

Over the Pass

Frederick Palmer

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OVER THE PASS

BY FREDERICK PALMER

AUTHOR OF THE VAGABOND, DANBURY RODD, ETC.

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PART I

AN EASY TRAVELLER

I

YOUTH IN SPURS

Here time was as nothing; here sunset and sunrise were as incidents of an uncalendared, everlasting day; here chaotic grandeur was that of the earth's crust when it cooled after the last convulsive movement of genesis.

In all the region about the Galeria Pass the silence of the dry Arizona air seemed luminous and eternal. Whoever climbed to the crotch of that V, cut jagged against the sky for distances yet unreckoned by tourist folders, might have the reward of pitching the tents of his imagination at the gateway of the clouds.

Early on a certain afternoon he would have noted to the eastward a speck far out on a vast basin of sand which was enclosed by a rim of tumbling mountains. Continued observation at long range would have shown the speck to be moving almost imperceptibly, with what seemed the impertinence of infinitesimal life in that dead world; and, eventually, it would have taken the form of a man astride a pony.

The man was young, fantastically young if you were to judge by his garb, a flamboyant expression of the romantic cowboy style which might have served as a sensational exhibit in a shop-window. In place of the conventional blue wool shirt was one of dark blue silk. The _chaparejos_, or "chaps," were of the softest leather, with the fringe at the seams generously long; and the silver spurs at the boot-heels were chased in antique pattern and ridiculously large. Instead of the conventional handkerchief at the neck was a dark red string tie; while

the straight-brimmed cowpuncher hat, out of keeping with the general effect of newness and laundered freshness, had that tint which only exposure to many dewfalls and many blazing mid-days will produce in light-colored felt.

There was vagrancy in the smile of his singularly sensitive mouth and vagrancy in the relaxed way that he rode. From the fondness with which his gaze swept the naked peaks they might have been cities _en fete_ calling him to their festivities. If so, he was in no haste to let realization overtake anticipation. His reins hung loose. He hummed snatches of Spanish, French, and English songs. Their cosmopolitan freedom of variety was as out of keeping with the scene as their lilt, which had the tripping, self-carrying impetus of the sheer joy of living.

Lapsing into silence, his face went ruminative and then sad. With a sudden indrawing of breath he freed himself from his reverie, and bending over from his saddle patted a buckskin neck in affectionate tattoo. Tawny ears turned backward in appreciative fellowship, but without any break in a plodding dog-trot. Though the rider's aspect might say with the desert that time was nothing, the pony's expressed a logical purpose. Thus the speed of their machine-like progress was entirely regulated by the prospect of a measure of oats at the journey's end.

When they came to the foot-hills and the rider dismounted and led the way, with a following muzzle at times poking the small of his back, up the tortuous path, rounding pinnacles and skimming the edge of abysses, his leg muscles answered with the readiness of familiarity with climbing. At the top he saw why the pass had received its name of Galeria from the Spanish. A great isosceles of precipitous walls formed a long, natural gallery, which the heaving of the earth's crust had rent and time had eroded. It lay near the present boundary line of two civilizations: in the neutral zone of desert expanses, where the Saxon pioneer, with his lips closed on English _s's_, had paused in his progress southward; and the _conquistadore_, with tongue caressing Castilian vowels, had paused in his progress northward.

At the other side the traveller beheld a basin which was a thousand feet higher than the one behind him. It approached the pass at a gentler slope. It must be cooler than the other, its ozone a little rarer. A sea of quivering and singing light in the afternoon glow, it was lost in the horizon.

Not far from the foot-hills floated a patch of foliage, checkered by the roofs of the houses of an irrigation colony, hanging kitelike at the end of the silver thread of a river whose waters had set gardens abloom in sterile expanses. There seemed a refusal of intimacy with the one visible symbol of its relations with the outer world; for the railroad, with its lines of steel flashing across the gray levels, passed beyond the outer edge of the oasis.

"This beats any valley I've seen yet," and the traveller spoke with the confidence of one who is a connoisseur of Arizona valleys.

He paused for some time in hesitancy to take a farewell of the rapturous vista. A hundred feet lower and the refraction of the light would present it in different coloring and perspective. With his spell of visual intoxication ran the consciousness of being utterly alone. But the egoism of his isolation in the towering infinite did not endure; for the sound of voices, a man's and a woman's, broke on his ear.

The man's was strident, disagreeable, persistent. Its timbre was such as he had heard coming out of the doors of border saloons. The woman's was quiet and resisting, its quality of youth peculiarly emphasized by its restrained emotion.

Now the easy traveller took stock of his immediate surroundings, which had interested him only as a foothold and vantage-point for the panorama that he had been breathing in. Here, of all conceivable places, he was in danger of becoming eavesdropper to a conversation which was evidently very personal. Rounding the escarpment at his elbow he saw, on a shelf of decaying granite, two waiting ponies. One had a Mexican saddle of the cowboy type. The other had an Eastern side-saddle, which struck him as exotic in a land where women mostly ride astride. And what woman, whatever style of riding she chose, should care to come to this pass?

Judging by the direction from which the voices came, the speakers were hidden by still another turn in the defile. A few more steps brought eye as well as ear back to the living world with the sight of a girl seated on a boulder. He could see nothing of her face except the cheek, which was brown, and the tip of a chin, which he guessed was oval, and her hair, which was dark under her hatbrim and shimmering with gold where it was kissed by the rays of the sun. An impression as swift as a flash of light could not exclude inevitable curiosity as to the full face; a curiosity emphasized by the poised erectness of her slender figure.

The man was bending over her in a familiar way. He was thirty, perhaps, in the prime of physical vigor, square-jawed, cocksure, a six-shooter slung at his hip. Though she was not giving way before him, her attitude, in its steadiness, reflected distress in a bowstrung tremulousness. Suddenly, at something he said which the easy traveller could not quite understand, she sprang up aflame, her hand flying back against the rock wall behind her for support. Then the man spoke so loud that he was distinctly audible.

"When you get mad like that you're prettier'n ever," he said.

It was a peculiar situation. It seemed incredible, melodramatic, unreal, in sight of the crawling freight train far out on the levels.

"Aren't you overplaying your part, sir?" the easy traveller asked.

The man's hand flew to his six-shooter, while the girl looked around in swift and eager impulse to the interrupting voice. Its owner, the color scheme of his attire emphasized by the glare of the low sun, expressed in his pose and the inquiring flicker of a smile purely the element of the casual. Far from making any movement toward his own six-shooter, he seemed oblivious of any such necessity. With the first glimpse of her face, when he saw the violet flame of her anger go ruddy with surprise and relief, then fluid and sparkling as a culminating change of emotion, he felt cheap for having asked himself the question--which now seemed so superficial--whether she were good-looking or not. She was, undoubtedly, yes, undoubtedly good-looking in a way of her own.

"What business is it of yours?" demanded the man, evidently under the impression that he was due to say something, while his fingers still rested on his holster.

"None at all, unless she says so," the deliverer answered. "Is it?" he

asked her.

After her first glance at him she had lowered her lashes. Now she raised them, sending a direct message beside which her first glance had been dumb indifference. He was seeing into the depths of her eyes in the consciousness of a privilege rarely bestowed. They gave wing to a thousand inquiries. He had the thrill of an explorer who is about to enter on a voyage of discovery. Then the veil was drawn before his ship had even put out from port. It was a veil woven with fine threads of appreciative and conventional gratitude.

"It is!" she said decisively.

"I'll be going," said the persecutor, with a grimace that seemed mixed partly of inherent bravado and partly of shame, as his pulse slowed down to normal.

"As you please," answered that easy traveller. "I had no mind to exert any positive directions over your movements."

His politeness, his disinterestedness, and his evident disinclination to any kind of vehemence carried an implication more exasperating than an open challenge. They changed melodrama into comedy. They made his protagonist appear a negligible quantity.

"There's some things I don't do when women are around," the persecutor returned, grudgingly, and went for his horse; while oppressive silence prevailed. The easy traveller was not looking at the girl or she at him. He was regarding the other man idly, curiously, though not contemptuously as he mounted and started down the trail toward the valley, only to draw rein as he looked back over his shoulder with a glare which took the easy traveller in from head to foot.

"Huh! You near-silk dude!" he said chokingly, in his rancor which had grown with the few minutes he had had for self-communion.

"If you mean my shirt, it was sold to me for pure silk," the easy traveller returned, in half-diffident correction of the statement.

"We'll meet again!" came the more definite and articulate defiance.

"Perhaps. Who can tell? Arizona, though a large place, has so few people that it is humanly very small."

Now the other man rose in his stirrups, resting the weight of his body on the palm of the hand which was on the back of his saddle. He was rigid, his voice was shaking with very genuine though dramatic rage drawn to a fine point of determination.

"When we do meet, you better draw! I give you warning!" he called.

There was no sign that this threat had made the easy traveller tighten a single muscle. But a trace of scepticism had crept into his smile.

"Whew!" He drew the exclamation out into a whistle.

"Whistle--whistle while you can! You won't have many more chances! Draw, you tenderfoot! But it won't do any good--I'll get you!"

With this challenge the other settled back into the saddle and proceeded on his way.

"Whew!" The second whistle was anything but truculent and anything but apologetic. It had the unconscious and spontaneous quality of the delight of the collector who finds a new specimen in wild places.

From under her lashes the girl had been watching the easy traveller rather than her persecutor; first, studiously; then, in the confusion of embarrassment that left her speechless.

"Well, well," he concluded, "you must take not only your zoology, but your anthropology as you find it!"

His drollness, his dry contemplation of the specimen, and his absurdly gay and unpractical attire, formed a combination of elements suddenly grouped into an effect that touched her reflex nerves after the strain with the magic of humor. She could not help herself: she burst out laughing. At this, he looked away from the specimen; looked around puzzled, quizzically, and, in sympathetic impulse, began laughing himself. Thus a wholly unmodern incident took a whimsical turn out of a horror which, if farcical in the abstract, was no less potent in the concrete.

"Quite like the Middle Ages, isn't it?" he said.

"But Walter Scott ceased writing in the thirties!" she returned, quick to fall in with his cue.

"The swooning age outlasted him--lasted, indeed, into the era of hoop-skirts; but that, too, is gone."

"They do give medals," she added.

"For rescuing the drowning only; and they are a great nuisance to carry around in one's baggage. Please don't recommend me!"

Both laughed again softly, looking fairly at each other in understanding, twentieth-century fashion. She was not to play the classic damsel or he the classic rescuer. Yet the fact of a young man finding a young woman brutally annoyed on the roof of the world, five or six miles from a settlement--well, it was a fact. Over the bump of their self-introduction, free of the serious impression of her experience, she could think for him as well as for herself. This struck her with sudden alarm.

"I fear I have made you a dangerous enemy," she said. "Pete Leddy is the prize ruffian of our community of Little Rivers."

"I thought that this would be an interesting valley," he returned, in bland appreciation of her contribution of information about the habits of the specimen.

She faced a situation irritating and vitalizing, and inevitably, under its growing perplexity, her observation of his appearance and characteristics had been acute with feminine intuition, which is so frequently right, that we forget that it may not always be. She imagined him with a certain amiable aimlessness turning his pony to one side so as not to knock down a danger sign, while he rode straight over a precipice.

What would have happened if Leddy had really drawn? she asked herself. Probably her deliverer would have regarded the muzzle of Leddy's gun in studious vacancy before a bullet sent him to kingdom come. All speculation aside, her problem was how to rescue her rescuer. She felt almost motherly on his account, he was so blissfully oblivious to realities. And she felt, too, that under the circumstances, she ought to be formal.

"Now, Mister--" she began; and the Mister sounded odd and stilted in her ears in relation to him.

"Jack is my name," he said simply.

"Mine is Mary," she volunteered, giving him as much as he had given and no more. "Now, sir," she went on, in peremptory earnestness, "this is serious."

"It _was_," he answered. "At least, unpleasant."

"It is, _now_. Pete Leddy meant what he said when he said that he would draw."

"He ought to, from his repeated emphasis," answered Jack, in agreeable affirmation.

"He has six notches on his gun-handle--six men that he has killed!" Mary went on.

"Whew!" said Jack. "And he isn't more than thirty! He seems a hard worker who keeps right on the job."

She pressed her lips together to control her amusement, before she asked categorically, with the precision of a school-mistress:

"Do you know how to shoot?"

He was surprised. He seemed to be wondering if she were not making sport of him.

"Why should I carry a six-shooter if I did not?" he asked.

This convinced her that his revolver was a part of his play cowboy costume. He had come out of the East thinking that desperado etiquette of the Bad Lands was _opera bouffe_.

"Leddy is a dead shot. He will give you no chance!" she insisted.

"I should think not," Jack mused. "No, naturally not; otherwise there might have been no sixth notch. The third or the fourth, even the second object of his favor might have blasted his fair young career as a

wood-carver. Has he set any limit to his ambition? Is he going to make it an even hundred and then retire?"

"I don't know!" she gasped.

"I must ask," he added, thoughtfully.

Was he out of his head? Certainly his eye was not insane. Its bluish-gray was twinkling enjoyably into hers.

"You exasperated him with that whistle. It was a deadly insult to his desperado pride. You are marked--don't you see, marked?" she persisted. "And I brought it on! I am responsible!"

He shook his head in a denial so unmoved by her appeal that she was sure he would send Job into an apoplectic frenzy.

"Pardon me, but you're contradicting your own statement. You just said it was the whistle," he corrected her. "It's the whistle that gives me Check Number Seven. You haven't the least bit of responsibility. The whistle gets it all, just as you said."

This was too much. Confuting her with her own words! Quibbling with his own danger in order to make her an accomplice of murder! She lost her temper completely. That fact alone could account for the audacity of her next remark.

"I wonder if you really know enough to come in out of the rain!" she stormed.

"That's the blessing of living in Arizona," he returned. "It is such a dry climate."

She caught herself laughing; and this only made her the more intense a second later, on a different tack. Now she would plead.

"Please--please promise me that you will not go to Little Rivers to-night. Promise that you will turn back over the pass!"

"You put me between the devil and the dragon. What you ask is impossible. I'll tell you why," he went on, confidentially. "You know this is the land of fossil dinosaurs."

"I had a brute on my hands," she thought; "now I have the Mad Hatter and the March Hare in collaboration!"

"There is a big dinosaur come to life on the other side," he proceeded. "I just got through the pass in time. I could feel his breath on my back--a hot, gun-powdery breath! It was awful, simply awful and horrible, too. And just as I had resigned myself to be his entree, by great luck his big middle got wedged in the bottom of the V, and his scales scraped like the plates of a ship against a stone pier!"

To her disgust she was laughing again.

"If I went back now out of fear of Pete Leddy," he continued, "that dinosaur would know that I was such insignificant prey he would not even take the trouble to knock me down with a forepaw. He would swallow me alive and running! Think of that slimy slide down the red upholstery of

his gullet, not to mention the misery of a total loss of my dignity and self-respect!"

He had spoken it all as if he believed it true. He made it seem almost true.

"I like nonsense as much as anybody," she began, "and I do not forget that you did me a great kindness."

"Which any stranger, any third person coming at the right moment might have done," he interrupted. "Sir Walter's age has passed."

"Yes, but Pete Leddy belongs still farther back. We may laugh at his ruffianly bravado, but no one may laugh at a forty-four calibre bullet! Think what you are going to make me pay for your kindness! I must pay with memory of the sound of a shot and the fall of a body there in the streets of Little Rivers--a nightmare for life! Oh, I beg of you, though it is fun for you to be killed, consider me! Don't go down into that valley! I beg of you, go back over the pass!"

There was no acting, no suspicion of a gesture. She stood quite still, while all the power of her eyes reflected the misery which she pictured for herself. The low pitch of her voice sounded its depths with that restraint which makes for the most poignant intensity. As she reached her

climax he had come out of his languid pose. He was erect and rigid. She saw him as some person other than the one to whom she had begun her appeal. He was still smiling, but his smile was of a different sort. Instead of being the significant thing about him in expression of his casualness, it seemed the softening compensation for his stubbornness.

"I'd like to, but it is hardly in human nature for me to do that. I can't!" And he asked if he might bring up her pony.

"Yes," she consented.

She thought that the faint bow of courtesy with which he had accompanied the announcement of his decision he would have given, in common politeness, to anyone who pointed at the danger sign before he rode over the precipice.

"May I ride down with you, or shall I go ahead?" he inquired, after he had assisted her to mount.

"With me!" she answered, quickly. "You are safe while you are with me."

The decisive turn to her mobile lips and the faint wrinkles of a frown, coming and going in various heraldry, formed a vividly sentient and versatile expression of emotions while she watched his silhouette against the sky as he turned to get his own pony.

"Come, P.D.--come along!" he called.

In answer to his voice an equine face, peculiarly reflective of trail wisdom, bony and large, particularly over the eyes, slowly turned toward its master. P.D. was considering.

"Come along! The trail, P.D.!" And P.D. came, but with democratic independence, taking his time to get into motion. "He is never fast,"

Jack explained, "but once he has the motor going, he keeps at it all day. So I call him P.D. without the Q., as he is never quick."

"Pretty Damn, you mean!" she exclaimed, with a certain spontaneous pride of understanding. Then she flushed in confusion.

"Oh, thank you! It was so human of you to translate it out loud! It isn't profane. Look at him now. Don't you think it is a good name for him?" Jack asked, seriously.

"I do!"

She was laughing again, oblivious of the impending tragedy.

III

JACK RIDES IN COMPANY

Let not the Grundy woman raise an eyebrow of deprecation at the informal introduction of Jack and Mary, or we shall refute her with her own precepts, which make the steps to a throne the steps of the social pyramid. If she wishes a sponsor, we name an impeccable majesty of the very oldest dynasty of all, which is entirely without scandal. We remind her of the ancient rule that people who meet at court, vouched for by royal favor, need no introduction.

These two had met under the roof of the Eternal Painter. His palette is somewhere in the upper ether and his head in the interplanetary spaces. His heavy eyebrows twinkle with star-dust. Dodging occasional flying meteors, which harass him as flies harass a landscapist out of doors on a hot day, he is ever active, this mighty artist of the changing desert sky. So fickle his moods, so versatile his genius, so quick to creation his fancy, that he never knows what his next composition will be till the second that it is begun.

No earthly rival need be jealous of him. He will never clog the galleries. He always paints on the same canvas, scraping off one picture to make room for another. And you do not mind the loss of the old. You live for the new.

His Majesty has no artistic memory. He is as young as he was the day that he flung out his first tentative lunette after chaos. He is the patron saint of all pilgrims from the city's struggle, where they found no oases of rest. He melts "pasts" and family skeletons and hidden stories of any kind whatsoever into the blue as a background with the abandoned preoccupation of his own brushwork. His lieges, who seek oblivion in the desert, need not worry about the water that will never run over the millwheel again, or dwell in prophecy on floods to come. The omnipotence of the moment transports and soothes them.

"Time is nothing!" says the Eternal Painter. "If you feel important, remember that man's hectic bustling makes but worm-work on the planet. Live and breathe joyfully and magnificently! Do not strain your eyes over embroidery! Come to my open gallery! And how do you like the way I set those silver clouds a-tumbling? Do you know anything better under the

dome of any church or capitol? Shall I bank them? Line them with purple? It is done! But no! Let us wipe it all out, change the tint of our background, and start afresh!"

With his eleven hundred million billionth sunset, or thereabouts, His Majesty held a man and a woman who had met on the roof of the world in thrall. He was lurid at the outset, dipping his camel's hair in at the round furnace door sinking toward the hills, whose red vortex shot tongues of flame into canyons and crevasses and drove out their lurking shadows with the fire of its inquisition. The foliage of Little Rivers became a grove of quivering leaves of gold, set on a vast beaten platter of gold. And the man and the woman, like all things else in the landscape, were suffused in this still, Parnassian, penetrating brilliancy, which ought to make even a miser feel that his hoarded eagles and sovereigns are ephemeral dross.

"I love it all--all the desert!" said Mary Ewold.

"And I, too!"

"I have for six years."

"I for five."

The sentences had struck clearly as answering chimes, impersonally, in their preoccupied gazing.

"It gave me life!" he added.

"And it gave me life!"

Then they looked at each other in mutual surprise and understanding; each in wonder that the other had ever been anything but radiant of out-of-doors health. That fleck on the lungs which brought a doctor's orders had long ago been healed by the physician of the ozone they were breathing.

"And you remained," he said.

"And you, also," she answered.

Their own silence seemed to become a thing apart from the silence of the infinite. It was as if both recognized a common thought that even the Eternal Painter could not compel oblivion of the past to which they did not return; of the faith of cities to which they had been bred. But it is one of the Eternal Painter's rules that no one of his subjects should ask another of his subjects why he stays on the desert. Jack was the first to speak, and his voice returned to the casual key.

"Usually I watch the sunset while we make camp," he said. "I am very late to-night--late beyond all habit; and sunset and sunrise do make one a creature of habit out here. Firio and my little train will grow impatient waiting for me."

"You mean the Indian and the burro with the silver bells that came over the pass some time before you?"

Of course they belonged to him, she was thinking, even as she made the inquiry. This play cowboy, with his absurdly enormous silver spurs, would

naturally put bells on his burro.

"Yes, I sent Firio with Wrath of God and Jag Ear on ahead and told him to wait at the foot of the descent. Wrath of God will worry--he is of a worrying nature. I must be going."

In view of the dinosaur nonsense she was already prepared for a variety of inventional talk from him. As they started down from the pass in single file, she leading, the sun sank behind the hills, leaving the Eternal Painter, unhindered by a furnace glare in the centre of the canvas, to paint with a thousand brushes in the radiant tints of the afterglow.

"You don't like that one, O art critics!" we hear him saying. "Well, here is another before you have adjusted your _pince-nez,_ and I will brush it away before you have emitted your first Ah! I do not criticise. I paint--I paint for the love of it. I paint with the pigments of the firmament and the imagination of the universe."

The two did not talk of that sky which held their averted glances, while knowing hoofs that bore their weight kept the path. For how can you talk of the desert sky except in the banality of exclamations? It is _lese majeste_ to the Eternal Painter to attempt description.

At times she looked back and their eyes met in understanding, as true subjects of His Majesty, and then they looked skyward to see what changes the Master's witchery had wrought. In supreme intoxication of the senses, breathing that dry air which was like cool wine coming in long sips to the palate, they rode down the winding trail, till, after a surpassing outburst, the Eternal Painter dropped his brush for the night.

It was dusk. Shadows returned to the crevasses. Free of the magic of the sky, with the curtains of night drawing in, the mighty savagery of the bare mountains in their disdain of man and imagination reasserted itself. It dropped Mary Ewold from the azure to the reality of Pete Leddy. She was seeing, the smoking end of a revolver and a body lying in a pool of blood; and there, behind her, rode this smiling stranger, proceeding so genially and carelessly to the fate which she had provided for him.

With the last turn, which brought them level with the plain, they came upon an Indian, a baggage burro, and a riding-pony. The Indian sprang up, grinning: his welcome and doffing a Mexican steeple-hat.

"I must introduce you all around," Jack told Mary.

She observed in his manner something new!--a positive enthusiasm for his three retainers, which included a certain well-relished vanity in their loyalty and character.

"Firio has Sancho Panza beaten to a frazzle," Jack said. "Sancho was fat and unresourceful; even stupid. Fancy him broiling a quail on a spit! Fancy what a lot of trouble Firio could have saved Don Quixote de la Mancha! Why, confound it, he would have spoiled the story!"

Firio was a solid grain, to take Jack's view, winnowed out of bushels of aboriginal chaff; an Indian, all Indian, without any strain of Spanish blood in the primitive southern strain.

"And Firio rides Wrath of God," Jack continued, nodding to a pony with a

low-hung head and pendant lip, whose lugubrious expression was exaggerated by a scar. "He looks it, don't you think?--always miserable, whether his nose is in the oats or we run out of water. He is our sad philosopher, who has just as dependable a gait as P.D. I have many theories about the psychology of his ego. Sometimes I explain it by a desire both to escape and to pursue unhappiness, which amounts to a solemn kind of perpetual motion. But he has a positively sweet nature. There is no more malice in his professional mournfulness than in the cheerful humor of Jag Ear."

"It is plain to see which is Jag Ear," she observed, "and how he earned his name."

Every time a burro gets into the corn, an Indian master cuts off a bit of long, furry ear as a lesson. Before Jag Ear passed into kindlier hands he had been clipped closer than a Boston terrier. Only a single upstanding fragment remained in token of a graded education which had availed him nothing.

"There's no curtailing Jag Ear's curiosity," said Jack. "To him, everything is worth trying. That is why he is a born traveller. He has been with me from Colorado to Chihuahua, on all my wanderings back and forth."

While he spoke, Firio mounted Wrath of God and, with Jag Ear's bells jingling, the supply division set out on the road. Jack and Mary followed, this time riding side by side, pony nose to pony nose, in an intimacy of association impossible in the narrow mountain trail. It was an intimacy signalized by silence. There was an end to the mighty transports of the heights; the wells of whimsicality had dried up. The weight of the silence seemed balancing on a brittle thread. All the afternoon's events aligned themselves in a colossal satire. In the half light Jack became a gaunt and lonely figure that ought to be confined in some Utopian kindergarten.

Mary could feel her temples beating with the fear of what was waiting for him in Little Rivers, now a dark mass on the levels, just dark, without color or any attraction except the mystery that goes with the shroud of night. She knew how he would laugh at her fears; for she guessed that he was unafraid of anything in the world which, however, was no protection from Pete Leddy's six-shooter.

"I--I have a right to know--won't you tell me how you are going to defend yourself against Pete Leddy?" she demanded, in a sudden outburst.

"I hadn't thought of that. Certainly, I shall leave it to Pete himself to open hostilities. I hadn't thought of it because I have been too busy thinking out how I was going to break a piece of news to Firio. I have been an awful coward about it, putting it off and putting it off. I had planned to do it on my birthday two weeks ago, and then he gave me these big silver spurs--spent a whole month's wages on them, think of that! I bought this cowboy regalia to go with them. You can't imagine how that pleased him. It certainly was great fun."

Mary could only shake her head hopelessly.

"Firio and Jag Ear and Wrath of God and old P.D. here--we've sort of grown used to one another's foolishness. Now I can't put it off any longer, and I'd about as soon be murdered as tell him that I am going

East in the morning."

"You mean you are going to leave here for good?" She mistrusted her own hearing. She was dazzled by this sudden burst of light through the clouds.

"Yes, by the first train. This is my last desert ride."

Why had he not said so at first? It would not only have saved her from worry, but from the humiliation of pleading with a stranger. Doubtless he had enjoyed teasing her. But no matter. The affair need not last much longer, now. She told herself that, if necessary, she would mount guard over him for the remaining twelve hours of his stay. Once he was aboard the Pullman he would be out of danger; her responsibility would be over and the whole affair would become a bizarre memory; an incident closed.

"Back to New York," he said, as one who enters a fog without a compass. "Back to fight pleosaurs, dinosaurs, and all kinds of monsters," he added, with a cheeriness which rang with the first false note she had heard from him. "I don't care," he concluded, and broke into a Spanish air, whose beat ran with the trickling hoof-beats of the ponies in the sand.

"That is it!" she thought. "That explains. He just does not care about anything."

Ahead, the lamps were beginning to twinkle in the little settlement which had sent such a contrast in citizenship as Mary Ewold and Pete Leddy out to the pass. They were approaching a single, isolated building, from the door of which came a spray of light and the sound of men's voices.

"That is Bill Lang's place," Mary explained. "He keeps a store, with a bar in the rear. He also has the post-office, thanks to his political influence, and this is where I have to stop for the mail when I return from the pass."

She had not spoken with any sense of a hint which it was inevitable he should accept.

"Let me get it for you;" and before she had time to protest, he had dismounted, drawing rein at the edge of the wooden steps.

She rode past where his pony was standing. When he entered the door, his tallness and lean ease of posture silhouetted in the light, she could look in on the group of idling male gossips.

"Don't!"

It was a half cry from her, hardly audible in an intensity which she knew was futile in the surge of her torturing self-incrimination. Why had she not thought that it would be here that Pete Leddy was bound to wait for anyone coming in by the trail from Galeria? The loungers suddenly dropped to the cover of boxes and barrels, as a flicker of steel shot upward, and behind the gleaming rim of a revolver muzzle held rigid was a brown hand and Leddy's hard, unyielding face.

What matter if the easy traveller could shoot? He was caught like a man coming out of an alley. He had no chance to draw in turn. In the click of a second-hand the thing would be over. Mary's eyes involuntarily closed,

to avoid seeing the flash from the revolver. She listened for the report; for the fall of a body which should express the horror she had visualized for the hundredth time. A century seemed to pass and there was no sound except the beat of her heart, which ran in a cataract throb to her temples; no sound except that and what seemed to be soft, regular steps on the bare floor of the store.

"Coward!" she told herself, with the agony of her suspense breaking. "He saved you from inexpressible humiliation and you are afraid even to look!"

She opened her eyes, prepared for the worst. Had she gone out of her head? Could she no longer trust her own eyesight? What she saw was inconceivable. The startled faces of the loungers were rising from behind the boxes and barrels. Pete Leddy's gun had dropped to his side and his would-be victim had a hand on Pete's shoulder. Jack was talking apparently in a kindly and reasoning tone, but she could not make out his words.

One man alone evidently had not taken cover. It was Jim Galway, a rancher, who had been standing at the mail counter. To judge by his expression, what Jack was saying had his approval.

With a nod to Leddy and then a nod to the others, as if in amicable conclusion of the affair, Jack wheeled around to the counter, disclosing Leddy's face wry with insupportable chagrin. His revolver was still in his hand. In the swift impulse of one at bay who finds himself released, he brought it up. There was murder, murder from behind, in the catlike quickness of his movement; but Jim Galway was equally quick. He threw his whole weight toward Leddy in a catapult leap, as he grasped Leddy's wrist and bore it down. Jack faced about in alert readiness. Seeing that Galway had the situation pat, he put up his hand in a kind of questioning, puzzled remonstrance; but Mary noticed that he was very erect. He spoke and Galway spoke in answer. Evidently he was asking that Leddy be released. To this Galway consented at length, but without drawing back until he had seen Leddy's gun safe in the holster.

Then Leddy raised himself challengingly on tiptoes to Jack, who turned to Galway in the manner of one extending an invitation. On his part, Leddy turned to Ropey Smith, another of Little Rivers' ruffians. After this, Leddy went through the door at the rear; the loungers resumed their seats on the cracker barrels and gazed at one another with dropped jaws, while Bill Lang proceeded with his business as postmaster.

IV

HE CARRIES THE MAIL

When the suspense was over for Mary, the glare of the store lamp went dancing in grotesque waves, and abruptly, uncannily, fell away into the distant, swimming glow of a lantern suffused with fog. She swayed. Only the leg-rest kept her from slipping off the pony. Her first returning sense of her surroundings came with the sound of a voice, the same careless, pleasant voice which she had heard at Galeria asking Pete Leddy if he were not overplaying his part.

"You were right," said the voice. "It was the whistle that made him so angry."

Indistinctly she associated a slowly-shaping figure with the voice and realized that she had been away in the unknown for a second. Yes, it was all very well to talk about Sir Walter being out of fashion, but she had been near to fainting, and in none of the affectation of the hoop-skirt age, either. Had she done any foolish thing in expression of a weakness that she had never known before? Had she extended her hand for support? Had he caught her as she wobbled in the saddle? No. She was relieved to see that he was not near enough for that.

"By no stretch of ethics can you charge yourself with further responsibility or fears," he continued. "Pete and I understand each other perfectly, now."

But in his jocularly ran something which was plain, if unspoken. It was that he would put an end to a disagreeable subject. His first words to her had provided a bridge--and burned it--from the bank of the disagreeable to the bank of agreeable. Her own desire, with full mastery of her faculties coming swiftly, fell in with his. She wanted to blot out that horror and scotch a sudden uprising of curiosity as to the exact nature of the gamble in death through which he had passed. It was enough that he was alive.

The blurry figure became distinct, smiling with inquiry in a glance from her to the stack of papers, magazines, and pamphlets which crowded his circling arms. He seemed to have emptied the post-office. There had not been any Pete Leddy; there had been no display of six-shooters. He had gone in after the mail. Here he was ready to deliver it by the bushel, while he waited for orders. She had to laugh at his predicament as he lowered his chin to steady a book on the top of the pile.

"Oh, I meant to tell you that you were not to bring the second-class matter!" she told him. "We always send a servant with a basket for that. You see what comes of having a father who is not only omnivorous, but has a herbivorous capacity."

He saw that the book had a row of Italian stamps across the wrapper. Unless that popular magazine stopped slipping, both the book and a heavy German pamphlet would go. He took two hasty steps toward her, in mock distress of appeal.

"I'll allow salvage if you act promptly!" he said.

She lifted the tottering apex just in time to prevent its fall.

"I'll take the book," she said. "Father has been waiting months for it. We can separate the letters and leave the rest in the store to be sent for."

"The railroad station is on the other side of the town, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I shall camp nearby, so it will be no trouble to leave my burden at your door as I pass."

"He does have the gift of oiling the wheels in either, big or little moments," she thought, as she realized how simple and considerate had been his course from the first. He was a stranger going on his way, stopping, however, to do her or any other traveller a favor _en route_.

"Firio, we're ready to hear Jag Ear's bells!" he called.

"_Si_!" answered Firio.

All the while the Indian had kept in the shadow, away from the spray of light from the store lamp, unaware of the rapid drama that had passed among the boxes and barrels. He had observed nothing unusual in the young lady, whose outward manifestation of what she had, witnessed was the closing of her eyes.

It was out of the question that Jack should mount a horse when both arms were crowded with their burden. He walked beside Mary's stirrup leather in the attitude of that attendant on royalty who bears a crown on a cushion.

"Little Rivers is a new town, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, the Town Wonderful," she answered. "Father founded it."

She spoke with an affection which ran as deep into the soil as young roots after water. If on the pass she had seemed a part of the desert, of great, lonely distances and a far-flung carpet of dreams, here she seemed to belong to books and gardens.

"I wish I had time to look over the Town Wonderful in the morning, but my train goes very early, I believe."

After his years of aimless travelling, to which he had so readily confessed, he had tied himself to a definite hour on a railroad schedule as something commanding and inviolable. Such inconsistency did not surprise her. Had she not already learned to expect inconsistencies from him?

"Oh, it is all simple and primitive, but it means a lot to us," she said.

"What one's home and people mean to him is pretty well all of one's own human drama," he returned, seriously.

The peace of evening was in the air and the lights along the single street were a gentle and persistent protest of human life against the mighty stretch of the enveloping mantle of night. From the cottages of the ranchers came the sound of voices. The twang of a guitar quivering starward made medley with Jag Ear's bells.

Here, for a little distance, the trail, in its long reach on the desert, had taken on the dignity of the urban name of street. On either side, fronting the cottages, ran the slow waters of two irrigation ditches, gleaming where lamp-rays penetrated the darkness. The date of each rancher's settlement was fairly indicated by the size of the quick-growing umbrella and pepper-trees which had been planted for shade. Thus all the mass of foliage rose like a mound of gentle slope toward the centre of the town, where Jack saw vaguely the outlines of a rambling bungalow, more spacious if no more pretentious than its neighbors in its

architecture. At a cement bridge over the ditch, leading to a broad veranda under the soft illumination of a big, wrought-iron lantern, Mary drew rein.

"This is home," she said; "and--and thank you!"

He could not see her face, which was in the shadow turned toward him, as he looked into the light of the lantern from the other side of her pony.

"And--thank you!"

It was as if she had been on the point of saying something else and could not get the form of any sentence except these two words. Was there anything further to say except "Thank you"? Anything but to repeat "Thank you"?

There he stood, this stranger so correctly introduced by the Eternal Painter, with his burden, waiting instructions in this moment of awkward diffidence. He looked at her and at the porch and at his bundle of mail in a quizzical appeal. Then she realized that, in a peculiar lapse of abstraction, she had forgotten about his encumbrance.

Before she could speak there was a sonorous hail from the house; a hail in keeping with the generous bulk of its owner, who had come through the door. He was well past middle-age, with a thatch of gray hair half covering his high forehead. In one hand he held the book that he had been reading, and in the other a pair of big tortoise-shell glasses.

"Mary, you are late--and what have we here?"

He was beaming at Jack as he came across the bridge and he broke into hearty laughter as he viewed Jack's preoccupation with the second-class matter.

"At last! At last we have rural free delivery in Little Rivers! We are the coming town! And your uniform, sir"--Jasper Ewold took in the cowboy outfit with a sweeping glance which warmed with the picturesque effect--"it's a great improvement on the regulation; fit for free delivery in Little Rivers, where nobody studies to be unconventional in any vanity of mistaking that for originality, but nobody need be conventional."

He took some of the cargo in his own hands. With the hearty breeze of his personality he fairly blew Jack onto the porch, where magazines and pamphlets were dropped indiscriminately in a pile on a rattan settee.

"You certainly have enough reading matter," said Jack. "And I must be getting on to camp."

For he had no invitation to stay from Mary and the conventional fact that he had to recognize is that a postman's call is not a social call. As he turned to go he faced her coming across the bridge. An Indian servant, who seemed to have materialized out of the night, had taken charge of her pony.

"To camp! Never!" said Jasper Ewold. "Sir Knight, slip your lance in the ring of the castle walls--but having no lance and this being no castle, well, Sir Knight in _chaparejos_--that is to say, Sir Chaps--let me inform you"--here Jasper Ewold threw back his shoulders and tossed his

mane of hair, his voice sinking to a serious basso profundo--"yes, inform you, sir, that there is one convention, a local rule, that no stranger crosses this threshold at dinner-time without staying to dinner." There was a resonance in his tone, a liveliness to his expression, that was infectious.

"But Firio and Jag Ear and Wrath of God wait for me," Jack said, entering with real enjoyment into the grandiose style.

"High sounding company, sir! Let me see them!" demanded Jasper Ewold.

Jack pointed to his cavalcade waiting in the half shadows, where the lamp-rays grew thin. Wrath of God's bony face was pointed lugubriously toward the door; Jag Ear was wiggling his fragment of ear.

"And Moses on the mountain-top says that you stay!" declared Jasper Ewold.

Jack looked at Mary. She had not spoken yet and he waited on her word.

"Please do!" she said. "Father wants someone to talk to."

"Yes, Sir Chaps, I shall talk; otherwise, why was man given a tongue in his head and ideas?"

Refusal was out of the question. Accordingly, Firio was sent on to make camp alone.

"Now, Sir Chaps, now, Mr.--" began Jasper Ewold, pausing blankly. "Why, Mary, you have not given me his city directory name!"

"Mr.--" and Mary blushed. She could only pass the blame back to the Eternal Painter's oversight in their introduction.

"Jack Wingfield!" said Jack, on his own account.

"Jack Wingfield!" repeated Jasper Ewold, tasting the name.

A flicker of surprise followed by a flicker of drawn intensity ran over his features, and he studied Jack in a long glance, which he masked just in time to save it from being a stare. Jack was conscious of the scrutiny. He flushed slightly and waited for some word to explain it; but none came. Jasper Ewold's Olympian geniality returned in a spontaneous flood.

"Come inside, Jack Wingfield," he said. "Come inside, Sir Chaps--for that is how I shall call you."

The very drum-beat of hospitality was in his voice. It was a wonderful voice, deep and warm and musical; not to be forgotten.

V

A SMILE AND A SQUARE CHIN

When a man comes to the door book in hand and you have the testimony of the versatility and breadth of his reading in half a bushel of mail for him, you expect to find his surroundings in keeping. But in Jasper Ewold's living-room Jack found nothing of the kind.

Heavy, natural beams supported the ceiling. On the gray cement walls were four German photographs of famous marbles. The Venus de Milo looked across to the David of Michael Angelo; the Flying Victory across to Rodin's Thinker. In the centre was a massive Florentine table, its broad top bare except for a big ivory tusk paper-knife free from any mounting of silver. On the shelf underneath were portfolios of the reproductions of paintings.

An effect which at first was one of quiet spaciousness became impressive and compelling. Its simplicity was without any of the artificiality that sometimes accompanies an effort to escape over-ornamentation. No one could be in the room without thinking through his eyes and with his imagination. Wherever he sat he would look up to a masterpiece as the sole object of contemplation.

"This is my room. Here, Mary lets me have my way," said Jasper Ewold. "And it is not expensive."

"The Japanese idea of concentration," said Jack.

Jasper Ewold, who had been watching the effect of the room on Jack, as he watched it on every new-comer, showed his surprise and pleasure that this young man in cowboy regalia understood some things besides camps and trails; and this very fact made him answer in the vigorous and enjoyed combatancy of the born controversialist.

"Japanese? No!" he declared. "The little men with their storks and vases have merely discovered to us in decoration a principle which was Greek in a more majestic world than theirs. It was the true instinct of the classic motherhood of our art before collectors mistook their residences for warehouses."

"And the books?" Jack asked, boyishly. "Where are they? Yes, what do you do with all the second-class matter?"

The question was bait to Jasper Ewold. It gave him an opportunity for discourse.

"When I read I want nothing but a paper-cutter close at hand--a good, big paper-cutter, whose own weight carries it through the leaves. And I want to be alone with that book. If I am too lazy to go to the library for another, then it is not worth reading. When I get head-achy with print and look up, I don't want to stare at the backs of more books. I want something to rest and fill the eye. I--"

"Father," Mary admonished him, "I fear this is going to be long. Why not continue after Mr. Wingfield has washed off the dust of travel and we are at table?"

"Mary is merely jealous. She wants to hurry you to the dining-room, which was designed to her taste," answered her father, with an affectation of grand indignation. "The dust of travel here is clean desert dust--but I admit that it is gritty. Come with me, Sir Chaps!"

He bade Jack precede him through a door diagonally opposite the one by which he had entered from the veranda. On the other side Jack found himself surrounded by walls of books, which formed a parallelogram around a great deal table littered with magazines and papers. Here, indeed, the printed word might riot as it pleased in the joyous variety and chaos of that truly omnivorous reader of herbivorous capacity. Out of the library Jack passed into Jasper Ewold's bedroom. It was small, with a soldier's cot of exaggerated size that must have been built for his amplitude of person, and it was bare of ornament except for an old ivory crucifix.

"There's a pitcher and basin, if you incline to a limited operation for outward convention," said Jasper Ewold; "and through that door you will find a shower, if you are for frank, unlimited submersion of the altogether."

"Have I time for the altogether?" Jack asked.

"When youth has not in this house, it marks a retrocession toward barbarism for Little Rivers which I refuse to contemplate. Take your shower, Sir Chaps, and"--a smile went weaving over the hills and valleys of Jasper Ewold's face--"and, mind, you take off those grand boots or they will get full of water! You will find me in the library when you are through;" and, shaking with subterranean enjoyment of his own joke, he closed the door.

Cool water from the bowels of the mountains fell on a figure as slender as that of the great Michael's David pictured in the living-room; a figure whose muscles ran rippling with leanness and suppleness, without the bunching over-development of the athlete. He bubbled in shivery delight with the first frigid sting of the downpour; he laughed in ecstasy as he pulled the valve wide open, inviting a Niagara.

While he was still glowing with the rough intimacy of the towel, he viewed the trappings thrown over the chair and his revolver holster on the bureau in a sense of detachment, as if in the surroundings of civilization some voice of civilization made him wish for flannels in which to dine. Then there came a rap at the door, and an Indian appeared with an envelope addressed in feminine handwriting. On the corner of the page within was a palm-tree--a crest to which anybody who dwelt on the desert might be entitled; and Jack read:

"DEAR MR. WINGFIELD:

"Please don't tell father about that horrible business on the pass. It will worry him unnecessarily and might interfere with my afternoon rides, which are everything to me. There is not the slightest danger in the future. After this I shall always go armed.

"Sincerely yours,

"MARY EWOLD."

The shower had put him in such lively humor that his answer was born in a flash from memory of her own catechising of him on Galeria.

"First, I must ask if you know how to shoot," he scribbled beneath her signature.

The Indian seemed hardly out of the doorway before he was back

with a reply:

"I do, or I would not go armed," it said.

She had capped his satire with satire whose prick was, somehow, delicious. He regarded the sweep of her handwriting with a lingering interest, studying the swift nervous strokes before he sent the note back with still another postscript:

"Of course I had never meant to tell anybody," he wrote. "It is not a thing to think of in that way."

This, he thought, must be the end of the correspondence; but he was wrong. The peripatetic go-between reappeared, and under Jack's last communication was written, "Thank you!" He could hardly write "Welcome!" in return. It was strictly a case of nothing more to say by either duelist. In an impulse he slipped the sheet, with its palm symbolic of desert mystery and oasis luxuriance, into his pocket.

"Here I am in the midst of the shucks and biting into the meat of the kernel," said Jasper Ewold, as Jack entered the library to find him standing in the midst of wrappings which he had dropped on the floor; "yes, biting into very rich meat."

He held up the book which was evidently the one that had balanced uncertainly on the pile which Jack had brought from the post-office.

"Professor Giuccamini's researches! It is as interesting as a novel. But come! You are hungry!"

Book in hand, and without removing his tortoise-shell spectacles, he passed out into the garden at the rear. There a cloth was laid under a pavilion.

"In a country where it never rains," said the host, "where it is eternal spring, walls to a house are conventions on which to stack books and hang pictures. Mary has chosen nature for her decorative effect--cheaper, even, than mine. In the distance is Galeria; in the foreground, what was desert six years ago."

The overhead lamp deepened to purple the magenta of the bougainvillea vines running up the pillars of the pavilion; made the adjacent rows of peony blossoms a pure, radiant white; while beyond, in the shadows, was a broad path between rows of young palms.

Mary appeared around a hedge which hid the open-air kitchen. The girl of the gray riding-habit was transformed into a girl in white. Jack saw her as a domestic being. He guessed that she had seen that the table was set right; that she had had a look-in at the cooking; that the hands whose boast it was that they could shoot, had picked the jonquils in the slender bronze vase on the table.

"Father, there you are again, bringing a book to the dining-room against the rules," she warned him; "against all your preachments about reading at meals!"

"That's so, Mary," said Jasper Ewold, absently, regarding the book as if some wicked genius had placed it in his hand quite unbeknown to him. "But, Mary, it is Professor Giuccamini at last! Giuccamini that I have

waited for so long! I beg your pardon, Sir Chaps! When I have somebody to talk to I stand doubly accused. Books at dinner! I descend into dotage!"

In disgust he started toward the house with the book. But in the very doorway he paused and, reopening the book, turned three or four pages with ravenous interest.

"Giuccamini and I agree!" he shouted. "He says there is no doubt that Burlamacchi and Pico were correct. Cosmo de' Medici did call Savonarola to his death-bed, and I am glad of it. I like good stories to turn out true! But here I have a listener--a live listener, and I ramble on about dead tyrants and martyrs. I apologize--I apologize!" and he disappeared in the library.

"Father does not let me leave books in the living-room, which is his. Why should he bring them to the dining-room, which is mine?" Mary explained.

"There must be law in every household," Jack agreed.

"Yes, somebody fresh to talk to, at, around, and through!" called Jasper Ewold, as he reappeared. "Yes, and over your head; otherwise I shall not be flattered by my own conversation."

"He glories in being an intellectual snob," Mary said. "Please pretend at times not to understand him."

"Thank you, Mary. You are the corrective that keeps my paternal superiority in balance," answered her father, with a comprehending wave of his hand indicating his sense of humor at the same time as playful insistence on his role as forensic master of the universe.

How he did talk! He was a mill to which all intellectual grist was welcome. Over its wheel the water ran now singing, again with the roar of a cataract. He changed theme with the relish of one who rambles at will, and the emotion of every opinion was written on the big expanse of his features and enforced with gestures. He talked of George Washington, of Andrea del Sarto, of melon-growing, trimming pepper-trees, the Divina Commedia, fighting rose-bugs, of Schopenhauer and of Florence--a great deal about Florence, a city that seemed to hang in his mind as a sort of Renaissance background for everything else, even for melon-growing.

"You are getting over my head!" Jack warned him at times, politely.

"That is the trouble," said Jasper Ewold. "Consider the hardship of being the one wise man in the world! I find it lonely, inconvenient, stupefying. Why, I can't even convince Jim Galway that I know more about dry farming than he!"

Jack listened raptly, his face glowing. Once, when he looked in his host's direction suddenly, after speaking to Mary, he found that he was the object of the same inquiring scrutiny that he had been on the porch. In lulls he caught the old man's face in repose. It had sadness, then, the sadness of wreckage; sadness against which he seemed to fence in his wordy feints and thrusts.

"Christian civilization began in the Tuscan valley," the philosopher proceeded, harking back to the book which had arrived by the evening's mail. "Florence was a devil--Florence was divine. They raised geniuses

and devils and martyrs: the most cloud-topping geniuses, the worst devils, the most saintly martyrs. But better than being a drone in a Florence pension is all this"--with a wave of his hand to the garden and the stars--"which I owe to Mary and the little speck on her lungs which brought us here after--after we had found that we had not as much money as we thought we had and an old fellow who had been an idling student, mostly living abroad all his life, felt the cramp of the material facts of board-and-clothes money. It made Mary well. It made me know the fulness of wisdom of the bee and the ant, and it brought me back to the spirit of America--the spirit of youth and accomplishment. Instead of dreaming of past cities, I set out to make a city like a true American. Here we came to camp in our first travelled delight of desert spaces for her sake; and here we brought what was left of the fortune and started a settlement."

The spectator-philosopher attitude of audience to the world's stage passed. He became the builder and the rancher, enthusiastically dwelling on the growth of orchards and gardens in expert fondness. As Jack listened, the fragrance of flowers was in his nostrils and in intervals between Jasper Ewold's sentences he seemed to hear the rustle of borning leaf-fronds breaking the silence. But the narrative was not an idyll. Toil and patience had been the handmaidens of the fecundity of the soil. Prosperity had brought an entail of problems. Jasper Ewold mentioned them briefly, as if he would not ask a guest to share the shadows which they brought to his brow.

"The honey of our prosperity brings us something besides the bees. It brings those who would share the honey without work," said he. "It brings the Bill Lang hive and Pete Leddy."

At the mention of the name, Jack's and Mary's glances met.

"You have promised not to tell," hers was saying.

"I will not," his was answering.

But clearly he had grasped the fact that Little Rivers was getting out of its patron's hands, and every honest man in that community wanted to be rid of Pete Leddy.

"I should think your old friend, Cosmo de' Medici, would have found a way," Jack suggested.

"Cosmo is for talk," said Mary. "At heart father is a Quaker."

"Some are for lynching," said Jasper Ewold, thoughtfully. "Begin to promote order with disorder and where will you end?" he inquired, belligerently. "This is not the Middle Ages. This is the Little Rivers of peace."

Then, after a quotation from Cardinal Newman, which seemed pretty far-fetched to deal with desert ruffians, he was away again, setting out fruit trees and fighting the scale.

"And our Date Tree Wonderful!" he continued. "This year we get our first fruit, unless the book is wrong. You cannot realize what this first-born of promise means to Little Rivers. Under the magic of water it completes the cycle of desert fecundity, from Scotch oats and Irish potatoes to the Arab's bread. Bananas I do not include. Never where the banana grows has

there been art or literature, a good priesthood, unimpassioned law-makers, honest bankers, or a noble knighthood. It is just a little too warm. Here we can build a civilization which neither roasts us in summer nor freezes us in winter."

There was a fluid magnetism in the rush of Jasper Ewold's junketing verbiage which carried the listener on the bosom of a pleasant stream. Jack was suddenly reminded that it must be very late and he had far overstayed the retiring hour of the desert, where the Eternal Painter commands early rising.

"Going--going so soon!" protested Jasper Ewold.

"So late!" Jack smiled back.

To prove that it was, he called attention to the fact, when they passed through the living-room to the veranda, that not a light remained in any ranch-house.

"I have not started my talk yet," said Jasper. "But next time you come I will really make a beginning--and you shall see the Date Tree Wonderful."

"I go by the morning train," Jack returned.

"So! so!" mused Jasper. "So! so!" he objected, but not gloomily. "I get a good listener only to lose him!"

But Jack was hardly conscious of the philosopher's words. In that interval he had still another glimpse of Mary's eyes without the veil and saw deeper than he had before; saw vast solitudes, inviting yet offering no invitation, where bright streams seemed to flash and sing under the sunlight and then disappear in a desert. That was her farewell to the easy traveller who had stopped to do her a favor on the trail. And he seemed to ask nothing more in that spellbound second; nor did he after the veil had fallen, and he acquitted himself of some spoken form of thanks for an evening of happiness.

"A pleasant journey!" Mary said.

"Luck, Sir Chaps, luck!" called Jasper Ewold.

Jack's easy stride, as he passed out into the night, confirmed the last glimpse of his smiling, whimsical "I don't care" attitude, which never minded the danger sign on the precipice's edge.

"He does not really want to go back to New York," Mary remarked, and was surprised to find that she had spoken her thought aloud.

"I hardly agree with that opinion," said her father absently, his thoughts far afield from the fetter of his words. "But of one thing I am sure, John Wingfield! A smile and a square chin!"

"A smile and a square chin!" Mary repeated, as they went back into the living-room.

"Yes, hasn't he both, this Wingfield?" asked her father.

"This Wingfield"--on the finish of the sentence there was a halting, appreciable accent. He moved toward the table with the listlessness of some enormous automaton of a man to whom every step of existence was a step in a treadmill. There was a heavy sadness about his features which rarely came, and always startled her when it did come with a fear that they had so set in gloom that they would never change. He raised his hand to the wick screw of the lamp, waiting for her to pass through the room before turning off the flame which bathed him in its rays, giving him the effect of a Rodinesque incarnation of memory.

Any melancholy that beset him was her own enemy, to be fought and cajoled. Mary slipped to his side, dropping her head on his shoulder and patting his cheek. But this magic which had so frequently rallied him brought only a transient, hazy smile and in its company what seemed a random thought.

"And you and he came down the pass together? Yes, yes!" he said. His tone had the vagueness of one drawing in from the sea a net that seemed to have no end.

Had Jack Wingfield been more than a symbol? Had he brought something more than an expression of culture, manner, and ease of a past which nothing could dim? Had he suggested some personal relation to that past which her father preferred to keep unexplained? These questions crowded into her mind speculatively. They were seeking a form of conveyance when she realized that she had been adrift with imaginings. He was getting older. She must expect his preoccupation and his absent-mindedness to become more exacting.

"Yes, yes!" His voice had risen to its customary sonority; his eyes were twinkling; all the hard lines had become benignant wrinkles of Olympian charm. "Yes, yes! You and this funny tourist! What a desert it is! I wonder--now, I wonder if he will go aboard the Pullman in that stage costume. But come, come, Mary! It's bedtime for all pastoral workers and subjects of the Eternal Painter. Off you go, or we shall be playing blind-man's-buff in the dark!" He was chuckling as he turned down the wick. "His enormous spurs, and Jag Ear and Wrath of God!" he said.

Her fancy ran dancing rejoicingly with his mood.

"Don't forget the name of his pony!" she called merrily from the stairs. "It's P.D."

"P.D.!" said her father, with the disappointment of one tempted by a good morsel which he finds tasteless. "There he seems to have descended to alphabetic commonplace. No imagery in that!"

"He is a slow, reliable pony," put in Mary, "without the Q."

"Pretty Damn, without the Quick! Oh, I know slang!"

Jasper Ewold burst into laughter. It was still echoing through the house when she entered her room. As it died away it seemed to sound hollow and

veiled, when the texture of sunny, transparent solidity in his laugh was its most pronounced characteristic.

Probably this, too, was imagination, Mary thought. It had been an overwrought day, whose events had made inconsiderable things supreme over logic. She always slept well; she would sleep easily to-night, because it was so late. But she found herself staring blankly into the darkness and her thoughts ranging in a shuttle play of incoherency from the moment that Leddy had approached her on the pass till a stranger, whom she never expected to see again, walked away into the night. What folly! What folly to keep awake over an incident of desert life! But was it folly? What sublime egoism of isolated provincialism to imagine that it had been anything but a great event! Naturally, quiet, desert nerves must still be quivering after the strain. Inevitably, they would not calm instantly, particularly as she had taken coffee for supper. She was wroth about the coffee, though she had taken less than usual that evening.

She heard the clock strike one; she heard it strike two, and three. And he, on his part--this Sir Chaps who had come so abruptly into her life and evidently set old passions afire in her father's mind--of course he was sleeping! That was the exasperating phlegm of him. He would sleep on horseback, riding toward the edge of a precipice!

"A smile and a square chin--and dreamy vagueness," she kept repeating.

The details of the scene in the store recurred with a vividness which counting a flock of sheep as they went over a stile or any other trick for outwitting insomnia could not drive from her mind. Then Pete Leddy's final look of defiance and Jack Wingfield's attitude in answer rose out of the pantomime in merciless clearness.

All the indecisiveness of the interchange of guesses and rehearsed impressions was gone. She got a message, abruptly and convincingly. This incident of the pass was not closed. An ultimatum had been exchanged. Death lay between these two men. Jack had accepted the issue.

The clock struck four and five. Before it struck again daylight would have come; and before night came again, what? To lie still in the torment of this new experience of wakefulness with its peculiar, half-recognized forebodings, had become unbearable. She rose and dressed and went down stairs softly, candle in hand, aware only that every agitated fibre of her being was whipping her to action which should give some muscular relief from the strain of her overwrought faculties. She would go into the garden and walk there, waiting for sunrise. But at the edge of the path she was arrested by a shadow coming from the servants' sleeping-quarters. It was Ignacio, the little Indian who cared for her horse, ran errands, and fought garden bugs for her--Ignacio, the note-bearer.

"Senorita! senorita!" he exclaimed, and his voice, vibrant with something stronger than surprise, had a certain knowing quality, as if he understood more than he dared to utter. "Senorita, you rise early!"

"Sometimes one likes to look at the morning stars," she remarked.

But there were no stars; only a pale moon, as Ignacio could see for himself.

"Senorita, that young man who was here and Pete Leddy--do you know,

senorita?"

"The young man who came down from the pass with me, you mean?" she asked, inwardly shamed at her simulation of casual curiosity.

"Yes, he and Leddy--bad blood between them" said Ignacio. "You no know, senorita? They fight at daybreak."

The pantomime in the store, Jack's form disappearing with its easy step into the night, analyzed in the light of this news became the natural climax of a series of events all under the spell of fatality.

"Come, Ignacio!" she said. "We must hurry!" And she started around the house toward the street.

VII

WHAT HAPPENED AT LANG'S

While Jack had been playing the pioneer of rural free delivery in Little Rivers, Pete Leddy, in the rear of Bill Lang's store, was refusing all stimulants, but indulging in an unusually large cud of tobacco.

"Liquor ain't no help in drawing a bead," he explained to the loungers who followed him through the door after Jack had gone.

If Pete did not want to drink it was not discreet to press him, considering the mood he was in. The others took liberal doses, which seemed only to heighten the detail of the drama which they had witnessed. To Mary it had been all pantomime; to them it was dynamic with language. It was something beyond any previous contemplation of possibility in their cosmos.

The store had been enjoying an average evening. All present were expressing their undaunted faith in the invincibility of James J. Jeffries, when a smiling stranger appeared in the doorway. He was dressed like a regular cowboy dude. His like might have appeared on the stage, but had never been known to get off a Pullman in Arizona. And the instant he appeared, up flashed Pete Leddy's revolver.

The gang had often discussed when and how Pete would get his seventh victim, and here they were about to be witnesses of the deed. Instinct taught them the proper conduct on such occasions. The tenderfoot was as good as dead; but, being a tenderfoot and naturally a bad shot and prone to excitement, he might draw and fire wild. They ducked with the avidity of woodchucks into their holes--all except Jim Galway, who remained leaning against the counter.

"I gin ye warning!" they heard Pete say, and closed their eyes involuntarily--all except Jim Galway--with their last impression the tenderfoot's ingenuous smile and the gleam on Pete's gun-barrel. They waited for the report, as Mary had, and then they heard steps and looked up to see that dude tenderfoot, still smiling, going straight toward the muzzle pointed at his head, his hands at his side in no attempt to draw. The thing was incredible and supernatural.

"Pete is letting him come close first," they thought.

But there, unbelievable as it was, Pete was lowering his revolver and the tenderfoot's hand was on his shoulder in a friendly, explanatory position. Pete seemed in a trance, without will-power over his trigger finger, and Pete was the last man in the world that you would expect to lose his nerve. Jim Galway being the one calm observer, whose vision had not been disturbed by precipitancy in taking cover, let us have his version.

"He just walked over to Pete--that's all I can say--walked over to him, simple and calm, like he was going to ask for a match. All I could think of and see was his smile right into that muzzle and the glint in his eyes, which were looking into Pete's. Someway you couldn't shoot into that smile and that glint, which was sort of saying, 'Go ahead! I'm leaving it to you and I don't care!'--just as if a flash of powder was all the same to him as a flash of lightning."

The desert had given Jack life; and it would seem as if what the desert had given, it might take away. He was not going to humble himself by throwing up his arms or standing still for execution. He was on his way into the store and he continued on his way. If something stopped him, then he would not have to take the train East in the morning.

"Now if you want to kill me, Pete Leddy," the astonished group heard this stranger say, "why, I'm not going to deny you the chance. But I don't want you to do it just out of impulse, and I know that is not your own reasoned way. You certainly would want sporting rules to prevail and that I should have an equal chance of killing you. So we will go outside, stand off any number of paces you say, let our gun-barrels hang down even with the seams of our trousers, and wait for somebody to say 'one, two, three--fire!'"

Not once had that peculiar smile faded from Jack's lips or the glint in his eyes diverted from its probe of Leddy's eyes. His voice went well with the smile and with an undercurrent of high voltage which seemed the audible corollary of the glint. Every man knew that, despite his gay adornment, he was not bluffing. He had made his proposition in deadly earnest and was ready to carry it out. Pete Leddy shuffled and bit the ends of his moustache, and his face was drawn and white and his shoulder burning under the easy grip of Jack's hand. From the bore of the unrelenting glance that had confounded him he shifted his gaze sheepishly.

"Oh, h--!!" he said, and the tone, in its disgust and its attempt to laugh off the incident, gave the simplicity of an exclamation from his limited vocabulary its character. "Oh, h--!! I was just trying you out as a tenderfoot--a little joke!"

At this, all the crowd laughed in an explosive breath of relief. The inflection of the laugh made Pete go red and look challengingly from face to face, with the result that all became piously sober.

"Then it is all right? I meant in no way to wound your feelings or even your susceptibilities," said Jack; and, accepting the incident as closed, he turned to the counter and asked for the Ewold mail.

Free from that smile and the glint of the eyes, Pete came to in a torrent

of reaction. He, with six notches on his gun-handle, had been trifled with by a grinning tenderfoot. Rage mounted red to his brow. No man who had humiliated him should live. He would have shot Jack in the back if it had not been for Jim Galway, lean as a lath, lantern-jawed, with deep-set blue eyes, his bearing different from that of the other loungers. Jim had not joined in the laugh over Pete's explanation; he had remained impassive through the whole scene; but the readiness with which he knocked Leddy's revolver down showed that this immovability had let nothing escape his quiet observation.

When Jack looked around and understood what had passed, his face was without the smile. It was set and his body had stiffened free of the counter.

"I'll take the gun away from him. It's high time somebody did," said Galway.

"I think you had better, if that is the only way that he knows how to fight," said Jack. "I have wondered how he got the six. Presumably he murdered them."

"To their faces, as I'll get you!" Leddy answered. "I'll play your way now, one, two, three--fire!"

Galway, convinced that this stranger did not know how to shoot, turned to Jack:

"It's not worth your being a target for a dead shot," he said.

"In the morning, yes," answered Jack; and he was smiling again in a way that swept the audience with uncanniness. "But to-night I am engaged. Make it early to-morrow, as I have to take the first train East."

"Well, are you going to let me go?" Leddy asked Jim, while he looked in appeal to the loungers, who were his men.

"Yes, by all means," Jack told Galway. "And as I shall want a man with me, may I rely on you? Four of us will be enough, with a fifth to give the word."

"Ropey Smith can go with me," said Leddy.

It scarcely occurred to them to give the name of duel to this meeting, which Jack held was the only fair way when one felt that he must have satisfaction from an adversary in the form of death. An _arroyo_ a mile from town was chosen and the time dawn, for a meeting which was to reverse the ethics of that boasted fair-play in which the man who first gets a bead is the hero.

"It seems a mediaeval day for me," Jack said, when the details were concluded. "Good-night, gentlemen," he added, after Bill Lang, with fingers that bungled from agitation, had filled his arms with second-class matter.

Jim Galway resumed his position, leaning against the counter watchfully as the gang filed out to the rear to wet up, and in his right hand, which was in his pocket, nestled an automatic pistol.

"I'd shot Pete Leddy dead--'twas the first real fair chance within the

law--so help me, God! I would," he thought, "if there had been time to spare, and save that queer tenderfoot's life. And me a second in a regular duel! Well, I'll be--but it ain't no regular duel. One of 'em is going to drop--that is, the tenderfoot is. I don't just know how to line him up. He beats me!"

VIII

ACCORDING TO CODE

It was the supreme moment of night before dawn. A violet mist shrouded everything. The clamminess of the dew touched Mary's forehead and her hand brushed the moisture-laden hedge as she left the Ewold yard. She remembered that Jack had said that he would camp near the station, so there was no doubt in which direction she should go. Hastening along the silent street, it was easy for her to imagine that she and Ignacio were the only sentient beings, abroad in a world that had stopped breathing.

Softly, impalpably, with both the graciousness of a host and the determinedness of an intruder who will not be gainsaid, the first rays of morning light filtered into the mist. The violet went pink. From pale pink it turned to rose-pink; to the light of life which was as yet as still as the light of the moon. The occasional giant cactus in the open beyond the village outskirts ceased to be spectral.

For the first time Mary Ewold was in the presence of the wonder of daybreak on the desert without watching for the harbinger of gold in the V of the pass, with its revelation of a dome of blue where unfathomable space had been. For the first time daybreak interested her only in broadening and defining her vision of her immediate surroundings.

When the permeating softness suddenly yielded to full transparency, spreading from the fanfare of the rising sun come bolt above the range, and the mist rose, she left the road at sight of two ponies and a burro in a group, their heads together in drooping fellowship. She knew them at once for P.D., Wrath of God, and Jag Ear. Nearby rose a thin spiral of smoke and back of it was a huddled figure, Firio, preparing the morning meal. Animals and servant were as motionless as the cactus. Evidently they did not hear her footsteps. They formed a picture of nightly oblivion, unconscious that day had come. Firio's face was hidden by his big Mexican hat; he did not look up even when she was near. She noted the two blanket-rolls where the two comrades of the trail had slept. She saw that both were empty and knew that Jack had already gone.

"Where is Mr. Wingfield?" she demanded, breathlessly.

Firio was not startled. To be startled was hardly in his Indian nature. The hat tipped upward and under the brim-edge his black eyes gleamed, as the sandy soil all around him gleamed in the dew. He shrugged his shoulders when he recognized the lady speaking as the one who had delayed him at the foot of the pass the previous afternoon. Thanks to her, he had been left alone without his master the whole evening.

"He go to stretch his legs," answered Firio.

Apparently, Sir Chaps had been disinclined to disturb the routine of camp by telling Firio anything about the duel.

"Where did he go? In which direction?" Mary persisted.

Firio moved the coffee-pot closer to the fire. This seemed to require the concentration of all his faculties, including that of speech. He was a fit servant for one who took duels so casually.

"Where? Where?" she repeated.

"Where? Have you no tongue?" snapped Ignacio.

Firio gazed all around as if looking for Jack; then nodded in the direction of rising ground which broke at the edge of a depression about fifty yards away. Her impatience had made the delay of a minute seem hours, while the brilliance of the light had now become that of broad day. She forgot all constraint. She ran, and as she ran she listened for a shot as if it were something inevitable, past due.

And then she uttered a muffled cry of relief, as the scene in a depression which had been the bed of an ancient river flashed before her with theatric completeness. In the bottom of it were five men, two moving and three stationary. Jim Galway and Ropey Smith were walking side by side, keeping a measured step as they paced off a certain distance, while Bill Lang and Pete Leddy and Jack stood by. Leddy and Lang were watching the process inflexibly. Jack was in the costume which had flushed her curiosity so vividly on the pass and he appeared the same amused, disinterested and wondering traveller who had then come upon strange doings.

She stopped, her temples throbbing giddily, her breaths coming in gasps; stopped to gain mastery of herself before she decided what she would do next. On the opposite bank of the _arroyo_ was a line of heads, like those of infantry above a parapet, and she comprehended that, in the same way that news of a cock-fight travels, the gallery gods of Little Rivers had received a tip of a sporting event so phenomenal that it changed the sluggards among them into early risers. They were making themselves comfortable lying flat on their stomachs and exposing as little as possible of their precious bodies to the danger of that tenderfoot firing wild.

It was a great show, of which they would miss no detail; and all had their interest whetted by some possible new complication of the plot when they saw the tall, familiar figure of Jasper Ewold's daughter standing against the skyline. She felt the greedy inquiry of their eyes; she guessed their thoughts.

This new element of the situation swept her with a realization of the punishment she must suffer for that chance meeting on Galeria and then with resentful anger, which transformed Jack Wingfield's indifference to callous bravado.

Must she face that battery of leers from the town ruffians while she implored a stranger, who had been nothing to her yesterday and would be nothing tomorrow, to run away from a combat which was a creation of his own stubbornness? She was in revolt against herself, against him, and against the whole miserable business. If she proceeded, public opinion would involve her in a sentimental interest in a stranger. She must live

with the story forever, while to an idle traveller it was only an adventure at a way-station on his journey.

She had but to withdraw in feigned surprise from the sight of a scene which she had come upon unawares and she would be free of any association with it. For all Little Rivers knew that she was given to random walks and rides. No one would be surprised that she was abroad at this early hour. It would be ascribed to the nonsense which afflicted the Ewolds, father and daughter, about sunrises.

Yes, she had been in a nightmare. With the light of day she was seeing clearly. Had she not warned him about Leddy? Had not she done her part? Should she submit herself to fruitless humiliation? Go to him in as much distress as if his existence were her care? If he would not listen to her yesterday, why should she expect him to listen to her now?

She would return to her garden. Its picture of content and isolation called her away from the stare of the faces on the other bank. She turned on her heel abruptly, took two or three spasmodic steps and stopped suddenly, confronted with another picture--one of imagination--that of Jack Wingfield lying dead. The recollection of a voice, the voice that had stopped the approach of Leddy's passion-inflamed face to her own on the pass, sounded in her ears.

She faced around, drawn by something that will and reason could not overcome, to see that Jim Galway and Ropey Smith had finished their task of pacing off the distance. The two combatants were starting for their stations, their long shadows in the slant of the morning sunlight travelling over the sand like pursuing spectres. Leddy went with the quick, firm step which bespoke the keenness of his desire; Jack more slowly, at a natural gait. His station was so near her that she could reach him with a dozen steps. And he was whistling--the only sound in a silence which seemed to stretch as far as the desert--whistling gaily in apparent unconsciousness that the whole affair was anything but play. The effect of this was benumbing. It made her muscles go limp. She sank down for very want of strength to keep erect; and Ignacio, hardly observed, keeping close to her dropped at her side.

"Ignacio, tell the young man, the one who was our guest last evening, that I wish to see him!" she gasped.

With flickering, shrewd eyes Ignacio had watched her distress. He craved the word that should call him to service and was off with a bound. His rushing, agitated figure was precipitated into a scene hard set as men on a chess-board in deadly serenity. Leddy and Jack, were already facing each other.

"Senor! Senor!" Ignacio shouted, as he ran. "Senor Don't Care of the Big Spurs--wait!"

The message which he had to give was his mistress's and, therefore, nobody else's business. He rose on tiptoes to whisper it into Jack's ear. Jack listened, with head bent to catch the words. He looked over to Mary for an instant of intent silence and then raised his empty left hand in signal.

"Sorry, but I must ask for a little delay!" he called to Leddy. His tone was wonderful in its politeness and he bowed considerably to his adversary.

"I thought it was all bluff!" Leddy answered. "You'll get it, though--you'll get it in the old way if you haven't the nerve to take it in yours!"

"Really, I am stubbornly fond of my way," Jack said. "I shall be only a minute. That will give you time to steady your nerves," he added, in the encouraging, reassuring strain of a coach to a man going to the bat.

He was coming toward Mary with his easy, languid gait, radiant of casual inquiry. The time of his steps seemed to be reckoned in succeeding hammer-beats in her brain. He was coming and she had to find reasons to keep him from going back; because if it had not been for her he would be quite safe. Oh, if she could only be free of that idea of obligation to him! All the pain, the confusion, the embarrassment was on her side. His very manner of approach, in keeping with the whole story of his conduct toward her, showed him incapable of such feelings. She had another reaction. She devoutly wished that she had not sent for him.

Had not his own perversity taken his fate out of her hands? If he preferred to die, why should it be her concern? Should she volunteer herself as a rescuer of fools? The gleaming sand of the _arroyo_ rose in a dazzling mist before her eyes, obscuring him, clothing him with the unreality of a dream; and then, in physical reality, he emerged. He was so near as she rose spasmodically that she could have laid her hand on his shoulder. His hat under his arm, he stood smiling in the bland, questioning interest of a spectator happening along the path, even as he had in her first glimpse of him on the pass.

"I don't care! Go on! Go on!" she was going to say. "You have made sport of me! You make sport of everything! Life itself is a joke to you!"

The tempest of the words was in her eyes, if it did not reach her tongue's end. It was halted by the look of hurt surprise, of real pain, which appeared on his face. Was it possible, after all, that he could feel? The thought brought forth the passionate cry of her mission after that sleepless night.

"I beg of you--I implore you--don't!"

Had anyone told her yesterday that she would have been begging any man in melodramatic supplication for anything, she would have thought of herself as mad. Wasn't she mad? Wasn't he mad? Yet she broke into passionate appeal.

"It is horrible--unspeakable! I cannot bear it!"

A flood of color swept his cheeks and with it came a peculiar, feminine, almost awkward, gentleness. His air was that of wordless humility. He seemed more than ever an uncomprehending, sure prey for Leddy.

"Don't you realize what death is?" she asked.

The question, so earnest and searching, had the contrary effect on him. It changed him back to his careless self. He laughed in the way of one who deprecates another's illusion or passing fancy. This added to her conviction that he did not realize, that he was incapable of realizing, his position.

"Do you think I am about to die?" he asked softly.

"With Pete Leddy firing at you twenty yards away--yes! And you pose--you pose! If you were human you would be serious!"

"Pose?" He repeated the word. It startled him, mystified him. "The clothes I bought to please Firio, you mean?" he inquired, his face lighting.

"No, about death. It is horrible--horrible! Death for which I am responsible!"

"Why, have you forgotten that we settled all that?" he asked. "It was not you. It was the habit I had formed of whistling in the loneliness of the desert. I am sorry, now, that I did not stick to singing, even at the expense of a sore throat."

Now he called to Leddy, and his voice, high-pitched and powerful, seemed to travel in the luminous air as on resilient, invisible wires.

"Leddy, wasn't it the way I whistled to you the first time we met that made you want satisfaction? You remember"--and he broke into a whistle. His tone was different from that to Leddy on the pass; the whistle was different. It was shrill and mocking.

"Yes, the whistle!" yelled Leddy. "No man can whistle to me like that and live!"

Jack laughed as if he appreciated all the possibilities of humor inherent in the picture of the bloodthirsty Leddy, the waiting seconds and the

gallery. He turned to Mary with a gesture of his outstretched hands:

"There, you see! I brought it on myself."

"You are brutal! You are without feeling--you are ridiculous--you--" she stormed, chokingly.

And in face of this he became reasoning, philosophical.

"Yes, I admit that it is all ridiculous, even to farce, this little comédie humaine. But we must remember that beside the age of the desert none of us last long. Ridiculous, yes; but if I will whistle, why, then, I must play out the game I've started."

He was looking straight into her eyes, and there was that in his gaze which came as a surprise and with something of the effect of a blade out of a scabbard. It chilled her. It fastened her inactive to the earth with a helplessness that was uncanny. It mixed the element of fear for him with the element of fear of him.

"Remember I am of age--and I don't mind," he added, with the faintest glint of satire in his reassurance.

He was walking away, with a wave of his hand to Leddy; he was going over the precipice's edge after thanking the danger sign. He did not hasten, nor did he loiter. The precipice resolved itself into an incident of a journey of the same order as an ankle-deep stream trickling across a highway.

IX

THE DEVIL IS OUT

She had done her best and she had failed. What reason was there for her to remain? Should she endure witnessing in reality the horror which she had pictured so vividly in imagination? A flash of fire! The fall of a careening figure to the earth! Leddy's grin of satisfaction! The rejoicing of his clan of spectators over the exploit, while youth which sang airs to the beat of a pony's hoofs and knew the worship of the Eternal Painter lay dead!

What reason to remain except to punish herself! She would go. But something banished reason. She was held in the leash of suspense, staring with clearness of vision in one second; staring into a mist the next; while the coming and going of Ignacio's breaths between his teeth was the only sound in her ears.

"Senor Don't Care of the Big Spurs will win!" he whispered.

"He will?" she repeated, like one marvelling, in the tautness of every nerve and muscle, that she had the power of speech.

She peered into Ignacio's face. Its Indian impassivity was gone. His lips were twitching; his eyes were burning points between half-closed lids.

"Why?" she asked. "How?"

"I know. I watch him. I have seen a mountain lion asleep in a tree. His paw is like velvet. He smiles. There seems no fight in him. I know. There is a devil, a big devil, in Senor Don't Care. It sleeps so much it very terrible when it awakes. And Pete Leddy--he is all the time awake; all the time too ready. Something in him will make his arm shake when the moment to shoot comes and something in Senor Don't Care--his devil--will make his arm steady."

Could Ignacio be right? Did Jack really know how to shoot? Was he confident of the outcome? Were his smiles the mask of a conviction that he was to kill and not to be killed? After all, had his attitude toward her been merely acting? Had she undergone this humiliation as the fish on the line of the mischievous play of one who had stopped over a train in order to do murder? No! If he were capable of such guile he knew that Leddy could shoot well and that twenty yards was a deadly range for a good shot. He was taking a chance and the devil in him was laughing at the chance, while it laughed at her for thinking that he was an innocent going to slaughter in expression of a capricious sense of chivalry.

"He will win--he will win if Leddy plays fair!" Ignacio repeated.

Now she was telling herself that it was solely for the sake of her conscience that she wanted to see Senor Don't Care survive; solely for the sake of her conscience that she wanted to see him go aboard the train safe. After that, she could forget ever having owed this trifle the feeling of gratitude for a favor done. Literally, he must live in order

to be a dead and unremembered incident of her existence.

And Jack was back at his station, with the bright sunlight heightening the colors of his play cowboy attire, his weight on the ball of his right foot thrown well ahead of the other, his head up, but the whole effect languid, even deferential. He seemed about to take off his hat to the joyous sky of a fair day in May. His shadow expressed the same feeling as his pose, that of tranquil youth with its eyes on the horizon. Leddy had the peculiar slouch of the desperado, which is associated with the spread of pioneering civilization by the raucous criers of red-blooded individualism. If Jack's bearing was amateurish, then Pete's was professional in its threatening pose; and his shadow, like himself, had an unrelieved hardness of outline.

Both drew their guns from their holsters and lowered them till the barrels lay even with the trousers seams. They awaited the word to fire which Bill Lang, who stood at an angle equidistant from the two men, was to give.

"Wait!" Jack called, in a tone which indicated that something had recurred to him. Then a half laugh from him fell on the brilliant, shining, hard silence with something of the sound of a pebble slipping over glare ice.

"Leddy, it has just occurred to me that we are both foolish--honestly, we are!" he said. "The idea when Arizona is so sparsely settled of our starting out to depopulate it in such a premeditated manner on such a beautiful morning, and all because I was such an inept whistler! Why, if I had realized what a perfectly bad whistler I was I would never have whistled again. If my whistle hurt your feelings I am sorry, and I--"

"No, you don't!" yelled Leddy. "I've waited long enough! It's fight, you--"

"Oh, all right! You are so emphatic," Jack answered. His voice was still pleasant, but shot with something metallic. The very shadow of him seemed to stiffen with the stiffening of his muscles.

"Ready!" called Bill Lang.

The ruling passion that had carved six notches on his gun-handle overwhelmed Pete Leddy. At least, let us give him the benefit of the doubt and say that this and not calculation was responsible for his action. Before the word for preparation was free of Lang's lips, and without waiting for the word to fire, his revolver came up in a swift quarter-circle. He was sure of his aim at that range with a ready draw. Again and again he had thus hit his target in practice and six times he had winged his man by such agile promptness.

With the flash from the muzzle all the members of the gallery rose on hands and knees. They were as sure that there was to be a seventh notch as of their identity. There was no question in their minds but Pete had played a smart trick. They had known from the first that he would win. And the proof of it was in the sudden, uncontrollable movement of the adversary.

Jack whirled half round. He was falling. But even as he fell he was still facing his adversary. He plunged forward unsteadily and came to rest on his left elbow. A trickle of blood showed on the chap of his left leg,

which had tightened as his knee twisted under him. Leddy's rage had been so hot that for once his trigger finger had been too quick. He had aimed too low. But he was sure that he had done for his man and he looked triumphantly toward the gallery gods whose hero he was. They had now risen to their feet. In answer to their congratulations he waved his left hand, palm out, in salutation. His gun-hand had dropped back to his trousers seam.

Even as it dropped, Jack's revolver had risen, his own gun-hand steadied in the palm of his left hand, which had an elbow in the sand for a rest. Victor and spectators, in their preoccupation with the relief and elation of a drama finished, had their first warning of what was to come in a voice that did not seem like the voice of the tenderfoot as they had heard it, but of another man. And Leddy was looking at a black hole in a rim of steel which, though twenty yards away, seemed hot against his forehead, while he turned cold.

"Now, Pete Leddy, do not move a muscle!" Jack told him. "Pete Leddy, you did not play my way. I still have a shot due, and I am going to kill you!"

Jack's face seemed never to have worn a smile. It was all chin, and thin, tightly-pressed lips, and solid, straight nose, bronze and unyielding.

"And I am going to kill you!"

This was surely the devil of Ignacio's imagery speaking in him--a cold, passionless, gray-eyed devil. Though they had never seen him shoot, everybody felt now that he could shoot with deadly accuracy and that there was no play cowboy in his present mood. He had the bead of death on Leddy and he would fire with the first flicker of resistance. His call seemed to have sunk the feet of everyone beneath the sand to bed-rock and riveted them there. Lang and the two seconds were as motionless as statues.

Mary recalled Leddy's leer at her on the pass, with its intent of something more horrible than murder. Savagery rose in her heart. It was right that he should be killed. He deserved his fate. But no sooner was the savagery born--born, she felt, of the very hypnosis of that carved face--than she cast it out shudderingly in the realization that she had wished the death of a fellow human being! She looked away from Jack; and then it occurred to her that he must be bleeding. He was again a companion of the trail, his strength ebbing away. Her impulse was retarded by no fear of the gallery now. It brought her to her feet.

"But first drop your revolver!" she heard Jack call, as she ran.

She saw it fall from Leddy's trembling hand, as a dead leaf goes free of a breeze-shaken limb. All the fight was out of him. The courage of six notches was not the courage to accept in stoicism the penalty of foul play. And that black rim was burning his forehead.

"Galway, you have a gun?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Galway answered, mechanically. His presence of mind, which had been so sure in the store, was somewhat shaken. He had seen men killed, but never in such deliberate fashion.

"Take it out"

There was a quality in the command like frosty madness, which one instinctively obeyed. The half-prostrate figure of the tenderfoot seemed to dominate everything--men, earth, and air.

Mary had a glimpse of Galway drawing an automatic pistol from his pocket when she dropped at Jack's side. She knew that Jack had not heard or seen her approach. All his will was flowing out along a pistol's sight, even as his blood was flowing out on the sand in a broadening circle of red.

It was well that she had come. Her fingers were splashed as she felt for the artery, which she closed by leaning her whole weight on the thumb.

Ignacio had followed her and immediately after him came Firio, who had been startled in his breakfast preparations by the sound of a shot and had set out to investigate its cause. He was as changed as his master; a twitching, fierce being, glaring at her and at the wound and then prolongedly and watchfully at Pete Leddy.

"Can you shoot to kill?" Jack asked Galway, in a piercing summons.

"Yes," drawled Galway.

"Then up with your gun--quick! There! A bead on Ropey Smith!"

Galway had the bead before Ropey could protest.

"Give Ropey ten seconds to drop his gun or we will care for him at the same time as Pete!" Jack concluded.

Ropey did not wait the ten seconds. He was over-prompt for the same reasons of temperament that made Pete Leddy prefer his own way of fighting.

"I take it that we can count on the neutrality of our spectators. They cannot be interested in the success of either side," Jack observed, with dry humor, but still methodically. "All they ask is a spectacle."

"Yes, you bet!" came a voice from the gallery, undisguisedly eager to concur.

"Now, Pete and Ropey," Jack began, and broke off.

There was a poignant silence that waited on the processes of his mind. Not only was there no sound, but to Mary there seemed no movement anywhere in the world, except the pulse of the artery trying to drive its flood past the barrier of her thumb. Jack kept his bead unremittingly on Pete. It was Firio who broke the silence.

"Kill him! He is bad! He hates you!" said Firio.

"_Si, si_! If you do not kill him now, you must some time," said Ignacio.

Mary felt that even if Jack heard them he would not let their advice influence him. On the bank before she had hastened to him a strange and awful visitor in her heart had wished for Leddy's death. Now she wished for him to go away unharmed. She wished it in the name of her own responsibility for all that had happened. Yet her tongue had no urging word to offer. She waited in a supernatural and dreadful curiosity on

Jack's decision. It was as if he were to answer one more question in explanation of the mystery of his nature. Could he deliberately shoot down an unarmed man? Was he that hard?

"I am thinking just how to deal with you, Pete and Ropey," Jack proceeded. "As I understand it, you have not been very useful citizens of Little Rivers. You can live under one condition--that you leave town and never return armed. Half a minute to decide!"

"I'll go!" said Pete.

"I'll go!" said Ropey.

"And keep your words?"

"Yes!" they assented.

But neither moved. The fact that Jack had not yet lowered his revolver made them cautious. They were obviously over-anxious to play safe to the last.

"Then go!" called Jack.

Pete and Ropey slouched away, leaving behind Ropey's gun, which was unimportant as it had only one notch, and Pete's precious companion of many campaigns with its six notches, lying on the sand.

"And, gentlemen," Jack called to the spectators, "our little entertainment is over now. I am afraid that you will be late for breakfast."

Apparently it came as a real inspiration to all at once that they might be, for they began to withdraw with a celerity that was amazingly spontaneous. Their heads disappeared below the skyline and only the actors were left. Pete and Ropey--Bill Lang following--walked away along the bed of the _arroyo_, instead of going over the bank. Pete paused when he was out of range. The old threat was again in his pose.

"I'm not through with you, yet!" he called.

"Why, I hope you are!" Jack answered.

He let his revolver fall with a convulsion of weakness. Mary wondered if he were going to faint. She wondered if she herself were not going to faint, in a giddy second, while the red spot on the sand shaped itself in revolving grotesquery. But the consciousness that she must not lift her weight from the artery was a centering idea to keep her faculties in some sort of equilibrium.

He was looking around at her, she knew. Now she must see his face after this transformation in him which had made her fears of his competency silly imaginings; after she had linked her name with his in an overwhelming village sensation. She was stricken by unanalyzable emotions and by a horror of her nearness to him, her contact with his very blood, and his power. She was conscious of a glimpse of his turning profile, still transfixed with the cool purpose of action. Then they were gazing full at each other, eyes into eyes, directly, questioningly. He was smiling as he had on the pass; as he had when he stood with his arms full of mail waiting for the signal to deposit his load. His devil had

slipped back into his inner being.

He spoke first, and in the voice that went with his vaguest mood; the voice in which he had described his escape from the dinosaur whose scales had become wedged in the defile at the critical moment.

"You have a strong thumb and it must be tired, as well as all bluggy," he said, falling into a childhood symbol for taking the whole affair in play.

Could he be the same man who had said, "I am going to kill you!" so relentlessly? He had eased the situation with the ready gift he had for easing situations; but, at the same time, he had made those unanalyzable emotions more complex, though they were swept into the background for the moment. He glanced down at his leg with comprehending surprise.

"Now, certainly, you are free of all responsibility," he added. "You kept the strength in me to escape the fate you feared. Jim Galway will make a tourniquet and relieve you."

The first available thing for tightening the tourniquet was the barrel of Pete Leddy's gun and the first suggestion for material came from her. It was the sash of her gown, which Galway knotted with his strong, sunburned fingers.

When she could lift her numbed thumb from its task and rose to her feet she had a feeling of relief, as if she were free of magnetic bonds and uncanny personal proximity. The incident was closed--surely closed. She was breathing a prayer of thanks when a remark from Galway to Jack brought back her apprehension.

"I guess you will have to postpone catching to-day's train," he said.

Certainly, Jack must remain until his wound had healed and his strength had returned. And where would he go? He could not camp out on the desert. As Jasper Ewold had the most commodious bungalow it seemed natural that any wounded stranger should be taken there. The idea chilled her as an insupportable intrusion. Jack hesitated a moment. He was evidently considering whether he could not still keep to his programme.

"Yes, Jim, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you for a cot for a few days," he said, finally.

Again he had the right thought at the right moment. Had he surmised what was passing in her mind?

"Seeing that you've got Pete Leddy out of town, I should say that you were fairly entitled to a whole bed," Jim drawled. "These two Indians here can make a hustle to get some kind of a litter."

Now she could go. That was her one crying thought: She could go! And again he came to her rescue with his smiling considerateness.

"You have missed your breakfast, I'll warrant," he said to her. "Please don't wait. You were so brave and cool about it all, and--I--" A faint tide of color rose to his cheeks, which had been pale from loss of blood. For once he seemed unable to find a word.

Mary denied him any assistance in his embarrassment.

"Yes," she answered, almost bluntly. Then she added an excuse: "And you should have a doctor at once. I will send him."

She did not look at Jack again, but hastened away. When she was over the bank of the _arroyo_ out of sight she put her fingers to her temples in strong pressure. That pulse made her think of another, which had been under her thumb, and she withdrew her fingers quickly.

"It is the sun! I have no hat," she said to herself, "and I didn't sleep well."

X

MARY EXPLAINS

Dr. Patterson was still asleep when Mary rapped at his door. Having aroused him to action by calling out that a stranger had been wounded in the _arroyo_, she did not pause to offer any further details. With her eyes level and dull, she walked rapidly along the main street where nobody was yet abroad, her one thought to reach her room uninterrupted. As she approached the house she saw her father standing on the porch, his face beaming with the joy of a serenely-lived moment as he had his morning look at the Eternal Painter's first display for the day. She had crossed the bridge before he became conscious of her presence.

"Mary! You are up first! Out so early when you went to bed so late!" he greeted her.

"I did not sleep well," she explained.

"What, Mary, you not sleep well!" All the preoccupation with the heavens went from his eyes, which swept her from head to foot. "Mary! Your hand is covered with blood! There is blood on your dress! What does this mean?"

She looked down and for the first time saw dark red spots on her skirt. The sight sent a shiver through her, which she mastered before she spoke.

"Oh, nothing--or a good deal, if you put it in another way. A real sensation for Little Rivers!" she said.

"But you are not telling!"

"It is such a remarkable story, father, it ought not to be spoiled by giving away its plot," she said, with assumed lightness. "I don't feel equal to doing full justice to it until after I've had my bath. I will tell you at breakfast. That's a reason for your waiting for me."

And she hastened past him into the house.

"Was it--was it something to do with this Wingfield?" he called excitedly after her.

"Yes, about the fellow of the enormous spurs--Senor Don't Care, as

Ignacio calls him," she answered from the stair.

Some note underneath her nonchalance seemed to disturb, even to distress him. He entered the house and started through the living-room on his way to the library. But he paused as if in answer to a call from one of the four photographs on the wall, Michael Angelo's young David, in the supple ease of grace. The David which Michael made from an imperfect piece of marble! The David which sculptors say is ill-proportioned! The David into which, however, the master breathed the thing we call genius, in the bloom of his own youth finding its power, even as David found his against Goliath.

This David has come out of the unknown, over the hills, with the dew of morning freshness on his brow. He is unconscious of self; of everything except that he is unafraid. If all other aspirants have failed in downing the old champion, why, he will try.

Now, Jasper Ewold frowned at David as if he were getting no answer to a series of questions.

"I must make a change. You have been up a long time, David," he thought; for he had many of these photographs which he kept in a special store-room subject to his pleasure in hanging. "Yes, I will have a Madonna--two Madonnas, perhaps, and a Velasquez and a Rembrandt next time."

In the library he set to reading Professor Giuccamini; but he found himself disagreeing with the professor.

"I want your facts which you have dug out of the archives," he said, speaking to the book as if it were alive. "I don't want your opinions. Confound it!" he threw Giuccamini on the table. "I'll make my own opinions! Nothing else to do out here on the desert. Time enough to change them as often as I want, too."

He went into the garden--the garden which, next to Mary, was the most intimate thing in his affections. Usually, every new leaf that had burst forth over night set itself in the gelatine of his mind like so many letterpress changes on a printed page to a proof-reader. This time, however, a new palm leaf, a new spray of bougainvillea blossoms, a bud on the latest rose setting which he had from Los Angeles, said "Good morning," without any response from him.

He paced back and forth, his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed moodily, and his shoulders drawn together in a way that made him seem older and more portly. With each turn he looked sharply, impatiently, toward the door of the house.

Never had Mary so felt the charm of her room as on this morning; never had it seemed so set apart from the world and so personal. It was the breadth of the ell and the size of her father's library and bedroom combined. The windows could hardly be called windows in a Northern sense, for there was no glass. It was unnecessary to seal up the source of light and air in a dry climate, where a blanket at night supplied all the extra warmth one's body ever required. The blinds swung inward and the shades softened the light and added to the privacy which the screen of the growing young trees and creeping vines were fast supplying. Here she could be more utterly alone than on the summit of the pass itself. She paused in the doorway, surveying familiar objects in the enjoyed triumph

of complete seclusion.

While she waited for the water to run into the bowl, she looked fixedly at the stains of a fluid which had been so warm in its touch. It was only blood, she told herself. It would wash off, and she held her hands in the water and saw the spread of the dye through the bowl in a moment of preoccupation. Then she scrubbed as vigorously as if she were bent on removing the skin itself. After she had held up her dripping fingers in satisfied inspection, the spots on her gown caught her eye. For a moment they, too, held her staring attention; then she slipped out of the gown precipitately.

With this, her determined haste was at an end. She was about to enjoy the feminine luxury of time. The combing of her hair became a delightful and leisurely function in the silky feel of the strands in her fingers and the refreshing pull at the roots. The flow of the bath water made the music of pleasurable anticipation, and immersion set the very spirit of physical life leaping and tingling in her veins. And all the while she was thinking of how to fashion a narrative.

When she started down-stairs she was not only refreshed but remade. She was going to breakfast at the usual hour, after the usual processes of ushering herself from the night's rest into the day's activities. There had been no stealthy trip out to the _arroyo_; no duel; no wound; no Senor Don't Care. She had only a story which involved all these elements, a most preposterous story, to tell.

"Now you shall hear all about it!" she called to her father as soon as she saw him; "the strangest, most absurd, most amusing affair"--she piled up the adjectives--"that has ever occurred in Little Rivers!"

She began at once, even before she poured his coffee, her voice a trifle high-pitched with her simulation of humor. And she was exactly veracious, avoiding details, yet missing nothing that gave the facts a pleasant trail. She told of the meeting with Leddy on the pass and of the arrival of the gorgeous traveller; of Jack's whistle; of Pete's challenge.

Jasper Ewold listened with stoical attentiveness. He did not laugh, even when Jack's vagaries were mentioned.

"Why didn't you tell me last night?" was his first question.

"To be honest, I was afraid that it would worry you. I was afraid that you would not permit me to go to the pass alone again. But you will?" She slipped her hand across the table and laid her fingers appealingly on the broad back of his heavily tanned hand, from which the veins rose in bronze welts. "And he was nice about it in his ridiculous, big-spurs fashion. He said that it was all due to the whistle."

"Go on! Go on! There must be more!" her father insisted impatiently.

She gave him the pantomime of the store, not as a bit of tragedy--she was careful about that--but as something witnessed by an impersonal spectator and narrator of stories.

"He walked right toward a muzzle, this Wingfield?" Jasper asked, his brows contracting.

"Why, yes. I told you at the start it was all most preposterous,"

she answered.

"And he was not afraid of death--this Wingfield!" Jasper repeated.

He was looking away from her. The contraction of his brows had become a scowl of mystification.

"Why do you always speak of him as 'this Wingfield,'" she demanded, "as if the town were full of Wingfields and he was a particular one?"

He looked around quickly, his features working in a kind of confusion. Then he smiled.

"I was thinking of the whistle," he explained. "Well, we'll call him this Sir Chaps, this Senor Don't Care, or whatever you please. As for his walking into the gun, there is nothing remarkable in that. You draw on a man. You expect him to throw up his hands or reach for his gun. He does nothing but smile right along the level of the sight into your eyes. It was disturbing to Pete's sense of etiquette on such occasions. It threw him off. There are similar instances in history. A soldier once put a musket at Bonaparte's head. Some of Caesar's legionaries once pressed their swords at his breast. Such old hands in human psychology had the presence of mind to smile. And the history of the West is full of examples which have not been recorded. Go on, Mary!"

"Ignacio says he has a devil in him," she added.

"That little Indian has a lot of primitive race wisdom. Probably he is right," her father said soberly.

"It explains what followed," she proceeded.

She was emphatic about the reason for her part. She went out to the _arroyo_ on behalf of her responsibility for a human life.

"But why did you not rouse me? Why did you go alone?" he asked.

"I didn't think--there wasn't time--I was upset and hurried."

She proceeded in a forced monotone which seemed to allow her hardly a single full breath.

"And I am going to kill you!" she repeated, shuddering, at the close of the narrative.

"When he said that did his face change completely? Did it seem like the face of another man? Yes, did it seem as if there were one face that could charm and another that could kill?" Jasper's words came slowly and with a drawn exactness. They formed the inquiry of one who expected corroboration of an impression.

"Yes."

"You felt it--you felt it very definitely, Mary?"

"Yes."

She was living over the moment of Jack's transformation from silk to steel. The scene in the _arroyo_ became burning clear. Under the strain

of the suppression of her own excitement, concentrated in her purpose to make all the realism of the duel an absurdity, she did not watch keenly for the signs of expression by which she usually knew what was passing in her father's mind. But she was not too preoccupied to see that he was relieved over her assent that there was a devil in Jack Wingfield, which struck her as a puzzle in keeping with all that morning's experience. It added to the inward demoralization which had suddenly dammed her power of speech.

"Ignacio saw it, too, so I was interested," Jasper added quickly, in a more natural tone, settling back into his chair. His agitation had passed.

So that was it. Her father's dominant, fine old egoism was rejoicing in another proof of his excellence as a judge of character.

"Finis! The story is told!" he continued softly.

All told! And it had been a success. Mary caught her breath in a gay, high-pitched exclamation of realization that she had not to go on with explanations.

"Our singular cavalier is safe!" she said. "My debt is paid. I need not worry any further lest someone who did me a favor should suffer for it!"

"True! true!"

Jasper's outburst of laughter when he had paused in turning down the wick of the lamp the previous evening had been as a forced blast from the brasses. Anyone with strong lungs may laugh majestically; but it takes depth of feeling and years rich with experience to express the gratification that now possessed him. He stretched his hands across the table to her and the laugh that came then came as a cataract of spontaneity.

"Exactly, Mary! The duel provided the way to pay a debt," he said. "Why, it is you who have done our Big Spurs a favor! He has a wound to show to his friends in the East! I am proud that you could take it all so coolly and reasonably."

She improved her opportunity while he held her hands.

"I will go armed next time, and I do know how to shoot, so you won't worry"--she put it that way, rather than openly ask his consent--"if I ride out to the pass?"

"Mary, I have every reason to believe that you know how to take care of yourself," he answered.

And that very afternoon she rode out to Galeria, starting a little earlier than usual, returning a little later than usual, in jubilant mood.

"Everything is the same!" she had repeated a dozen times on the road. "Everything is the same!" she told herself before she fell asleep; and her sleep was long and sweet, in nature's gratitude for rest after a storm.

The sunlight breaking through the interstices of the foliage of a poplar,

sensitive to a slight breeze, came between the lattices in trembling patchwork on the bed, flickering over her face and losing itself in the strands of her hair.

"Everything is the same!" she said, when her faculties were cleared of drowsiness.

For the second time she gave intimate, precious thanks for a simple thing that had never occurred to her as a blessing before: for the seclusion and silence of her room, free from all invasion except of her own thoughts. The quicker flow of blood that came with awaking, the expanding thrill of physical strength and buoyancy of life renewed, brought with it the moral courage which morning often brings to flout the compromises of the confusion of the evening's weariness. The inspiriting, cool air of night electrified by the sun cleared her vision. She saw all the pictures on the slate of yesterday and their message plainly, as something that could not be erased by any Buddhistic ritual of reiterated phrase.

"No, everything is not the same, not even the ride--not yet!" she admitted. "But time will make it so--time and a sense of humor, which I hope I have."

XI

SENIOR DON'T CARE RECEIVES

Jack lounged in an armchair in the Galway sitting-room with his bandaged leg bolstered on a stool after Dr. Patterson had fished a bit of lead out of the wound. Tribute overflowed from the table to the chairs and from the chairs to the floor; pineapples, their knobby jackets all yellow from ripening in the field, with the full succulency of root-fed and sun-drawn flavor; monstrous navel oranges, leaden with the weight of juice, richer than cloth of gold and velvet soft; and every fruit of the fertile soil and benignant climate; and jellies, pies, and custards. But these were only the edibles. There were flowers in equal abundance. They banked the windows.

"It's Jasper Ewold's idea to bring gifts when you call," explained Jim Galway. "Jasper is always sowing ideas and lots of them have sprung up and flourished."

Jack had not been in Little Rivers twenty-four hours, and he had played a part in its criminal annals and become subject to all the embarrassment of favors of a royal bride or a prima donna who is about to sail. In a bower, amazed, he was meeting the world of Little Rivers and its wife. Men of all ages; men with foreign accent; men born and bred as farmers; men to whom the effect of indoor occupation clung; men still weak, but with red corpuscles singing a song of returning health in their arteries--strapping, vigorous men, all with hands hardened by manual labor and in their eyes the far distances of the desert, in contrast to the sparkle of oasis intimacy.

Women with the accent of college classrooms; women who made plural nouns the running mates of singular verbs; women who were novices in housework; women drilled in drudgery from childhood--all expanding, all

dwelling in a democracy that had begun its life afresh in a new land, and all with the wonder of gardens where there had been only sagebrush in their beings.

There was something at odds with Jack's experience of desert towns in the picture of a bronzed rancher, his arms loaded with roses, saying, in boyish diffidence:

"Mister, you fit him fair and you sure fixed him good. Just a few roses--they're so thick over to our place that they're getting a pest. Thought mebbe they'd be nice for you to look at while you was tied up to a chair nursing Pete's soovenir!"

One visitor whose bulk filled the doorway, the expansion of his smile spreading over a bounteous rotundity of cheek, impressed himself as a personality who had the distinction in avoirdupois that Jim Galway had in leanness. In his hand he had five or six peonies as large as saucers.

"Every complete community has a fat man, seh!" he announced, with a certain ample bashfulness in keeping with his general amplitude and a musical Southern accent.

"If it wants to feel perfectly comfortable it has!" said Jack, by way of welcome.

"Well, I'm the fat man of Little Rivers, name being Bob Worther!" said he, grinning as he came across the room with an amazingly quick, easy step.

"No rivals?" inquired Jack.

"No, seh! I staked out the first claim and I've an eye out for any new-comers over the two hundred mark. I warn them off! Jasper Ewold is up to two hundred, but he doesn't count. Why, you ought to have seen me, seh, before I came to this valley!"

"A living skeleton?"

"No, seh! Back in Alabama I had reached a point where I broke so many chairs and was getting so nervous from sudden falls in the midst of conversation, when I made a lively gesture that I didn't dare sit down away from home except at church, where they had pews. I weighed three hundred and fifty!"

"And now?"

"I acknowledge two hundred and forty, including my legs, which are very powerful, having worked off that extra hundred. I've got the boss job for making a fat man spider-waisted--inspector of ditches and dams. Any other man would have to use a horse, but I hoof it, and that's economy all around. And being big I grow big things. Violets wouldn't be much more in my line than drawnwork. I've got this whole town beat on peonies and pumpkins. Being as it's a fat man's pleasure to cheer people up, I dropped in to bring you a few peonies and to say that, considering the few well-selected words you spoke to Pete Leddy on this town's behalf, I'm prepared to vote for you for anything from coroner to president, seh!"

Later, after Bob had gone, a small girl brought a spray of gladiolus,

their slender stems down to her toe-tips and the opening blossoms half hiding her face. Jack insisted on having them laid across his knee. She was not a fairy out of a play, as he knew by her conversation.

"Mister, did you yell when you was hit?" she asked.

Jack considered thoughtfully. It would not do to be vagarious under such a shrewd examination; he must be exact.

"No, I don't think I did. I was too busy."

"I'll bet you wanted to, if you hadn't been so busy. Did it hurt much?"

"Not so very much."

"Maybe that was why you didn't yell. Mother says that all you can see is a little black spot--except you can't see it for the bandages. Is that the way yours is?"

"I believe so. In fact, I'll tell you a secret: That's the fashion in wounds."

"Mother will be glad to know she's right. She sets a lot by her opinion, does mother. Say, do you like plums?"

Jack already had a peck of plums, but another peck would not add much to the redundancy as far as he was concerned.

"I'll bring you some. We've got the biggest plums in Little Rivers--oh, so big! Bigger'n Mr. Ewold's! I'll bring some right away." She paused, however, in the doorway. "Don't you tell anybody I said they were bigger'n Mr. Ewold's," she went on. "It might hurt his feelings. He's what they call the o-rig-i-nal set-tler, and we always agree that he grows the biggest of everything, because--why, because he's got such a big laugh and such a big smile. Mother says sour-faced people oughtn't to have a face any bigger'n a crab apple; but Mr. Ewold's face couldn't be too big if it was as big as all outdoors! Good-by. I reckon you won't be s'prised to hear that I'm the dreadful talker of our family."

"Wait!" Jack called. "You haven't told me your name."

"Belvedere Smith. Father says it ain't a name for living things. But mother is dreadfully set in her ideas of names, and she doesn't like it because people call me Belvy; but they just naturally will."

"Belvedere, did you ever hear of the three little blue mice"--Jack was leaning toward her with an air of fascinating mystery--"that thought they could hide in the white clover from the white cat that had two black stripes on her back?"

There was a pellmell dash across the room and her face, with wide-open eyes dancing in curiosity, was pressed close to his:

"Why did the cat have two black stripes? Why? why?"

"Just what I was going to tell," said the pacifier of desperadoes.

"They were off on a tremendous adventure, with anthills for mountains and clover-stems for the tree-trunks of forests in the path. Tragedy

seemed due for the mice, when a bee dropped off a thistle blossom for a remarkable reason--none other than that a hummingbird cuffed him in the ear with his wing--and the bee, looking for revenge with his stinger on the first vulnerable spot, stung the cat right in the Achilles tendon of his paw, just as that paw was about to descend with murderous purpose. The cat ran away crying, with both black stripes ridges of fur sticking up straight, while the rest of the fur lay nice and smooth; and the mice giggled so that their ears nearly wiggled off their heads. So all ended happily."

"He does beat all!" thought Mrs. Galway, who had overheard part of the nonsense from the doorway. "Wouldn't it make Pete Leddy mad if he could hear the man who took his gun away getting off fairy stuff like that!"

Mrs. Galway had brought in a cake of her own baking. She was slightly jealous of the neighbors' pastry as entering into her own particular field of excellence. Jack saw that the supply of cake in the Galway pantry must be as limitless as the pigments on the Eternal Painter's palette.

"The doctor said that I was to have a light diet," he expostulated; "and I am stuffed to the brim."

"I'll make you some floating island," said Mrs. Galway, refusing to strike her colors.

"That isn't filling and passes the time," Jack admitted.

"Jim says if you had to Fletcherize on floating island you would starve to death and your teeth would get so used to missing a step on the stairs that they would never be able to deal with real victuals at all."

"Mrs. Galway," Jack observed sagely, dropping his head on the back of the chair, "I see that it has occurred to you and Jim that it is an excellent world and full of excellent nonsense. I am ready to eat both fluffy isles and the yellow sea in which they float. I am ready to keep on getting hungry with my efforts, even though you make it continents and oceans!"

From his window he had a view, over the dark, polished green of Jim's orange trees, of the range, brown and gray and bare, holding steady shadows of its own and host to the shadows of journeying clouds, with the pass set in the centre as a cleft in a forbidding barrier. In the yard Wrath of God, Jag Ear, and P.D. were tethered. Deep content illumined the faces of P.D. and Jag Ear; but Wrath of God was as sorrowful as ever. A cheerful Wrath of God would have excited fears for his health.

"Yet, maybe he is enjoying his rest more than the others," Jack told Firio, who kept appearing at the window on some excuse or other. "Perhaps he takes his happiness internally. Perhaps the external signs are only the last stand of a lugubriousness driven out by overwhelming forces of internal joy."

"_Si, si_!" said Firio.

"Firio, you are eminently a conversationalist," said Jack. "You agree with any foolishness as if it were a new theory of ethics. You are an ideal companion. I never have to listen to you in order that I may in turn have my say."

"_Si_," said Firio. He leaned on the windowsill, his black eyes shining with ingenuous and flattering appeal: "I will broil you a quail on a spit," he whispered. "It's better than stove cooking."

"Don't talk of that!" Jack exclaimed, almost sharply. The suggestion brought a swift change to sadness over his face and drew a veil of vagueness over his eyes. "No, Firio, and I'll tell you why: the odor of a quail broiled on a spit belongs at the end of a day's journey, when you camp in sight of no habitation. You should sit on a dusty blanket-roll; you should eat by the light of the embers or a guttering candle. No, Firio, we'll wait till some other day. And it's not exactly courtesy to our hostess to bring in provender from the outside."

The trail had apparently taught Firio all the moods of his master. He knew when it was unwise to persist.

"_Si_!" he whispered, and withdrew.

Jack looked at Galeria and then back quickly, as if resisting its call. He smiled half wryly and readjusted his position in the chair. Over the hedge he could see the heads and shoulders of passers-by. Jim Galway had come into the room, when Jasper Ewold's broad back and great head hove in sight with something of the steady majesty of progress of a full-rigged ship.

"The Doge!" Jack exclaimed, brightening.

Jim was taken unawares. Was it the name of a new kind of semi-tropical fruit not yet introduced into Arizona?

"Not the Doge of Venice--hardly, when Mr. Ewold's love runs to Florence! The Doge of Little Rivers!"

"Why, the Doge--of course!" Jim was "on" now and grinning. "I didn't think of my history at first. That's a good one for Jasper Ewold!"

"O Doge of Little Rivers, I expected you in a gondola of state!" said Jack, with a playfully grandiloquent gesture, as Jasper's abundance filled the doorway. "But it is all the more compliment to me that you should walk."

"Doge, eh?" Jasper tasted the word. "Pooh!" he said. "Persiflage! persiflage! I saw at once yesterday that you had a weakness for it."

"And Miss Ewold? How is she?" Jack asked. Remembering the promise that Mary had exacted from him, he took care not to refer to her part in the duel.

His question fell aptly for what Jasper had to say. Being a man used to keeping the gate ever open to the full flood of spontaneity, he became stilted in the repetition of anything he had thought out and rehearsed. He was overcheerful, without the mellowness of tone which gave his cheer its charm on the previous evening.

"She's not a bit the worse. Why, she went for a ride out to the pass this afternoon as usual! I've had the whole story, from the pass till the minute that Jim put the tourniquet on your leg. She recognizes the great kindness you did her."

"Not a kindness--an inevitable interruption by any passer-by," Jack put in.

"Naturally she felt that it was a kindness, a service, and when she knew you were in danger she acted promptly for herself, with a desert girl's self-reliance. When it was all over she saw the whole thing in its proper perspective, as an unpleasant, preposterous piece of barbarism which had turned out fortunately."

"Oh, I am glad of that!" Jack exclaimed, in relief that spoke rejoicing in every fibre. "I had worried. I had feared lest I had insisted too much on going on. But I had to. And I know that it was a scene that only men ought to witness--so horrible I feared it might leave a disagreeable impression."

"Ah, Mary has courage and humor. She sees the ridiculous. She laughs at it all, now!"

"Laughs?" asked Jack. "Yes, it was laughable;" and he broke into laughter, in which Jasper joined thunderously.

Jasper kept on laughing after Jack stopped, and in genuine relief to find that the affair was to be as uninfluencing a chapter in the easy traveller's life as in Mary's.

"Our regret is that we may have delayed you, sir," Jasper proceeded. "You may have had to postpone an important engagement. I understand that you had planned to take the train this morning."

"When one has been in the desert for a long time," Jack answered, "a few days more or less hardly matter in the time of his departure. In a week Dr. Patterson says that I may go. Meanwhile, I shall have the pleasure of getting acquainted with Little Rivers, which, otherwise, I should have missed."

"I am glad!" Jasper Ewold exclaimed with dramatic quickness. "Glad that your wound is so slight--glad that you need not be shut up long when you are due elsewhere."

What books should he bring to the invalid to while away the time? "The Three Musketeers" or "Cyrano"? Jack seemed to know his "Cyrano" so well that a copy could be only a prompt. He settled deeper in his chair and, more to the sky than to Jasper Ewold, repeated Cyrano's address to his cadets, set to a tune of his own. His body might be in the chair, with a bandaged leg, but clearly his mind was away on the trail.

"Yes, let me see," he said, coming back to earth. "I should like the 'Road to Rome,' something of Charles Lamb, Aldrich's 'Story of a Bad Boy,' Heine---but no! What am I saying? Bring me any solid book on economics. I ought to be reading economics. Economics and Charles Lamb, that will do. Do you think they could travel together?"

"All printed things can, if you choose. I'll include Lamb."

"And any Daudet lying loose," Jack added.

"And Omar?"

"I carry Omar in my head, thank you, O Doge!"

"Sir Chaps of the enormous spurs, you have a broad taste for one who rides over the pass of Galeria after five years in Arizona," said the Doge as he rose. He was covertly surveying that soft, winning, dreamy profile which had turned so hard when the devil that was within came to the surface.

"I was fed on books and galleries in my boyhood," Jack said; but with a reticence that indicated that this was all he cared to tell about his past.

XII

MARY BRINGS TRIBUTE

Every resident except the cronies of Pete Leddy considered it a duty, once a day at least, to look over the Galway hedge and ask how Senor Don't Care was doing. That is, everyone with a single exception, which was Mary. Jack had never seen her even pass the house. It was as if his very existence had dropped out of her ken. The town remarked the anomaly.

"You have not been in lately," Mrs. Galway reminded her.

"My flowers have required a lot of attention; also, I have been riding out to the pass a good deal," she answered, and changed the subject to geraniums, for the very good reason that she had just been weeding her geranium bed.

Mrs. Galway looked at her strangely and Mary caught the glance. She guessed what Mrs. Galway was thinking: that she had been a little inconsiderate of a man who had been wounded in her service.

"Probably it is time I bore tribute, too," she said to herself.

That afternoon she took down a glass of jelly from the pantry shelves and set forth in the line of duty, frowning and rehearsing a presentation speech as she went. With every step toward the Galway cottage she was increasingly confused and exasperated with herself for even thinking of a speech. As she drew near she heard a treble chorus of "ohs!" and "ahs!" and saw Jack on the porch surrounded by children.

"It's dinosaur foolishness again!" she thought, pungently.

He was in the full fettle of nonsense, his head a little to one side and lowered, while he looked through his eyebrows at his hearers, measuring the effect of his words. She thought of that face when he called to Leddy, "I am going to kill you!" and felt the pulse of inquiry beat over all that lay in this man's repertory between the two moods.

"Then, counting each one in his big, deep, bass voice, like this," he was saying, "that funny little dwarf kept dropping oranges out of the tree on the big giant, who could not wiggle and was squeaking in protest in his little, old woman's voice. Every orange hit him right on the bridge of his nose, and he was saying: 'You know I never could bear yellow! It fusses me so.'"

"He doesn't need any jelly! I am going on!" Mary thought.

Then Jack saw a slim, pliant form hastening by and a brown profile under hair bare of a hat, with eyes straight ahead. Mary might have been a unit of marching infantry. The story stopped abruptly.

"Yes--and--and--go on!" cried the children.

Jack held up his hand for silence.

"How do you do?" he called, and she caught in his tone and in her first glimpse of his face a certain mischievousness, as if he, who missed no points for idle enjoyment of any situation, had a satisfaction in taking her by surprise with his greeting. This put her on her mettle with the quickness of a summons to fence. She was as nonchalant as he.

"And you are doing well, I learn," she answered.

"Oh, come in and hear it, Miss Ewold! It's the best one yet!" cried Belvedere Smith. "And--and--"

"And--and--" began the chorus.

Mary went to the hedge. She dropped the glass of jelly on the thick carpet of the privet.

"I have just brought my gift. I'll leave it here. Belvy will bring it when the story is over. I am glad you are recovering so rapidly."

"And--and--" insisted the chorus.

"You oughtn't to miss this story. It's a regular Jim dandy!" Belvedere shouted.

"Yes, won't you come in?" Jack begged in serious urgency. "I pride myself that it is almost intellectual toward the close."

"I have no doubt," she said, looking fairly at him from under her hand, which she held up to shade her face, so he saw only the snap of her eyes in the shadow. "But I am in a hurry."

And he was looking at a shoulder and a quarter profile as she turned away.

"Did you make the jelly yourself?" he called.

"Yes, I am not afraid of the truth--I did!" she answered with a backward glance and not stopping.

"Oh, bully!" he exclaimed with great enthusiasm, in which she detected a strain of what she classified as impudence.

"But all the time the giant was fumbling in his pocket for his green handkerchief. You know the dwarf did not like green. It fussed him just as much as yellow fussed the giant. But it was a narrow pocket, so narrow that he could only get his big thumb in, and very deep. So, you see--" and she heard the tale proceeding as she walked on to the end of the street, where she turned around and came back across the desert and

through the garden.

On the way she found it amusing to consider Jack judicially as a human exhibit, stripped of all the chimera of romance with which Little Rivers had clothed his personality. If he had not happened to meet her on the pass, the townspeople would have regarded this stranger as an invasion of real life by a character out of a comic opera. She viewed the specimen under a magnifying glass in all angles, turning it around as if it were a bronze or an ivory statuette.

1. In his favor: Firstly, children were fond of him; but his extravagance of phrase and love of applause accounted for that. Secondly, Firio was devoted to him. Such worshipful attachment on the part of a native Indian to any Saxon was remarkable. Yet this was explained by his love of color, his foible for the picturesque, his vagabond irresponsibility, and, mostly, by his latent savagery--which she would hardly have been willing to apply to Ignacio's worshipful attachment to herself.

2. Against him: Everything of any importance, except in the eyes of children and savages; everything in logic. He would not stand analysis at all. He was without definite character. He was posing, affected, pleased with himself, superficial, and theatrical, and interested in people only so long as they amused him or gratified his personal vanity.

"I had the best of the argument in leaving the jelly on the hedge, and that is the last I shall hear of it," she concluded.

Not so. Mrs. Galway came that evening, a bearer of messages.

"He says it is the most wonderful jelly that ever was," said Mrs. Galway.

"He ate half the glass for dinner and is saving the rest for breakfast--I'm using his own words and you know what a killing way he has of putting things--saving it for breakfast so that he will have something to live through the night for and in the morning the joy of it will not be all a memory. He wants to know if you have any more of the same kind."

"Yes, a dozen glasses," Mary returned. "Tell him we are glad of the opportunity of finishing last year's stock, and I send it provided he eats half a glass with every meal."

"I don't know what his answer will be to that," said Mrs. Galway, contracting her brow studiously at Mary. "But he would have one quick. He always has. He's so poetic and all that, we're planning to go to the station to see him off and pelt him with flowers; and Dr. Patterson is going to fashion a white cat out of white carnations, with deep red ones for the black stripes, for the children to present."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Mary blithely, and went for the jelly.

She was spared further bulletins on the state of health of the wounded until her father returned from his daily call the next morning. She was in the living-room and she knew by his step on the porch, vigorous yet light, that he was uplifted by good news or by the anticipation of the exploitation of some new idea--a pleasure second only to that of the idea's birth. Such was his elation that he broke one of his own rules by tossing some of the books loaned to Jack onto the broad top of the table of the living-room, which was sacred to the isolation of the ivory paper-knife.

"He has named the date!" shouted the Doge. "He goes by to-morrow's train! It will be a gala affair, almost an historical moment in the early history of this community. I am to make a speech presenting him with the freedom of the whole world. Between us we have hit on a proper modern symbol of the gift. He slips me his Pullman ticket and I formally offer it to him as the key to the hospitality of the seven seas, the two hemispheres, and the teeming cities that lie beyond the range. It will be great fun, with plenty of persiflage. And, Mary, they suggest that you write some verses--ridiculous verses, in keeping with the whole nonsensical business."

"You mean that I am to stand on the platform and read poetry dedicated to him?" she demanded.

"Poetry, Mary? You grow ambitious. Not poetry--foolish doggerel. Or someone will read it for you."

He had not failed to watch the play of her expression. She had received all his nonsense, announced in his best style of simulated forensic grandeur, with a certain unchanging serenity which was unamused: which was, indeed, barely interested.

"And someone else shall write it, for I don't think of any verses," she said, with a slight shrug of the shoulder. "Besides, I shall not be there."

"Not be there! People will remark your absence!"

"Will they?" she asked, thoughtfully, as if that had not occurred to her. "No, they will be too occupied with the persiflage. I am going to ride out to the pass in the morning very early--before daybreak."

"But"--he was positively frolicsome as he caught her hands and waved them back and forth, while he rocked his shoulders--"when you are stubborn, Mary, have your way. I will make your excuses. And I to work now. It is the hour of the hoe," as he called all hours except those of darkness and the hot midday.

For Jasper Ewold was no idler in the affairs of his ranch or of the town. Few city men were so busy. His everlasting talk was incidental, like the babbling of a brook which, however, keeps steadily flowing on; and the stored scholarship of his mind was supplemented by long evenings with no other relaxation but reading. Now as he went down the path he broke into song; and when the Doge sang it was something awful, excusable only by the sheer happiness that brought on the attack.

Mary had important sewing, which this morning she chose to do in her room rather than in her favorite spot in the garden. She closed the shutters on the sunny side and sat down by the window nearest the garden, peculiarly sensible of the soft light and cool spaciousness of an inner world. The occasional buzz of a bee, the flutter of the leaves of the poplar, might have been the voice of the outer world in Southern Spain or Southern Italy, or anywhere else where the air is balmy.

And to-morrow! Out to Galeria in the fervor of a pilgrim to some shrine, with the easy movement of her pony and the rigid lines of the pass gradually drawing nearer and the sky ever distant! She would be mistress of her thoughts in all the silent glamour of morning on the desert. She would hear the train stop at the station, its heavy effort as it pulled

out, and watch it winding over the flashing steel threads in a clamor of stridency and harshness, which grew fainter and fainter. And she would smile as it disappeared around a bend in the range. She would smile at him, at the incident, just as carelessly as he had smiled when he told of the dinosaur.

XIII

A JOURNEY ON CRUTCHES

The sun became benign in its afternoon slant. Little Rivers was beginning to move after its siesta, with the stretching of muscles that would grow more vigorous as evening approached and freshened life came into the air with the sprinkle of sunset brilliance.

To Jack the hour palpably brought a reminder of the misery of the moment when a thing long postponed must at last be performed. The softness of speculative fancy faded from his face. His lips tightened in a way that seemed to bring his chin into prominence in mastery of his being. As he called Firio, his voice unusually high-pitched, he did not look out at P.D. and Wrath of God and Jag Ear.

Firio came with the eagerness of one who is restless for action. He leaned on the windowsill, his elbows spread, his chin cupped in his hands, his Indian blankness of countenance enlivened by the glow of his eyes, as jewels enliven dull brown velvet.

"Firio, I have something to tell you."

"_Si_!"

There was a laboring of Jack's throat muscles, and then he forced out the truth in a few words.

"Firio," he said, "this is my trail end. I am going back to New York to-morrow."

"_Si_!" answered Firio, without a tremor of emotion; but his eyes glowed confidently, fixedly, into Jack's.

"There will be money for you, and--"

"_Si_!" said Firio mechanically, as if repeating the lines of a lesson.

Was this Indian boy prepared for the news? Or did he not care? Was he simply clay that served without feeling? The thought made Jack wince. He paused, and the dark eyes, as in a spell, kept staring into his.

"And you get P.D. and Wrath of God and Jag Ear and, yes, the big spurs and the chaps, too, to keep to remember me by."

Firio did not answer.

"You are not pleased? You--"

"_Si_! I will keep them for you. You will want them; you will come back to all this;" and suddenly Firio was galvanized into the life of a single gesture. He swept his arm toward the sky, indicating infinite distance.

"No, I shall never come back! I can't!" Jack said; and his face had set hard, as if it were a wall about to be driven at a wall. "I must go and I must stay."

"_Si_!" said Firio, resuming his impassiveness, and slipped around the corner of the house.

"He does care!" Jack cried with a smile, which, however, was not the smile of gardens, of running brooks, and of song. "I am glad--glad!"

He picked up his crutches and went out to the three steeds of trail memory:

"And _you_ care--_you_ care!" he repeated to them.

He drew a lugubrious grimace in mockery at Wrath of God. He tickled the sliver of the donkey's ear, whereat Jag Ear wiggled the sliver in blissful unconsciousness that he had lost any of the ornamental equipment of his tribe.

"You are like most of us; we don't see our deformities, Jag Ear," Jack told him. "And if others were also blind to them, why, we should all be good-looking!"

His arm slipped around P.D.'s neck and he ran a finger up and down P.D.'s nose with a tickling caress.

"You old plodder!" he said. "You know a lot. It's good to have the love of any living thing that has been near me as long as you have."

This preposterous being was preposterously sentimental over a pair of ponies and an earless donkey. When Mrs. Galway, who had watched him from the window, came out on the porch she saw that he was on his way through the gate in the hedge to the street.

"Look here! Did the doctor say you might?" she called.

"No, my leg says it!" Jack answered, gaily. "Just a little walk! Back soon."

It was his first enterprise in locomotion outside the limits of Jim Galway's yard since he had been wounded. He turned blissful traveller again. Having come to know the faces of the citizens, now he was to look into the faces of their habitations. The broad main street, with its rows of trees, narrowed with perspective until it became a gray spot of desert sand. Under the trees leisurely flowed those arteries of ranch and garden-life, the irrigation ditches. Continuity of line in the hedge-fences was evidently a municipal requirement; but over the hedges individualism expressed itself freely, yet with a harmony which had been set by public fashion.

The houses were of cement in simple design. They had no architectural message except that of a background for ornamentation by the genius of the soil's productivity. They waited on vines to cover their sides and trees to cast shade across their doorways. One need not remain long to

know the old families in this community, where the criterion of local aristocracy was the size of your plums or the number of crops of alfalfa you could grow in a year.

Already Jack felt at home. It was as if he were friends with a whole world, lacking the social distinctions which only begin when someone acquires sufficient worldly possessions to give exclusive, formal dinners. He knew every passer-by well enough to address him or her by the Christian name. Women called to him from porches with a dozen invitations to visit gardens.

"Just a saunter, just a try-out before I take the train. Not going far," he always answered; yet there was something in his bearing that suggested a definite mission.

"We hate to lose you!" called Mrs. Smith.

"I hate to be lost!" Jack called back; "but that is just my natural luck."

"I suppose you've got your work cut out for you back East, same's everybody else, somewhere or other, 'less they're millionaires, who all stay in the city and try to run from microbes in their automobiles."

"Yes, I have work--lots of it," said Jack, ruefully. He shifted his weight on the crutches, paused and looked at the sky. The Eternal Painter was dipping his brush lightly and sweeping soft, silvery films, as a kind of glorified finger-exercise, over an intangible blue.

"Why care? Why care?" His Majesty was asking. "Why not leave all the problems of earthly existence to your lungs? Why not lie back and look on at things and breathe my air? That is enough to keep your whole being in tune with the Infinite."

It was his afternoon mood. At sunset he would have another. Then he would be crying out against the folly of wasting one precious moment in the eons, because that moment could never return to be lived over.

Jack kept on until he recognized the cement bridge where he had stopped when he came from the post-office with Mary. Left bare of its surroundings, the first habitation in Little Rivers, with the ell which had been added later, would have appeared a barracks. But Jasper Ewold had the oldest trees and the most luxuriant hedge and vines as the reward of his pioneerdom.

When Jack crossed the bridge and stood in the opening of the hedge there was no one on the porch in the inviting shade of the prodigal bougainvillea vines. So he hitched his way up the steps. Feeling that it was a formal occasion, he searched for the door-bell. There was none. He rapped on the casing and waited, while he looked at the cool, quiet interior, with the portrait of David facing him from the wall.

"David, you seem to be the only one at home," he remarked, for there had been no answer to his raps; "and you are too busy getting a bead on Goliath to answer the immaterial questions of a wayfarer."

Accepting the freedom of the Little Rivers custom on such occasions, he followed the path to the rear. His head knocked off the dead petals of a rambler rose blossom, scattering them at his feet. Rounding the corner of

the house, he saw the arbor where he had dined the night of his arrival, and beyond this an old-fashioned flower garden separated by a path from a garden of roses. There was a sound of activity from the kitchen behind a trellis screen, but he did not call out for guidance. He would trust to finding his own way.

When he came to the broad path, its stretch lay under a crochet-work of shadows from the ragged leaves of two rows of palms which ran to the edge of an orange grove, and the centre of this path was in a straight line with the bottom of the V of Galeria.

Jasper Ewold had laid out his little domain according to a set plan before the water was first let go in laughing triumph over the parched earth, and this plan, as one might see on every hand, was expressive of the training of older civilizations in landscape gardening, which ages of men striving for harmonious forms of beauty in green and growing things had tested, and which the Doge, in all his unconventionalism of personality, was as little inclined to amend as he was to amend the classic authors. An avenue of palms is the epic of the desert; a bougainvillea vine its sonnet.

Between the palms to the right and left Jack had glimpses of a vegetable garden; of rows of berry bushes; of a grove of young fig-trees; of rows of the sword-bundles of pineapple tops. Everything except the old-fashioned flower-bed, with its border of mignonette, and the generous beds of roses and other flowers of the bountiful sisterhood of petals of artificial cultivation, spoke of utility which must make the ground pay as well as please.

Jack took each step as if he were apprehensive of disturbing the quiet. Midway of the avenue of palms ran a cross avenue, and at the meeting-point was a circle, which evidently waited till the oranges and the olives should pay for a statue and surrounding benches. Over the breadth of the cross avenue lay the glossy canopy of the outstretched branches of umbrella-trees. A table of roughly planed boards painted green and green rattan chairs were in keeping with the restful effect, while the world without was aglare with light.

Here Mary had brought her sewing for the afternoon. She was working so intently that she had not heard his approach. He had paused just as his line of vision came flush with the trunks of the umbrella-trees. For the first time he saw his companion in adventure in repose, her head bent, leaving clear the line of her neck from the roots of her hair to the collar, and the soft light bringing out the delicate brown of her skin.

There seemed no movement anywhere in the world at the moment, except the flash of her needle in and out.

XIV

"HOW FAST YOU SEW!"

And she had not seen him! He was touched with a sense of guilt for having looked so long; for not having at once called to her; and rather than give her the shock of calling now, he moved toward her, the scuff

of his limp, pendent foot attracting her attention. Her start at the sound was followed, when she saw him, with amazement and a flush and a movement as if she would rise. But she controlled the movement, if not the flush, and fell back into her chair, picking up her sewing, which had dropped on the table.

It was like him, she might well think, to come unexpectedly, without invitation or announcement. She was alert, ready to take the offensive as the best means of defence, and wishing, in devout futility, that he had stayed away. He was smiling happily at everything in cosmos and at her as a part of it.

"Good afternoon!"

"Good afternoon!"

"That last lot of jelly was better than the first," he said softly.

"Was it? You must favor vintage jelly!"

"I came to call--my p.p.c. call--and to see your garden," he added.

"Is there any particular feature that interests you?" she asked. "The date-trees? The aviary? The nursery?"

"No," he answered, "not just yet. It is very cool here under the umbrella-trees, isn't it? I have walked all the way from the Galways and I'll rest a while, if I may."

He was no longer the play cavalier in overornamented _chaparejos_ and cart-wheel spurs, but a lame fellow in overalls, who was hitching toward her on crutches, his cowpuncher hat held by the brim and flopping with every step. But he wore the silk shirt and the string tie, and somehow he made even the overalls seem "dressy."

"Pray sit down," she said politely.

Standing his crutches against the table, he accepted the invitation. She resumed her sewing, eyes on the needle, lips pressed into a straight line and head bending low. He might have been a stranger on a bench in a public park for all the attention she was paying to him. She realized that she was rude and took satisfaction in it as the only way of expressing her determination not to reopen a closed incident.

"It's wonderful--wonderful!" he observed, in a voice of contemplative awe.

"What is?" she asked.

"Why, how fast you sew!"

"Yes?" she said, as automatically as she stitched. "Your wound is quite all right? No danger of infection?"

"I don't blame you!" he burst out. His tone had turned sad and urgent.

She looked up quickly, with the flare of a frown. His remark had brought her out of her pose and she became vivid and real.

"Blame me!" she demanded, sharply, as one who flies to arms.

But she met a new phase--neither banter, nor fancy, nor unvarying coolness in the face of fire. He was all contrition and apology. Must she be the audience to some fresh exhibition of his versatility?

"I do not blame you for feeling the way that you do," he said.

"How do you know how I feel?" she asked; and as far as he could see into her eyes there was nothing but the flash of sword-points.

"I don't. I only know how I think you feel--how you might well feel," he answered delicately. "After Pete let his gun drop in the store I should not have named terms for an encounter. I should have turned to the law for protection for the few hours that I had to remain in town."

"But to you that would have been avoiding battle!" she exclaimed.

"Which may take courage," he rejoined. "What I did was selfish. It was bravado, with no thought of your position."

"It is late to worry about that now. What does it matter? I did not want anyone killed on my account, and no one was," she insisted. "Besides, you should not be blue," this with a ripple of satire; "it is not quite all bravado to face Pete Leddy's gun at twenty yards."

"And it is not courage. Courage is a force of will driving you into danger for some high purpose. I want you to realize that I am not such a barbarian that I do not know that I could have kept you out of it all if I had had proper self-control. Though probably, on the impulse, I would do the fool thing over again! Yes, that's the worst of it!"

"There is a devil in him!" Ignacio's words were sounding in her ears. To how many men had he said, "I am going to kill you?" What other quarrels had he known in his wanderings from Colorado to Chihuahua?

"If you really want my opinion, I am glad, so far as I am concerned, that you did fight," she said lightly. "Aren't you a hero? Isn't the town free of Leddy? And you take the train in the morning!"

"Yes."

The monosyllable was drawn out rather faintly. For the first time since they had met on the pass she felt she was mistress of the situation. This time she had not to plead with him in fear for his life. She could regard him without any sense of obligation, this invader of her garden retreat who had to put in one more afternoon in a dull desert town before he was away to that outside world which she might know only through books and memory.

She rose exultantly, disregarding any formality that she would owe to the average guest; for an average guest he was not. Her attitude meant that she was having the last word; that she was showing her mettle.

He did not rise. He was staring into the sunlight, as if it were darkness alive with flitting spectres which baffled identification.

"Yes, back--back to armies of Leddys!" he said slowly.

But this she saw as still another pose. It did not make her pause in gathering up her sewing. She was convinced that there was nothing more for her to say, except to give their parting an appearance of ease and unconcern.

"Is it work you mean? You are not used to that, I take it?" she inquired a little sarcastically.

"Yes, call it work," he answered, looking away from the spectres and back to her.

"And you have never done any work!" she added.

"Not much," he admitted, with his old, airy carelessness. He was smiling at the spectres now, as he had at the dinosaur.

"As there is nothing particular about the garden that I can show you--" she was moving away.

"No, I will be walking back to the house," he said after she had taken a few steps. "Will you wait on my slow pace?"

He reached for his crutches, lifted himself to his feet and swung to her side. She who wished that the interview were over saw that it must be prolonged. Then suddenly she realized the weakness as well as the brusqueness of her attitude. She had been about to fly from him as from something that she feared. It was not necessary. It was foolish, even cowardly.

"I thought perhaps you preferred to be alone, you seemed so abstracted," she said, lamely; and then, as they came out into the sunlight in the circle, she began talking of the garden as she would to any visitor; of its beginnings, its growth, and its future, when her father's plans should have been fulfilled.

"And in all these years you have never been back East?" he asked.

"No. We are always planning a trip, but the money which we save for it goes into more plantings."

They had been moving slowly toward the house, but now he stopped and his glance swept the sky and rested on Galeria.

"It is the best valley of all! I knew it as soon as I saw it from the pass!" and the rapture of the scene was sounding in every syllable like chimes out of the distance. She knew that he was far away from the garden, and delaying, still delaying. If she spoke she felt that he would not hear what she said. If she went on it seemed certain that she would leave him standing there like a statue.

"And there is more land here to make gardens like this?" he asked slowly, absorbed.

"Yes, with water and labor and time."

Though his face was in the full light of the sun, it seemed at times in shadow; then it glowed, as if between two passions. For an instant it was grim, the chin coming forward, the brows contracting; then it was transformed with something that was as a complete surrender to the

transport of irresistible temptation. He looked down at her quickly and she saw him in the mood of story-telling to the children, suffused with the radiance of a decision.

"I prefer the Leddys of Little Rivers to the Leddys of New York," he said. "I am not going to-morrow! I am going to have land and a home under the aegis of the Eternal Painter and in sight of Galeria, and worship at the shrine of fecund peace. Will you and the Doge help me?" he asked with an enthusiasm that was infectious. "May I go to his school of agriculture, horticulture, and floriculture?"

Dumfounded, she bent her head and stared at the ground to hide her astonishment.

"You want citizens, industrious young citizens, don't you?" he persisted.

"Yes, yes!" she said hastily and confusedly.

"Do you know a good piece of land?" he continued.

"Yes, several parcels," she answered, recovering her poise and smiling in mockery.

"Come on!" he cried.

He was taking long, jumping steps on his crutches as they went up the path.

"You will take me to look at the land, won't you, please--now? I want to get acquainted with my future estate. I mean to beat the Smiths at plums, Jim Galway at alfalfa, even rival Bob Worther at pumpkins and peonies. And you will help me lay out the flower garden, won't you? You see, I shall have to call in the experts in every line to start with, before I begin to improve on them and make them all jealous. I may find a kind of plum that will grow on alfalfa stalks," he hazarded. "What a horticultural sensation!"

"And a spineless cactus called the Leddy!"

His eyes were laughing into hers and hers irresistibly laughed back. She guessed that he was only joking. He had acted so well in the latest role that she had actually believed in his sincerity for a moment. He meant to take the train, of course, but his resourceful capriciousness had supplied him with a less awkward exit from the garden than she had provided. He would yet have the last word if she did not watch out--a last mischievous word at her expense.

"First, you will have to plow the ground, in the broiling hot sun," she said tauntingly, when they had passed around to the porch. She was starting into the house with nervous, precipitate triumph. The last word was hers, after all.

"But you are going to show me the land now!"

His tone was so serious and so hurt that she paused.

"And"--with the seriousness electrified by a glance that sought for mutual understanding--"and we are to forget about that duel and the whole hero-desperado business. I am a prospective settler who just arrived this

afternoon. I came direct to headquarters to inquire about property. The Doge not being at home, won't you show me around?"

Again he had said the right thing at the right time, with a delightful impersonality precluding sentiment.

"I couldn't be unaccommodating," she admitted. "It is against all Little Rivers ethics."

"I feel like a butterfly about to come out of his miserable chrysalis! Haven't you a walking-stick? I am going to shed the crutches!"

She became femininely solicitous at once.

"Are you sure you ought? Did the doctor say you might? Is the wound healed?"

"There isn't any wound!" he answered. "That is one of the things which we are to forget."

She brought a stick and he laid the crutches on the porch.

He favored the lame leg, yet he kept up a clipping pace, talking the while as fast as the Doge himself as they passed through one of the side streets out onto the cactus-spotted, baking, cracked levels.

"This is it!" she said finally. "This is all that father and I had to begin with."

"Enough!" he answered, and held out his hands, palms open. "With callouses I will win luxuriance!"

She showed him the irrigation ditch from which he should draw his water; she told him of the first steps; She painted all the difficulties in the darkest colors, without once lessening the glow of his optimism. He was so overwhelmingly, boyishly happy that she had to be happy with him in making believe that he was about to be a real rancher. But he should not have the sport all on his side. He must not think that she accepted this latest departure of his imagination incarnated by his Thespian gift in anything but his own spirit.

"You plowing! You spraying trees for the scale! You digging up weeds! You stacking alfalfa! You settling down in one place as a unit of co-ordinate industry! You earning bread by the sweat of your brow! You with callouses!" Thus she laughed at him.

Very seriously he held out his hands and ran a finger around a palm and across the finger-joints:

"That is where I shall get them," he said. "But not on the thumb. I believe you get them on the thumb only by playing golf."

He asked about carpenters and laborers; he chose the site for his house; he plotted the walks and orchards. She could not refuse her advice. Who can about the planning of new houses and gardens? He had everything quite settled except the land grant from the Doge when they started back; while the sun, with the swift passage of time in such fascinating diversion, had swung low in its ellipse. When they reached the main street the Doge was on the porch passing his opinion on the Eternal

Painter's evening work.

"Some very remarkable purples to-night, I admit, Your Majesty, without any intention of giving you too good an opinion of yourself; but otherwise, you are not up to your mark. There must have been a downpour in the rainy world on the other side of the Sierras that moistened your pigments. Next thing we know you will be turning water-colorist!" he was saying, when he heard Jack's voice.

"Here's a new settler!" Jack called. "I am going to stay in Little Rivers and win all the prizes."

"You are joking!" gasped the Doge.

"Not joking," said Jack. "I want to close the bargain to-night."

"You bring color and adventure--yes! I did not expect the honor--the town will be delighted! I am overwhelmed! Will you plow with Pete Leddy's gun drawn by Wrath of God, sir, and harrow with your spurs drawn by Jag Ear? Shall you make a specialty of olives? Do you dare to aspire as high as dates?"

The Doge's speech had begun incoherently, but steadied into rallying humor at the close.

"I haven't seen the date-tree yet," said Jack. "Not until I have can I judge whether or not I shall dare to rival the lord of the manor in his own specialty. And there are business details which I must settle with you, O Doge of this city of slender canals!"

"O youth, will you tarry with peace between wars?" answered the Doge, in quick response to the spirit of nonsense as a basis for their new relations. "Come, and I will show you our noblest product of peace, the Date-Tree Wonderful!" he said, leading the way to the garden, while Mary hurried rather precipitately into the house.

Jasper Ewold was at his best, a glowing husbandman, when he pointed aloft to the clusters of fruit pendent from the crotches of the stiff branches, enclosed in cloth bags to keep them free of insects.

"Do you see strange lettering on the cloth?" he asked.

"Yes, it looks like Arabic."

"So it is! Among other futile diversions in a past incarnation I studied Arabic a little, and I still have my lexicon. Perhaps my construction might not please the grammarians of classic Bagdad, but the sentiment is there safe enough in the language of the mother romance world of the date: 'All hail, first-born of our Western desert fecundity!' It is calling out to the pass and the range from the wastes where the sagebrush has had its own way since the great stir that there was in the world at genesis."

"With the unlimited authority I have in bestowing titles," said Jack, "I have a mind to make you an Emir. But it's a pity that you haven't a camel squatting under your date-tree and placidly chewing his cud."

"A tempting thought!" declared the Doge unctuously.

"Bob Worther could ride him on the tours of inspection. I think the jounce would be almost as good a flesh-reducer as pedestrianism."

"There you go! You would have the camel wearing bells, with reins of red leather and a purple saddle-cloth hung with spangles, and Bob--our excellent Bob--in a turban! Persiflage, sir! A very demoralization of the faculties with cataracts of verbiage, sir!" declared the Doge as he started back to the house. "Little Rivers is a practical town," he proceeded seriously. "We indulge in nonsense only after sunset and when a stranger appears riding a horse with a profane name. Yes, a practical town; and I am surprised at your disloyalty to your own burro by mentioning camels."

"It rests with you, I believe, to let me have the land and also the water," said Jack.

"We grow businesslike!" returned the Doge with a change of manner.

"Very!" declared Jack.

"The requirement is that you become a member of the water users' association and pay your quota of taxes per acre foot; and the price you pay for your land also goes to the association. But I decide on the eligibility of the applicant."

They were in front of the house by this time, and again the Doge gave Jack that sharp, quick, knowing glance of scrutiny through his heavy, tufted eyebrows, before he proceeded:

"The concession for the use of the river for irrigation is mine, administered by the water users' association as if it were theirs, under the condition that no one who has not my approval can have membership. That is, it is practically mine, owing to my arrangement with old Mr. Lefferts, who lives upstream. He is an eccentric, a hermit. He came here many years ago to get as far away from civilization as he could, I judge. That gives him an underlying right. Originally he had two partners, squaw men. Both are dead. He had made no improvements beyond drawing enough water for a garden and for his horse and cow. When I came to make a bargain with him he named an annual sum which should keep him for the rest of his life; and thus he waived his rights. First, Jim Galway, then other settlers drifted in. I formed the water users' association. All taxes and sums for the sale of land go into keeping the dam and ditches in condition."

"You take nothing for yourself!"

"A great deal. The working out of an idea--an idea in moulding a little community in my old age in a fashion that pleases me; while my own property, of course, increases in value. At my death the rights go to the community. But no Utopia; Sir Chaps! Just hard-working, cheerful men and women in a safe refuge!"

"And I am young!" exclaimed Jack, with a hopeful smile. "I have good health. I mean to work. I try to be cheerful. Am I eligible?"

"Sir Chaps, you--you have done us a great favor. Everybody likes you. Sir Chaps"--the Doge hesitated for an instant, with a baffling, unspoken inquiry in his eyes--"Sir Chaps, I like your companionship and your mastery of persiflage. Jim Galway, who is secretary of the association,

will look after details of the permit and Bob Worther will turn the water on your land, and the whole town will assist you with advice! Luck, Sir Chaps, in your new vocation!"

That evening, while the Doge took down the David and set a fragment from the frieze of the Parthenon in its place, Little Rivers talked of the delightful news that it was not to lose its strange story-teller and duelist. Little Rivers was puzzled. Not once had Jack intimated a thought of staying. By his own account, so far as he had given any, his wound had merely delayed his departure to New York, where he had pressing business. He had his reservation on the Pullman made for the morning express; he had paid a farewell call at the Ewolds, and apparently then had changed his mind and his career. These were the only clues to work on, except the one suggested by Mrs. Galway, who was the wise woman of the community, while Mrs. Smith was the propagandist.

"I guess he likes the way Mary Ewold snubs him!" said Mrs. Galway.

But there was one person in town who was not surprised at Jack's decision. When Jack sang out as he entered the Galway yard on returning from the Doge's, "We stay, Firio, we stay!" Firio said: "_Si_, Senor Jack!" with no change of expression except a brighter gleam than usual in his velvety eyes.

XV

WHEN THE DESERT BLOOMS

Perhaps we may best describe this as a chapter of Incidents; or, to use a simile, a broad, eddying bend in a river on a plateau, with cataracts and canyons awaiting it on its route to the sea. Or, discarding the simile and speaking in literal terms, in a search for a theme on which to hang the incidents, we revert to Mary's raillery at the announcement of an easy traveller that he was going to turn sober rancher.

"You plowing! You blistering your hands! You earning your bread by the sweat of your brow!"

But there he was in blue overalls, sinking his spade deep for settings, digging ditches and driving furrows through the virgin soil, while the masons and carpenters built his ranch house.

"They are straight furrows, too!" Jack declared.

"Passably so!" answered Mary.

"And look at the blisters!" he continued, exhibiting his puffy palms.

"You seem to think blisters a remarkable human phenomenon, a sensational novelty to a laboring population!"

"Now, would you advise pricking?" he asked, with deference to her judgment.

"It is so critical in your case that you ought to consult a doctor rather

than take lay advice."

"Jim Galway says that the thorough way, I mulched my soil before putting in my first crop of alfalfa is a model for all future settlers," he ventured.

She remarked that Jim was always encouraging to new-comers, and remarked this in a way that implied that some new-comers possibly needed hazing.

"And I am up at dawn and hard at it for six hours before midday."

"Yes, it is wonderful!" she admitted, with a mock show of being overwhelmingly impressed. "Nobody in the world ever worked ten hours a day before!"

"I'm doing more than any man that I pay two-fifty. I do perspire, and if you don't call that earning your bread with the sweat of your brow, why this is an astoundingly illogical world!"

"There is a great difference between sporadic display and that continuity which is the final proof of efficiency," she corrected him.

"Long, involved sentences often indicate the loss of an argument!" declared Jack.

"There isn't any argument!" said Mary with superior disinterestedness.

By common inspiration they had established a truce of nonsense. She still called him Jack; he still called her Mary. It was the only point of tacit admission that they had ever met before he asked her to show a prospective settler a parcel of land.

Their new relations were as the house of cards of fellowship: cards of glass, iridescent and brittle, mocking the idea that there could be oblivion of the scene in Lang's store, the crack of Leddy's pistol in the _arroyo_, or the pulse of Jack's artery under her thumb! She was sure that he could forget these experiences, even if she could not. That was his character, as she saw it, free of clinging roots of yesterday's events, living some new part every day.

In the house of cards she set up a barrier, which he saw as a veil over her eyes. Not once had he a glimpse of their depths. There was only the surface gleam of sunbeams and sometimes of rapier-points, merry but significant. She frequently rode out to the pass and occasionally, when his day's work was done, he would ride to the foot of the range to meet her, and as they came back he often sang, but never whistled. Indeed, he had ceased to whistle altogether. Perhaps he regarded the omission as an insurance against duels.

Aside from nonsense they had common interests in cultural and daily life, from the Eternal Painter's brushwork to how to dress a salad. She did extend her approval for the generous space which he was allowing for flower-beds, and advised him in the practical construction of his kitchen; while the Doge decorated the living-room with Delia Robbias, which, however, never arrived at the express office. He was a neighbor always at home in the Ewold house. The Doge revelled in their disputations, yet never was really intimate or affectionate as he was with Jim Galway, who knew not the Pitti, the Prado, nor the Louvre, and could not understand the intoning of Dante in the original as Jack could,

thanks to his having been brought up in libraries and galleries.

The town, which was not supposed to ask about pasts, could not help puzzling about his. What was the story of this teller of stories? The secluded little community was in a poor way to find out, even if the conscientious feeling about a custom had not been a restraint that kept wonder free from inquiring hints. They took him for what he was in all their personal relations; that was the delightful way of Little Rivers, which inner curiosity might not alloy. His broader experience of that world over the pass which stretched around the globe and back to the other range-wall of the valley, seemed only to make him fall more easily into the simple ways of the fellow-ranchers of the Doge's selection, who were genuine, hall-marked people, whatever the origin from which the individual sprang. He knew the fatigue of productive labor as something far sweeter than the fatigue that comes from mere exercise, and the neophyte's enthusiasm was his.

"I'm sitting at the outer edge of the circle," he told Jim Galway. "But when my first crop is harvested I shall be on the inside--a real rancher!"

"You've already got one foot over the circle," said Jim.

"And with my first crop of dates I'll be in the holy of holies of pastoral bliss!"

"Yes, I should say so!" Jim responded, but in a way that indicated surprise at the thought of Jack's remaining in Little Rivers long enough for such a consummation.

When his alfalfa covered the earth with a green carpet Jack was under a spell of something more than the never-ending marvel of dry seeds springing into succulent abundance without the waving of any magic wand.

"I made it out of the desert!" he cried. "It laughs in triumph at the bare stretches around it, waiting on water!"

"That is it," said Jim; "waiting on water!"

"The promise of what might come!"

"It will come! Some day, Jack, you and I will ride up into the river canyon and I will show you a place where you can see the blue sky between precipitous walls two hundred feet high. The abyss is so narrow you can throw a stone across it."

"What lies beyond?" asked Jack, his eyes lighting vividly.

"A great basin which was the bed of an ancient lake before the water wore its way through."

"A dam between those walls--and you have another lake!"

"Yes, and the spring freshets from the northern water-shed all held in a reservoir--none going to waste! And, Jack, as population spreads the dam must come."

"Why, the Doge has a kingdom!"

"Yes, that's the best of it, the rights being in his hands. He shares up with everybody and we get it when he dies. That's why we are ready to accept the Doge's sentiments as kind of gospel. If ornamental hedges waste water and bring bugs and are contrary to practical ranching ideas, why--well, why not? It's our Little Rivers to enjoy as we please. We aren't growing so fast, but we're growing in a clean, beautiful way, as Jasper Ewold says. What if that river was owned by one man! What if we had to pay the price he set for what takes the place of rain, as they do in some places in California? We're going to say who shall build that dam!"

"Think of it! Think of it!" Jack half whispered, his imagination in play. "Plot after plot being added to this little oasis until it extends from range to range, one sea of green! Many little towns, with Little Rivers the mother town, spreading its ideas! Yes, think of being in at the making of a new world, seeing visions develop into reality as, stone by stone, an edifice rises! I--I--" Jack paused, a cloud sweeping over his features, his eyes seeming to stare at a wall. His body alone seemed in Little Rivers, his mind on the other side of the pass. He was in one of those moods of abstraction that ever made his fellow-ranchers feel that he would not be with them permanently.

Indeed, he had whole days when his smile had a sad turn; when, though he spoke pleasantly, the inspiration of talk was not in him and when Belvy Smith could not rouse any action in the cat with two black stripes down its back. But many Little Riversites, including the Doge, had their sad days, when they looked away at the pass oftener than usual, as if seeing a life-story framed in the V. His came usually, as Mrs. Smith observed, when he had a letter from the East. And it was then that he would pretend to cough to Firio. These mock coughing spells were one of the few manifestations that made the impassive Firio laugh.

"Now you know I am not well, don't you, Firio?" he would ask, waggishly, the very thought seeming to take him out of the doldrums. "I could never live out of this climate. Why, even now I have a cough, kuh-er!"

Firio had turned a stove cook. He accepted the humiliation in a spirit of loyalty. But often he would go out among the sagebrush and return with a feathery tribute, which he would broil on a spit in a fire made in the yard. Always when Jack rode out to meet Mary at the foot of the range, Firio would follow; and always he had his rifle. For it was part of Jack's seeming inconsistency, emphasizing his inscrutability, that he would never wear his revolver. It hung beside Pete's on the wall of the living-room as a second relic. Far from being a quarrel-maker, he was peaceful to the point of Quakerish predilection.

"Nobody ever hears anything of Leddy," said Jim; "but he will never forget or forgive, and one day he will show up unexpectedly."

"Not armed!" said Jack.

"Do you think he will keep his word?"

"I know he will. I asked him and he said he would."

"You're very simple, Jack. But mind, he can keep his word and still use a gun outside the town!"

"So he might!" admitted Jack, laughing in a way that indicated that the

subject was distasteful to him; for he would never talk of the duel.

Now we come to that little affair of Pedro Nogales. Pedro was a half-breed, whose God among men was Pete Leddy no less than Jack was Firio's and the Doge was Ignacio's. In his shanty back of Bill Lang's the Mexicans and Indians lost their remaining wages in gambling after he had filled them with _mescal_. It happened that Gonzalez, head man of the laborers under Bob Worthier, who had saved quite a sum, came away penniless after taking but one drink. Every ounce of Bob's avoirdupois was in a rage.

"It's time we cleaned out Pedro's place, seh!" he told Jack; "and you and Jim Galway have got to help me do it!"

"I don't like to get into a row," said Jack very soberly.

"Then I'll undertake the job alone," Bob retorted. "That will be a good deal worse, for when I get going I lose my temper and I tell you, seh, I've got a lot to lose! And, Jack, are you going to stand by and see robbery done by the meanest, most worthless greaser in the valley--and a good Indian the victim?"

"Yes, Jack," said Jim, "you've got such a formidable reputation since your set-to with Leddy that the Indians think you are a regular master of magic. You're just the one to make Pedro come to terms."

"A formidable reputation without firing a shot!" admitted Jack quizzically, and consented.

"You'll surely want your gun this time!" Bob warned him.

"No," said Jack.

"But--"

"I have hung up my gun!" Jack said decisively. "We'll try to handle this peacefully. Come on!"

"Well, we've got our guns, anyway!" Jim put in.

It was mid-afternoon, a slack hour for Pedro's kind of trade, and the shanty was empty of customers when the impromptu vigilance committee entered. Pedro himself was half dozing in the faro dealer's chair. His small, ferret eyes flashed a spark at the visitors as he rose, but he was politeness itself.

"Senores! It is great honor! Be seated, senores!" he said with eloquent deference.

The very sight of him set all the ounces in Bob quivering in an outburst:

"No chairs for us! You fork over Gonzalez's money that you tricked out of him!"

"I take Gonzalez's money! I? Senores?"

"It's a hundred and twenty dollars that he earned honestly, and the quicker you lay your hands on it the better for you!" Bob roared back.

Pedro was quite impassive.

"Senores, if Gonzalez need money--senores, I honest man! Senores, sit down! We talk!" Pedro dropped back into his chair and his hand, with cat-like quickness, shot under the faro table.

Jack had come through the door after Jim and Bob. He was standing a little behind them, and while they had been watching Pedro's face he had watched Pedro's movements.

"Pedro, take your hand out from under the table and without your gun!" said Jack; and Jim Galway caught a thrill in Jack's voice that he had heard in the _arroyo_.

Pedro looked into Senor Don't Care's eyes and saw a bead, though they were not looking along the glint of a revolver barrel.

"_Si_, senor!" said Pedro, settling back in the chair with palms out in intimation of his pacific intentions.

"Now, Pedro, you have Gonzalez's money, haven't you?" Jack went on, in the reasoning fashion that he had adopted to Leddy in the store. "And you aren't going to make yourself or Bob trouble. You are going to give it back!"

"_Si_, senor!" said Pedro wincing.

While he was producing the money and counting it, his furtive glance kept watch of Jack. Then, as the committee turned to go, he suddenly exclaimed with angry surprise and disillusion:

"You got no gun!"

While Jim and Bob waited for Jack to precede them out of the door Jim had time to note Pedro's baleful, piercing look at Jack's back.

"Just as I told you, Jack--and I reckon you saved a big row. You just put a scare into that hellion with a word, like you had a thousand devils in you!" said Jim.

"It's all over!" Jack answered, looking more hurt than pleased over the congratulations. "Very fortunately over."

"But," Jim observed, tensely, "Pedro is not only Leddy's bitter partisan and ready to do his bidding, Pedro's a bit loco, besides--the kind that hesitates at nothing when he gets a grudge. You've got to look out for him."

"Oh, no!" said Jack, in the full swing of a Senor Don't Care mood.

Jim and Bob began to entertain the feelings of Mary on the pass, when she thought of Jack as walking over precipices regardless of danger signs. After all, did he really know how to shoot? If he would not look after himself, it was their duty to look after him. Jim suggested that the rule which Jack had made for Leddy should have universal application. No one whosoever should wear arms in Little Rivers without a permit. The new ordinance had the Doge's approval; and Jim and Bob, both of whom had permits, kept watch that it was enforced, particularly in the case of Pedro Nogales.

Meanwhile, Jack kept the ten-hour-a-day law. His alfalfa was growing with prolific rapidity, but Firio had the air of one who waits between journeys.

"Never the trail again?" he asked temptingly, one day.

"Never the trail again!" Jack declared firmly.

"_Si, si, si_--the trail again!"

"You think so? Then why do you ask?"

"To make a question," answered Firio. "The big sadness will be too strong. It will make you move--_si_!"

"The big sadness!" Jack exclaimed. He seized Firio by the shoulders and looked narrowly at him, and Firio met the gaze with soft, puzzling lights in his eyes. "Ho! ho! A big sadness! How do you know?" he laughed.

"I learn on the trail when I watch you look at the stars. And Senorita Ewold, she know; but she think the big sadness a devil. She--" and he paused.

"She--yes?" Jack asked.

"She--" Firio started again.

Jack suddenly raised his hands from Firio's shoulders in a gesture of interruption. It was not exactly Firio's place to hazard opinions about Mary Ewold.

"Never mind!" he said, rather sharply.

But Firio proceeded fixedly to finish what he had to say.

"She has a big sadness, which makes her ride to the pass. She rides out so she can ride back smiling."

"Firio, don't mistake your imagination for divination!" Jack warned him.

As Firio did not understand the meaning of this he said nothing. Probably he would have said nothing even if he had understood.

"I'll show you the nature of the big sadness and that the devil is a joy devil when we harvest our first crop of alfalfa," Jack concluded. "Then I shall make a holiday! Then I shall be a real rancher and something is going to happen!"

"The trail!" exclaimed Firio, and the soft light in his eyes flashed. "_Si_! The trail and the big spurs and the revolver in the holster!"

"No!"

But Firio said "_Si_!" with the supreme confidence of one who holds that belief in fulfilment will make any wish come true.

A CHANGE OF MIND

It was Sunday afternoon; or, to date it by an epochal event, the day after Jack's alfalfa crop had fallen before the mower. Mary was seated on the bench under the avenue of umbrella-trees reading a thin edition of Marcus Aurelius bound in flexible leather. Of late she had developed a fondness for the more austere philosophers. Jack, whose mood was entirely to the sonneteers, came softly singing down the avenue of palms and presented himself before her in a romping spirit of interruption.

"O expert in floriculture!" he said, "the humble pupil acting as a Committee of One has failed utterly to agree with himself as to the form of his new flowerbed. There must be a Committee of Two. Will you come?"

"Good! I am weary of Marcus. I can't help thinking that he too far antedates the Bordeaux mixture!" she answered, springing to her feet with positive enthusiasm.

He rarely met positive enthusiasm in her and everything in him called for it at the moment. He found it so inspiring that the problem of the bed was settled easily by his consent to all her suggestions--a too-ready consent, she told herself.

"After all, it is your flower garden," she reminded him.

"No, every flower garden in Little Rivers is yours!" he declared.

The way he said this made her frown. She saw him taking a step on the other side of that barrier over which she mounted guard.

"Never make your hyperboles felonious!" she warned him. "Besides, if you are going to be a real Little Riversite you should have opinions of your own."

"I haven't any to-day--none except victory!" and he held out his palms, exhibiting their yellowish plates. "Look! Even corns on the joints!"

"Yes, they look quite real," she admitted, censoriously.

"Haven't I made good? Do you remember how you stood here on the very site of my house and lectured me? I would not work! I would not--"

"You have worked a little--a little!" she said grudgingly, and showed him as much of the wondrous sparkle in her eyes as he could see out of the corners between the lashes. She never allowed him to look into her eyes if she apprehended any attempt to cross the barrier. But she could see well enough out of the corners to know that his glances had a kind of hungry joy and a promise of some new demonstration in his attitude toward her. She must watch that barrier very shrewdly.

"Look at my hedge!" he went on. "It is knee-high already, and my umbrella-trees cast enough shade for anybody, if he will wrap himself around the trunk. But such things are ornamental. I have a more practical appeal. Come on!"

His elation was insistent, superior to any prickling gibes of banter, as they walked on the mealy earth between rows of young orange settings, and the sweet odor of drying alfalfa came to their nostrils, borne by a vagrant breeze. He swept his hand toward the field in a gesture of pride, his shoulders thrown back in a deep breath of exultation.

"The callouses win!" And he exhibited them again.

But she refused even to glance at them this time.

"You seem to think callouses phenomenal. Most people in Little Rivers accept them as they do the noses on their faces."

"They certainly are phenomenal on me. So is my first crop! My first crop! I'll be up at dawn to stack it--and then I'm no longer a neophyte. I am an initiate! I'm a real rancher! A holiday is due! I celebrate!"

He was rhapsodic and he was serious, too. She was provokingly flippant as an antidote for Marcus Aurelius, whom she was still carrying in the little flexible leather volume.

"How celebrate?" she inquired. "By walking through the town with a wisp of alfalfa in one hand and exhibiting the callouses on the other? or will you be drawn on a float by Jag Ear--a float labeled, 'The Idler Enjoying His Own Reform?' We'll all turn out and cheer."

"Amusing, but not dignified and not to my taste. No! I shall celebrate by a terrific spree--a ride to the pass!"

He turned his face toward the range, earnest in its transfixion and suffused with the spirit of restlessness and the call of the mighty rock masses, gray in their great ribs and purple in their abysses. She felt that same call as something fluid and electric running through the air from sky to earth, and set her lips in readiness for whatever folly he was about to suggest.

"A ride to the pass and a view of the sunset from the very top!" he cried. He looked down at her quickly, and all the force of the call he had transformed into a sunny, personal appeal, which made her avert her glance. "My day in the country--my holiday, if you will go with me! Will you, and gaze out over that spot of green in the glare of the desert, knowing that a little of it is mine?"

"Your orange-trees are too young. It's so far away they will hardly show," she ventured, surveying the distance to the pass judicially.

"Will you?"

"Why, to me a ride to the pass is not a thing to be planned a day beforehand," she said deliberately, still studiously observing Galeria. "It is a matter of momentary inspiration. Make it a set engagement and it is but a plodding journey. I can best tell in the morning," she concluded. "And, by the way, I see you haven't yet tried grafting plums on the alfalfa stalks."

"No. I have learned better. It is not consistent. You see, you mow alfalfa and you pick plums."

This return to drollery, in keeping with the prescribed order of their

relations, made her look up in candid amusement over the barrier which for a moment he had been endangering.

"Honestly, Jack, you do improve," she said, with mock encouragement. "You seem to have mastered a number of the simple truths of age-old agricultural experience."

"But will you? Will you ride to the pass?"

He had the question launched fairly into her eyes. She could not escape it. He saw one bright flash, whether of real anger or simply vexation at his reversion to the theme he could not tell, and her lashes dropped; she ran the leaf edges of the austere Marcus back and forth in her fingers, thip-thip-thip. That was the only sound for some seconds, very long seconds.

"As I've already tried to make clear to you, it's such a businesslike thing to ride to the pass unless you have the inspiration," she remarked thoughtfully to Marcus. "Perhaps I shall get the inspiration on the way back to the house;" which was a signal that she was going. "And, by the way, Jack, to return to the object of my coming, if you have ideas of your own about flowers incorporate them; that is the way to develop your floricultural talent."

She turned away, but he followed. He was at her side and proceeding with her, his head bent toward her, boyishly, eagerly.

"You see, I have never been out to the pass," he remarked urgently.

"What! You--" she started in surprise and checked herself.

"Didn't I come by train?" he asked reprovingly.

"No!" she answered. Her eyes were level with the road, her voice was a little unnatural. "No! You came over the pass, Jack."

It was the first time in the months of his citizenship of Little Rivers that she had ever hinted anything but belief in the fiction that they had first met when he asked her to show him a parcel of land. She seemed to be calling a truth out of the past and grappling with it, while her lips tightened and she drew in her chin.

"Then I did come over the pass," he agreed; and after a pause added: "But there was no Pete Leddy."

"Yes, oh, yes--there was a Pete Leddy!"

"But he will not be there this time!"

And now his voice, in a transport that seemed to touch the cloud heights, was neither like the voice of the easy traveller on the pass, nor the voice of his sharp call to Leddy to disarm, nor the voice of the storyteller. It had a new note, a note startling to her.

"We shall be on the pass without Leddy and smiling over Leddy and thanking him for his unwitting service in making me stop in Little Rivers," he concluded.

"Yes, he did that," she admitted stoically, as if it were some oppressive

fact for which she could offer no thanks.

"I want to see our ponies with their bridles hanging loose! I want the great silence! I want company, with imagination speaking from the sky and reality speaking from the patch of green out on the sea of gray! Will you?"

Their steps ran rhythmically together. His look was eager in anticipation, while she kept on running the leaves of the austere Marcus through her fingers. Her lips were half open, as if about to speak, but were without words; the thin, delicate nostrils trembled.

"Will you? Will you, because I kept the faith of callouses? Will you go forth and dream for a day? We'll tell fairy stories! We'll get a pole and prod the dinosaur through the narrow part of the pass and hear him roar his awfulest. Will you?"

Her fingers paused in the pages as if they had found a helpful passage. The chin tilted upward resolutely and he had a full view of her eyes, dancing with challenging lights. She was augustly, gloriously mischievous.

"Will you go in costume? Will you wear your spurs and the chaps and the silk shirt?"

The question said that it was not a time to be serious. It sprinkled the crest of the barrier with gleaming slivers of glass, which might give zest to words spoken across it, but would be most sharp to the touch.

"I will wear my spurs around my wrists, if you say, tie roses in the fringe of my chaps, bind my hat with a big red silk bandanna, and put streamers on P.D.'s bits!"

"That is too enticing for refusal," she answered, playfully. "I particularly want to hear the dinosaur roar."

They had come to the opening of the Ewold hedge, and they paused to consider arrangements. There was no one in sight on the street except Jim Galway, who was approaching at some distance.

"Shall we start in the morning and have luncheon at the foot of the range?" suggested Jack.

She favored an early afternoon start; he argued for his point of view, and in their preoccupation with the passage of arms they did not notice Pedro Nogales slipping along beside the hedge with soft steps, his hand under his jacket. A gleam out of the bosom of Pedro's jacket, a cry from Mary, and a knife flashed upward and drove toward Jack's neck.

Jack had seemed oblivious of his surroundings, his gaze centered on Mary. Yet he was able to duck backward so that the blade only slit open his shirt as Pedro, with the misdirected force of his blow, lunged past its object. Mary saw that face which had been laughing into hers, which had been so close to hers in its persistent smile of persuasion, struck white and rigid and a glint like that of the blade itself in the eyes. In a breath Jack had become another being of incarnate, unthinking physical power and swiftness. One hand seized Pedro's wrist, the other his upper arm, and Mary heard the metallic click of the knife as it struck the earth and the sickening sound of the bone of Pedro's forearm cracking.

She saw Pedro's eyes bursting from their sockets in pain and fear; she saw Jack's still profile of unyielding will and the set muscles of his neck and the knitting muscles of his forearm driving Pedro over against the hedge, as if bent on breaking the Mexican's back in two, and she waited in frozen apprehension to hear another bone crack, even expecting Pedro's death cry.

"The devil is out of Senor Don't Care!" It was the voice of Ignacio, who had come around the house in time to witness the scene.

"What fearful strength! You will kill him!" It was the voice of the Doge, from the porch.

"Yes, please stop!" Mary pleaded.

Suddenly, at the sound of her cry, Jack released his hold. The strong column of his neck became apparently too weak to hold the weight of his head. Inert, he fell against the hedge for support, his hands hanging limp at his side, while he stared dazedly into space. It seemed then that Pedro might have picked up the knife and carried out his plan of murder without defence by the victim.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Jack repeated.

Pedro had not moved from the hollow in the hedge which the impress of his body had made. He was trembling, his lips had fallen away from his teeth, and he watched Jack in stricken horror, a beaten creature waiting on some judgment from which there was no appeal.

"We'll tell fairy stories"--Jack's soft tones of persuasion repeated themselves in Mary's ears in contrast to the effect of what she had just witnessed. Her hand slipped along the crest of the hedge, as if to steady herself.

"I'll change my mind about going to the pass, Jack," she said.

"Yes, Mary," he answered in a faint tone.

He looked around to see her back as she turned away from him; then, with an effort, he stepped free of the hedge.

"Come, we will go to the doctor!" he said to the Mexican.

He touched Pedro's shoulder softly and softly ran his hand down the sleeve in which the arm hung limp. Pedro had not moved; he still leaned against the hedge inanimate as a mannikin.

"Come! Your legs are not broken! You can walk!" said Jim Galway, who had come up in a hurry when he saw what was happening.

"Pedro, you will learn not to play with the devil in Senor Don't Care!" whispered Ignacio, while Mary had disappeared in the house and the Doge stood watching.

Jack had stroked Pedro's head while the bone was being set. He had arranged for Pedro's care. And now he was in his own yard with Jag Ear and the ponies, rubbing their muzzles alternately in silent impartiality, his head bowed reflectively as Firio came around the corner of the house. At first he half stared at Firio, then he surveyed

the steeds of his long journeyings in questioning uncertainty, and then looked back at Firio, smiling wanly.

"Firio," he said, "I feel that I am a pretty big coward. Firio, I am full up--full to overflowing. My mind is stuffed with cobwebs. I--I must think things out. I must have the solitudes."

"The trail!" prescribed Doctor Firio.

After Jack had given his ranch in charge to Galway, he rode away in the dusk, not by the main street, but straight across the levels toward the pass.

XVII

THE DOGE SNAPS A RUBBER BAND

Jasper Ewold was a disciple of an old-fashioned custom that has fallen into disuse since the multiplicity of typewriters made writing for one's own pleasure too arduous; or, if you will have another reason, since our existence and feelings have become so complex that we can no longer express them with the simple directness of our ancestors. He kept a diary with what he called a perfect regularity of intermittency. A week might pass without his writing a single word, and again he might indulge freely for a dozen nights running. He wrote as much or as little as he pleased. He wrote when he had something to tell and when he was in the mood to tell it.

"It is facing yourself in your own ink," he said. "It is confessing that you are an egoist and providing an antidote for your egoism. Firstly, you will never be bored by your own past if you can appreciate your errors and inconsistencies. Secondly, you will never be tempted to bore others with your past as long as you wish to pose as a wise man."

He must have found, as you would find if you had left youth behind and could see yourself in your own ink, that the first tracery of any controlling factor in your life was faint and inconsequential to you at the time, without presage of its importance until you saw other lines, also faint and inconsequential in their beginnings, drawing in toward it to form a powerful current.

On the evening that Jack took to the trail again, Jasper Ewold had a number of thick notebooks out of the box in the library which he always kept locked, and placed them on the living-room table beside his easy chair, in which he settled himself. Mary was sewing while he pored over his life in review as written by his own hand. Her knowledge of the secrets of that chronicle from wandering student days to desert exile was limited to glimpses of the close lines of fine-written pages across the breadth of the circle of the lamp's reflection. He surrounded his diary with a line of mystery which she never attempted to cross. On occasions he would read to her certain portions which struck his recollection happily; but these were invariably limited to his impressions of some city or some work of art that he was seeing for the first time in the geniality of the unadulterated joy of living in what she guessed was the period of youth before she was born; and never did they throw any light

on his story except that of his views as a traveller and a personality. But he did not break out into a single quotation to-night. It seemed as if he were following the thread of some reference from year to year; for he ran his fingers through the leaves of certain parts hastily and became studiously intense at other parts as he gloomily pondered over them.

Neither she nor her father had mentioned Jack since the scene by the hedge. This was entirely in keeping with custom. It seemed a matter of instinct with both that they never talked to each other of him. Yet she was conscious that he had been in her father's mind all through the evening meal, and she was equally certain that her father realized that he was in her mind.

It was late when the Doge finished his reading, and he finished it with the page of the last book, where the fine handwriting stopped at the edge of the blank white space of the future. An old desire, ever strong with Mary, which she had never quite had the temerity to express, had become impelling under the influence of her father's unusually long and silent preoccupation.

"Am I never to have a glimpse of that treasure? Am I never, never to read your diary?" she asked.

The Doge drew his tufted eyebrows together in utter astonishment.

"What! What, Mary! Why, Mary, I might preach a lesson on the folly of feminine curiosity. Do you think I would ask to see your diary?"

"But I don't keep one."

"Hoo-hoo-hoo!" The Doge was blowing out his lips in an ado of deprecatory nonsense. "Don't keep one? Have you lost your memory?"

"I had it a minute ago--yes," after an instant's playful consideration, "I am sure that I have it now."

"Then, everybody with a memory certainly keeps a diary. Would you want me to read all the foolish things you had ever thought? Do you think I would want to?"

"No," she answered.

"There you are, then!" declared the Doge victoriously, as he rose, slipping a rubber band with a forbidding snap over the last book. "And this is all stupid personal stuff--but mine own!"

There was an unconscious sigh of weariness as he took up the thumbled leather volumes. He was haggard. "Mine own" had given him no pleasure that evening. All the years of his life seemed to rest heavily upon him for a silent moment. Mary feared that she had hurt him by her request.

"You have read so much you will scarcely do any writing to-night," she ventured.

"Yes, I will add a few more lines--the spirit is in me--a few more days to the long record," he said, absently, then, after a pause, suddenly, with a kind of suppressed force vibrating in his voice: "Well, our Sir Chaps has gone."

"As unceremoniously as he came," she answered.

"It was terrible the way he broke Nogales's wrist!" remarked the Doge narrowly.

"Terrible!" she assented as she folded her work, her head bent.

"Gone, and doubtless for good!" he continued, still watching her sharply.

"Very likely!" she answered carelessly without looking up. "His vagarious playtime for this section is over."

"Just it! Just it!" the Doge exclaimed happily.

"And if Leddy overtakes him now, it's his own affair!"

"Yes, yes! He and his Wrath of God and Jag Ear are away to other worlds!"

"And other Leddys!"

"No doubt! No doubt!" concluded the Doge, in high good humor, all the vexation of his diary seemingly forgotten as he left the room.

But, as the Doge and Mary were to find, they were alone among Little Riversites in thinking that the breaking of Pedro Nogales's wrist was horrible. Jim Galway, who had witnessed the affair, took a radically contrary view, which everyone else not of the Leddy partisanship readily accepted. Despite the frequency of Jack's visits to the Ewold garden and all the happy exchange of pleasantries with his hosts, the community could not escape the thought of a certain latent hostility toward Jack on the part of the Doge, the more noticeable because it was so out of keeping with his nature.

"Doge, sometimes I think you are almost prejudiced against Jack Wingfield because he didn't let Leddy have his way," said Jim, with an outright frankness that was unprecedented in speaking to Jasper Ewold. "You're such a regular old Quaker!"

"But that little Mexican panting in abject fear against the hedge!" persisted the Doge.

"A nice, peaceful little Mexican with a knife, sneaking up to plant it in Jack's neck!"

"But Jack is so powerful! And his look! I was so near I could see it well as he towered over Nogales!"

"Yes, no mistaking the look. I saw it in the _arroyo_. It made me think of what the look of one of those old sea-fighters might have been like when they lashed alongside and boarded the enemy."

"And the crack of the bone!" continued the Doge.

"Would you have a man turn cherub when he has escaped having his jugular slashed by a margin of two or three inches? Would you have him say, 'Please, naughty boy, give me your knife? You mustn't play with such things!'"

"No! That's hyperbole!" the Doge returned with a lame attempt at a laugh.

"Mebbe it is, whatever hyperbole is," said Jim; "but if so, hyperbole is a darned poor means of self-defence. Yes, the trouble is you are against Jack Wingfield!"

"Yes, I am!" said the Doge suddenly, as if inward anger had got the better of him.

"And the rest of us are for him!" Jim declared sturdily.

"Naturally! naturally!" said the Doge, passing his hand over his brow. "Yes, youth and color and bravery!" He shook his head moodily, as if Jim's statement brought up some vital, unpleasant, but inevitable fact to his mind.

"It's beyond me how anybody can help liking him!" concluded Galway stubbornly.

"I like him--yes, I do like him! I cannot help it!" the Doge admitted rather grudgingly as he turned away.

"So we weren't so far apart, after all!" Galway hastened to call after the Doge in apology for his testiness. "We like him for what he has been to us and will always be to us. That's the only criterion of character in Little Rivers according to your own code, isn't it, Jasper Ewold?"

"Exactly!" answered the Doge over his shoulder.

The community entered into a committee of the whole on Jack Wingfield. With every citizen contributing a quota of personal experience, his story was rehearsed from the day of his arrival to the day of his departure. Argument fluctuated on the question of whether or not he would ever return, with now the noes and now the ayes having it. On this point Jim had the only first-hand evidence.

"He said to let things grow until he showed up or I heard from him," said Jim.

"Not what I would call enlightening," said Bob Worthier.

"That was his way of expressing it; but to do him justice, he showed what a good rancher he was by his attention to the details that had to be cared for," Jim added.

"He's like the spirit of the winds, I guess," put in Mrs. Galway. "Something comes a-calling him or a-driving him, I don't know which. Indeed, I'm not altogether certain that it isn't a case of Mary Ewold this time!"

"Yes," agreed Jim. "The fighting look went out of his face when she spoke, and when he saw how horrified she was, why, I never saw such a change come over a man! It was just like a piece of steel wilting."

However, the children, who had no part in the august discussions of the committee of the whole, were certain that their story-teller would come back. Their ideas about Jack were based on a simple, self-convincing faith of the same order as Firio's. Lonely as they were, they were hardly more lonely than their elders, who were supposed to have the philosophy of adults.

No Jack singing out "Hello!" on the main street! No Jack looking up from work to ask boyishly: "Am I learning? Oh, I'll be the boss rancher yet!" No Jack springing all sorts of conceits, not of broad humor, but the kind that sort of set a "twinkling in your insides," as Bob Worther expressed it! No Jack inspiring a feeling deeper than twinkles on his sad days! He had been an improvement in town life that became indispensable once it was absent. Little Rivers was fairly homesick for him.

"How did we ever get along without him before he came, anyway?" Bob Worther demanded.

Then another new-comer, as distinctive from the average settler as Jack was, diverted talk into another channel, without, however, reconciling the people to their loss.

XVIII

ANOTHER STRANGER ARRIVES

If the history of Little Rivers were to be written in chapter headings the first would be, "Jasper Ewold Founded the Town"; the second, "Jack Wingfield Arrived"; and the third, "John Prather Arrived."

While Jack came in chaps and spurs, bearing an argosy of fancy, Prather came by rail, carrying a suitcase in a conventional and businesslike fashion. Bill Deering, as the representative of a spring wagon that did the local omnibus and express business, was on the platform of the station when the 11:15 rolled in, and sang out, in a burst of joy, as the stranger, a man in the early twenties, stepped off the Pullman:

"What's this, Jack? Back by train--and in store clothes? Well, of all--" and saw his mistake when the stranger's full face was turned toward him.

"Yes, I am sometimes called Jack," said the stranger pleasantly. "Now, where have we met before? Perhaps in Goldfield? No matter. It is time we got acquainted. My name is Prather, and yours?"

As he surveyed the man before him, Bill was as fussed as the giant of the fairy story had been by a display of yellow. He was uncertain whether he was giving his own baptismal name or somebody's else.

"By Jing! No, I don't know you, but you sure are the dead spit of a fellow I do know!" said Bill.

"Well, he has done me the favor of introducing me to you, anyway," said Prather, who had a remarkably ingratiating smile. "I would like a place to stop while I take a look around. Is there a hotel?"

"Rooms over the store and grub at Mrs. Smith's--none better!"

"That will do."

As they rode into town more than one passer-by called out a ringing

"Hello, Jack!" or, "Back, eh, Jack? Hurrah for you!" and then uttered an exclamation of disillusion when Prather turned his head.

"The others see it, too," said Bill.

"They seem to. Who is this double of mine?"

"Jack Wingfield."

"Jack Wingfield? It seems that our first names are the same, too. He lives here, I take it."

"Yes. But he's away now."

"Well, when he comes back"--with a pause of slight irritation--"there will be no difficulty in telling us apart."

He put his finger to a triangular patch of mole on his cheek. His irritation passed and a sense of appreciative amusement at the distinction took its place.

"Now, where shall I find Jasper Ewold?" he asked, as Bill drew up before the Smiths.

A few minutes later the Doge, busy among his orange-trees, hearing a step, looked up with a signal of recognition which changed to blank inquiry when the cheek with the mole was turned toward him.

"Upon my word, sir, I--I thought that you were--" he began.

"Mr. Wingfield! Yes, everybody in town seems to think so at first glance, so I am quite used to the comparison by this time," Prather put in, easily. "It is very interesting to meet the founder of a town, and I have come to you to find out about conditions here."

Prather did not appear as if he had ever done manual labor. He was too young to have turned from ill health or failure in the city to the refuge of the land. Indeed, his quiet gray suit of good material indicated unostentatious prosperity. Evidently he was well-bred and evidently he was not an agent for a new style of seeding harrow or weed killer.

"You think of settling?" asked the Doge.

"Yes. From all I have heard of Little Rivers, it's a community where I should feel at home."

"Then, sir, we will talk of it at luncheon; it is knocking-off time for the morning. Yes, I'll talk as much as you please. Come on, Mr. Prather!" They started along the avenue of palms, the Doge still studying the face at his side. "Pardon me for staring at you, but the resemblance to Jack Wingfield at first sight is most striking," he added.

"Has he travelled much in the West?" asked Prather.

"Yes, much--leading an aimless life."

"Then he must be the one that I was taken for in Salt Lake City one day. The man who called out to me saw his mistake, just as you did, when he saw my full face;" and again Prather made a gesture of understanding

amusement to the mole.

"When you consider what confusion there must be in the workrooms, with the storks flapping and screeching like newsboys outside the delivery room," mused the Doge, "and when you consider the multitudinous population of the earth, it's surprising that the good Lord is able to furnish such a variety of faces as he does. But they do say that every one of us has a few doubles. In the case of famous public men they get their pictures in the papers."

"Yes, very few of us but have been mistaken for a friend by a stranger passing in the street!" Prather suggested.

"Only to have the stranger see his mistake at a second glance; and on second glance you do not look very much like Jack Wingfield," the Doge concluded. "Just a coincidence in physiognomy!"

And Prather was very frank about his past.

"I have led rather a hard life," he said. "Though I was well brought up my father left mother and me quite penniless. I had to fend for myself at the age of sixteen. A friend gave me an opportunity to go to Goldfield at the outbreak of the excitement there. The rough experience of a mining-camp was not exactly to my taste, but it meant a livelihood. My real interest has always been in irrigation farming. I would rather grow a good crop than mine for gold. Well, I saved a little money at Goldfield--saved it to buy land. But land is not the only consideration. The surroundings, the people with whom you have to live count for a great deal when you mean to settle permanently."

"Excellent!" declared the Doge. "A good citizen in full fellowship with your neighbors! Exactly what we want in Little Rivers."

Prather had a complexion of that velvety whiteness that never tans. His eyes were calm, yet attractive, with a peculiar insinuating charm when he talked that made it seem easy and natural to respond to his wishes. In listening he had an ingratiating manner that was flattering to the speaker.

"A practical man!" the Doge said to Mary that evening. "The kind we need here. He and I had a grand afternoon of it together. Every one of his questions about soils and cultivation was to the point."

"Not one argument?" she asked.

"No, Mary; no time for argument."

"You do like people to agree with you, after all!" she hazarded. For she did not like Prather.

"Pooh! Not a matter of agreement! No persiflage! No altitudinous conversation of the kind that grows no crops. Prather wants to learn, and he's got good, clean ideas, with a trained and accurate mind--the best possible combination. I hope he will stay for the very reason that he is not the kind that takes up a plot of land for life on an impulse, which usually results in turning on the water and getting discouraged because nature will not do the rest. But he is very favorably impressed. He said that after Goldfield Little Rivers was like Paradise--practical Paradise. Good phrase, practical Paradise!"

In two or three days the new-comer knew everyone in town; but though he addressed the men by their first names they always addressed him as "Mr. Prather." In another respect besides his features he was like Jack: he was much given to smiling.

"The difference between his smile and Jack's," said Mrs. Galway, who was at one with Mary in not liking him, "is that his is sort of a drawing-in kind of smile and Jack's sort of radiates."

The children developed no interest in him. It was evident that he could not tell stories, except with an effort. In his goings and comings, ever asking pleasant questions and passing compliments, he was usually accompanied by the Doge, and his attitude toward the old man was the admiring deference of disciple for master.

"I am sorry I don't understand that," he would say when the Doge fell into a scholastic allusion to explain a point. "I was hard at work when lots of my friends were in college."

"Learning may be ruination," responded the Doge, "though it wouldn't have been in your case. It's the man that counts. See what you have made of yourself!"

"Ah, yes, but I feel that I have missed something. When I am settled here I shall be able to make up for lost time, with your help, sir."

"Every pigeonhole in my mind will be open at your call!" said the Doge, glowing at the prospect.

The favor that Prather found in the eyes of Jasper Ewold partly accounted for what favor he found in Little Rivers' eyes.

"Prather has certainly made a hit with the Doge!" quoth Bob Worthen. "As the Doge gets older I reckon he will like compliments better than persiflage. But Jack could pay a compliment, too--only he never used the ladle."

It was Bob, as inspector of ditches and dams, who provided a horse for Prather to inspect the source of the water supply. In keeping with a characteristic thoroughness, Prather wanted to go up the river into the canyon. He made himself a very enjoyable companion on the way, drawing out all of Bob's best stories. When they stopped in sight of the streak of blue sky through the breach in the mighty wall that had once imprisoned the ancient lake, he was silent for some time, while he surveyed this grandeur of the heights with smiling contemplation, at intervals rubbing the palms of his hands together in a manner habitual with him when he was particularly pleased.

"I guess the same idea has struck you that strikes everybody at sight of that, seh!" said Bob.

"Yes, a dam might be practical," Prather answered. "But it would take a lot of capital--a lot of capital!"

On the way back they stopped before a dilapidated shanty near the foothills. In the midst of a littered yard old man Lefferts, half dozing, occupied a broken chair.

"Since the Doge came old man Lefferts has had to do no work at all. A Mexican looks after him. But it hasn't made him any happier," Bob explained as they approached.

"Howdy yourself?" growled Lefferts in answer to Bob's greeting.

"He seems to be a character!" whispered Prather to Bob, as he smiled at the prospect. "To confess the truth, I am a little saddle sore and tired. I didn't get much riding in Goldfield. I think I'll stop and rest and get acquainted."

"You won't get much satisfaction but growls."

"That will be all the more fun for me," rejoined Prather. "But don't let me keep you."

"No. I must be going on. I've got some things to look after before nightfall," said Bob, while Prather, in a humor proof against any hermit cantankerousness, rode into the yard.

When he returned after dark he said, laughingly, that he had enjoyed himself, though the conversation was all on one side. The next morning he decided to take up the plot of land adjoining Jack's.

"But I shall not be able to begin work for a few weeks," he said. "I must go to Goldfield to settle up my affairs before I begin my new career."

"If Jack ever comes back I wonder what he will say to his new neighbor!" Little Rivers wondered.

XIX

LOOKING OVER PRECIPICES

To Mary Ewold the pass was a dividing line between two appeals. The Little Rivers side, with the green patch of oasis in the distance, had a message of peaceful enjoyment of what fortune had provided for her. Under its spell she saw herself content to live within garden walls forever in the land that had given her life, grateful for the trickles of intelligence that came by mail from the outside world.

The other side aroused a mighty restlessness. Therefore, she rarely made that short journey which spread another panorama of space before her. But this was one of the afternoons when she welcomed a tumult of any kind as a relief from her depression; and she went on through the V as soon as she reached the summit.

Seated on a flat-topped rock, oblivious of the passage of time, of the dream cities of the Eternal Painter, she was staring far away where the narrowing gray line between the mountain rims met the sky. She was seeing beyond the horizon. She was seeing cities of memory and reality. A great yearning was in her heart. All the monotonous level lap of the heights which seemed without end was a symbol that separated her from her desire.

She imagined herself in a Pullman, flashing by farms and villages; in a

shop selecting gowns; viewing from a high window the human stream of Fifth Avenue; taking passage on a steamer; hearing again foreign tongues long ago familiar to her ears; sensing the rustle of great audiences before a curtain rose; glimpsing the Mediterranean from a car window; feeling herself a unit in the throbbing promenade of the life of many streets while her hunger took its fill of a busy world.

"It is hard to do it all in imagination!" she said to herself. "Even imagination needs an occasional nest-egg of reality by way of encouragement."

An hour on the far side of the pass played the emotional part for her of a storm of tears for many another woman. She rejoiced in being utterly alone; rejoiced in the grandeur of the very wastes around her as mounting guard over the freedom of her thoughts. There was no living speck on the trail, which she knew lay across the expanse of parched earth to the edge of the blue dome; there was not even a bird in the air. Undisturbed, she might think anything, pray for anything; she might feed the flame of revolt till the fuel of many weeks' accumulation had burned itself out and left her calm in the wisdom and understanding that reconciled her to her portion and freshened to return through Galeria to the quiet routine of her daily existence.

Her mind paused in its travels from capital to capital and she was conscious solely of the stark majesty of her surroundings. She listened. There was no sound. The spacious stillness was soothing to her nerves; a specific when all the Eternal Painter's art failed. She closed her eyes, trying to realize that great silence as one would try to realize the Infinite. Then faintly she heard a man's voice singing. It seemed at first a trick of the imagination. But nearer and nearer it came, in the fellowship of life joyfully invading the solitude; and with a readjustment of her faculties to the expected event, she watched the point where the trail dipped on a sharp turn of grade.

Above it rose a cowpuncher hat, then a silk shirt with a string tie, and after that a sage baggage burro with clipped ears, a solemn-faced pony, and an Indian. Jack was watching his steps in the uneven path, and not until the full length of him had appeared and he was flush on the level with her did he look up.

She was leaning back, her weight partly poised on the flat of her hand on the rock, revealing the full curve of throat and the soft sweep of the lines of her slim figure, erect, her head thrown back, her face in shadow with the sun behind playing in her hair, in half-defiant readiness. She saw him as the spirit of travel--its ease, mystery, unattachedness--which had spanned the distances between her and the horizon, in the freedom of his wandering choice. His low-pitched exclamation of surprise was vibrant with appreciation of the picture she made, and he stood quite still in a second's wistful silence, waiting on her first word after the lapse of the many days since he had brought a look of horror into her eyes.

"Hello, Jack!" she said in the old tone of comradeship. It struck a spark electrifying him with all his old, happy manner.

He swept off his hat with a grand bow, blinking in the blaze of the sun which turned his tan to a bronze and touched the smile, which was born as an inspiration from her greeting, with radiance.

"Hello to you, Mary, guarding the pass to Little Rivers!" he said exultantly. "You are just the person I wanted to see. I have been in a hurry to tell you about a certain thing ever since it came to me this morning."

She guessed that he was about to make up a new story. He must have had time for many inventions in the ten days of his absence. But she welcomed any tangent of nonsense that set the right key for the coincidence of their meeting. She had refused to ride to the pass with him and here they were alone together on the pass. Three or four steps, so light that they seemed to be irresistibly winning permission from her, and he had sat down on another flat-topped rock close by. Firio and the baggage train moved on up the trail methodically and stopped well in the background.

"You know how when you meet a person you are sometimes haunted by a conviction that you have met him before!" he began. "How exasperated you are not to be able to recall the time and place!"

"Had you forgotten where you met the dinosaur?" she asked. "He must have thought you very impolite after all the trouble he had taken to make you remember him the last time you went through the pass."

"Oh, the dinosaur and I have patched up a truce, because it seems, after all, that I had mistaken his identity and he was a pleosaur. But"--he did not take the pains to parry her interruption with more foolery, and proceeded as if she had not spoken--"it has never been out of my mind that your father gave me a glance at our first meeting which asked the question that has kept recurring to me: Where had he and I seen each other before?"

"Well?" she said curiously, recalling her father's repeated allusions to "this Wingfield," his strange depression after Jack had left the night before the duel, his reticence and animadversions.

"I said nothing about it, nor did he. I wonder if it has not been a kind of contest between us as to which should be the first to say 'Tag!'"

She smiled at this and leaned farther back, but with the curtain of her eyelashes widening in tremulous intensity.

"I knew it would come!" he went on, with dramatic fervor. "Such things do come unexpectedly in a flash when there is a sudden electric connection with some dusty pigeonhole in the mind. It was in Florence that he and I met! In Florence, on the road to Fiesole!"

"Florence! The road to Fiesole!" Mary repeated; and the names seemed to rouse in her a rapturous recollection. She leaned forward now, her lips apart, her eyes glowing. In place of wastes she was seeing brown roofs and the sweep of the Tuscan Valley.

"And _we_ met--_you_ and _I_!"

"We?" Her glance came sharply back from the distances in the astonishment of dilating pupils that drew together in inquiry as she saw that he was in earnest.

"Yes. I was at the extremely mature age of six and you must have been about a year younger. Do you remember it at all?"

"No!" She was silent, concentrated, groping. "No, no!" she repeated. "Five is very immature compared to six!"

"Your father had a beard then, a great blond beard that excited my emulation. When I grew up I was going to have one like it and just such bushy eyebrows. You came up the Fiesole road at his side, holding fast to his thumb. I was playing at our villa gate. You went up the path with him to see my mother--I can see just how you looked holding so fast to that thumb! After a while you came straying out alone. Now don't you remember? Don't you? Something quite sensational happened."

"No!"

"Well, I showed off what a great boy I was. I walked on the parapet of the villa wall. I bowed to my audience aged five with the grandeur of a tight-rope performer who has just done his best thriller as a climax to his turn."

"Yes--yes!" she breathed, with quick-running emphasis. Out of the mists of fifteen years had come a signal. She bent nearer to him in the wonder of a thing found in the darkness of memory, which always has the fascination of a communication from another world. "You wanted me to come up on the wall," she said, taking up the thread of the story. "You said it was so easy, and you helped me up, and when I looked down at the road I was overcome and fell down all in a heap on the parapet."

"And heavens!" he gasped, living the scene over again, "wasn't I frightened for fear you would tumble off!"

"But I remember that you helped me down very nicely--and--and that is all I do remember. What then?"

She had come to a blind alley and perplexity was in her face, though she tried to put the question nonchalantly. What then? How deep ran the current of this past association?

"Why, there wasn't much else. Your father came down the path and his big thumb took you in tow. I did not see you again. A week later mother and I had gone to Switzerland--we were always on the move."

The candor of his glance told her that this was all. As boy and girl they had met under an Italian sky. As man and woman they had met under an Arizona sky.

Now the charm of the Florence of their affections held them with a magic touch. They were not in a savage setting, looking out over savage distances, but on the Piazzale Michelangelo, looking out over the city of Renaissance genius which slumbers on the refulgent bosom of its past; they were oblivious of the Eternal Painter's canvasses and enjoying Raphael's, Botticelli's, and Andrea del Sarto's. Possibly the Eternal Painter, in the leniency of philosophic appreciation of their oblivion to his art, hazarded a guess about the destiny of this pair. He could not really have known their destiny. No, it is impossible to grant him the power of divination; for if he had it he might not be so young of heart.

Their talk flitted here and there in exclamations, each bringing an entail of recollection of some familiar, enjoyed thing; and when at last it returned to their immediate surroundings the shadow of the range was creeping out onto the plain, cut by the brilliance of the sun through the

V. Mary rose with a quick, self-accusing cry about the lateness of the hour. To him it was a call on his resources to delay their departure.

"Do you see where that shelf breaks abruptly?" he asked. "It must be the side of a canyon. Have you ever looked down?"

"I started to once."

"I should not like to go over the pass again without seeing if this is really a canyon of any account. I feel myself quite an authority on canyons."

"It will be dark before we reach Little Rivers!" she protested.

"Ten minutes--only a step!" and he was appealing in his boyish fashion to have his way.

"Nonsense! Besides, I do not care for canyons."

"You still fear, then, to look down from walls? You--"

And this decided her. On another occasion she had gone to the precipice edge and faltered. She would master her dizziness for once and all; he should not know from her any confession of a weakness which was purely of the imagination.

The point to which he had alluded was an immense overhanging slab of granite stratum deep set in the mountain side. As they approached, a thrill of lightness and uncertainty was setting her limbs a-quiver. Her elbow was touching his, her will driving her feet forward desperately. Suddenly she was gazing down, down, down, into black depths which seemed calling irresistibly and melting her power of muscular volition, while he with another step was on the very edge, leaning over and smiling. She dropped back convulsively. He was all happy absorption in the face of that abyss. How easy for him to topple over and go hurtling into the chasm!

"Don't!" she gasped, and blindly tugged at his arm to draw him back.

As he looked around in surprise and inquiry, she withdrew her hand in a reaction against her familiarity, yet did not lower it, holding it out with fingers spread in expression of her horror. Serenely he regarded her for a moment in her confusion and distress, and then, smiling, while the still light of confidence was in his eyes, he locked his arm in hers. Before she could protest or resist he had drawn her to his side.

"It is just as safe as looking off the roof of a porch on to a flower garden," he said.

And why she knew not, but the fact had come as something definite and settled: she was no longer dizzy or uncertain. Calmly, in the triumph of mind over fear, in the glory of a new sensation of power, she looked down into that gulf of shadows--looked down for a thousand feet, where the narrowing, sheer walls merged into darkness.

From this pit to the blue above there was only infinite silence, with no movement but his pulse-beat which she could feel in his wrist distinctly. He had her fast, a pawn of one of his impulses. A shiver of revolt ran through her. He had taken this liberty because she had shown

weakness. And she was not weak. She had come to the precipice to prove that she was not.

"Thank you. My little tremor of horror has passed," she told him. "I can stand without help, now."

He released his hold and she stood quite free of him, a glance flashing her independence. Smilingly she looked down and smilingly and triumphantly back at him.

"You need not keep your arm up in that fashion ready to assist me. It is tiring," she said, with a touch of her old fire of banter over the barrier. "I am all right, now. I don't know what gave me that giddy turn--probably sitting still so long and looking out at the blaze of the desert."

He swept her with a look of admiration; and their eyes meeting, she looked back into the abyss.

"I wish I had such courage," he said with sudden, tense earnestness; "courage to master my revulsion against shadows."

"Perhaps it will come like an inspiration," she answered uncomprehendingly.

Then both were silent until she spoke of a stunted little pine three or four hundred feet down, in the crotch of an outcropping. Its sinking roots had split a rock, over which the other roots sprawled in gnarly persistence. Some passing bird had dropped the seed which had found a bed in a pocket of dust from the erosions of time. So it had grown and set up housekeeping in its isolation, even as the community of Little Rivers had in a desert basin beside a water-course.

"The little pine has courage--the courage of the dwarf," she said. "It is worth more than a whole forest of its majestic cousins in Maine. How green it is--greener than they!"

"But they rise straight to heaven in their majesty!" he returned, to make controversy.

"Yes, out of the ease of their rich beds!"

"In a crowd and waiting for the axe!"

"And this one, in its isolation, creating something where there was nothing! Every one of its needles is counted in its cost of birth out of the stubborn soil! And waiting all its life down there for the reward of a look and a word of praise!"

"But," he went on, in the delight of hearing her voice in rebuttal, "the big pines give us the masts of ships and they build houses and furnish the kindling for the hardwood logs of the hearth!"

"The little pine makes no pretensions. It has done more. It has given us something without which houses are empty: It has given us a thought!"

"True!" he exclaimed soberly, yielding. And now all the lively signals of the impulse of action played on his face. "For your glance and your word of praise it shall pay you tribute!" he cried. "I am going down to bring

you one of its clusters of spines."

"But, Jack, it is a dangerous climb--it is late! No! no!"

"No climb at all. It is easy if I work my way around by that ledge yonder. I see stepping-places all the way."

How like him! While she thought only of the pine, he had been thinking how to make a descent; how to conquer some physical difficulty. Already he had started despite her protest.

"I don't want to rob the little pine!" she called, testily.

"I'll bring a needle, then!"

"Even every needle is precious!"

"I'll bring a dead one, then!"

There was no combatting him, she knew, when he was headstrong; and when he was particularly headstrong he would laugh in his soft way. He was laughing now as he took off his spurs and tossed them aside.

"No climbing in these cart-wheels, and I shall have to roll up my chaps!"

She went back to the precipice edge to prove to him, to prove to herself, that she could stand there alone, without the moral support of anyone at her side, and found that she could. She had mastered her weakness. It was as if a new force had been born in her. She felt its stiffening in every fibre as she saw him pass around the ledge and start down toward the little pine; felt it as something which could build barriers and mount them with an invulnerable guard.

How would he get past that steep shoulder? The worst obstacle confronted him at the very beginning of the descent. He was hugging a rock face, feeling his way, with nothing but a few inches of a projecting seam between him and the darkness far below. His foot slipped, his body turned half around, and she had a second of the horror that she had felt when waiting for the sound of Leddy's shot in Bill Lang's store. She saw his outspread hands clutching the seam above; watched for them to let go. But they held; the foot groped and got its footing again, and he worked his way out on a shelf.

He was safe and she dropped on her knees weakly, still looking down at him. It was the old story of their relations. Was this man ever to be subjecting her to spasms of fear on his account? And there he was beaming up at her reassuringly, while she felt the blood which had gone from her face return in a hot flood. It brought with it anger in place of fear.

"I don't want it! I don't want it!" she cried down.

"And I want to get it for you! I want to get it for you--for you!" His voice was a tumult of emotion in the abandon of passionate declaration. So long had she held him back that now when the flood came it had the power of conserved strength bursting a dam in wild havoc. "There is nothing I would not like to do for you, Mary!" he cried. "I'd like to pull that pine up for you, even if it bled and suffered! I'd like to go on doing things for you forever!"

There was not even a movement of her lips in answer. It seemed to her now that there on the precipice edge, while he held her arm in his, the iridescent house of glass had fallen about them in a confused, dazzling shower of wreckage. He had found an opening. He had broken through the barrier.

Half unconscious of his progress, of the chasm itself, she waited in a daze and came out of it to see him sweeping his hat upward from beside the pine before he reached as far as he could among the branches and, with what seemed to her the refinement of effrontery and disregard of her wishes, broke off a tawny young branch. He waved it to her--this garland of conquest won out of the jaws of danger, which he was ready to throw at her feet from the lists.

"No, no, no!" she said, half aloud.

She saw him start back with his sure steps, his shoulders swinging with the lithe, adaptable movement of his body; and every step was drawing him nearer to a meeting which would be like no other between them. Soon he would be crunching the glass of the house under that confident tread; in the ecstasy of a new part he would be before the opening he had broken in the barrier with the jauntiness of one who expected admission. His pulse-beat under the touch of her fingers at the precipice edge, his artery-beat in the _arroyo_, was hammering in her temples, hammering out a decision which, when it came, brought her to her feet.

Now the shadows were deep; all the glory of the sunset in the Eternal Painter's chaotic last moments of his day's work overspread the western sky, and from the furnace in which he dipped his brush came a blade of rich, blazing gold through the pass and lay across the trail. It enveloped her as, half running, mindless of her footing, slipping as she went, she hurried toward the other side of Galeria.

When Jack Wingfield came up over the ledge, a pine tassel in his hand, his languor of other days transformed into high-strung, triumphant intensity, the sparkle of a splendid hope in his eyes, only Firio was there to welcome him.

"Senorita Ewold said she no could wait," Firio explained. "It was very late, she said."

Jack stopped as if struck and his features became a lifeless mask, as lifeless as the walls of the canyon. He looked down at the trophy of his climb and ran his fingers over the needles slowly, again and again, in abstraction.

"I understand!" he said, half to himself; and then aloud: "Firio, we will not go into town to-night. We will camp on the other side by the river."

"_Si_! I shot enough quail this afternoon for dinner."

But Jack did not have much appetite, and after dinner he did not amuse Firio with inventions of his fancy. He lay long awake, his head on his clasped hands, looking at the stars.

A PUZZLED AMBASSADOR

A faint aureole of light crept up back of the pass.

"Dawn at last!" Jack breathed, in relief. "Firio! Firio! Up with you!"

"Oh-yuh!" yawned Firio. "_Si, si_" he said, rising numbly to his feet and rubbing his eyes with his fists, while he tried to comprehend an astonishing reversal of custom. Usually he awakened his camp-mate; but this morning his camp-mate had awakened him. A half shadow in the semi-darkness, Jack was already throwing the saddle over P.D.'s back.

"We will get away at once," he said.

Firio knew that something strange had come over Senor Jack after he had met Senorita Ewold on the pass, and now he was convinced that this thing had been working in Senor Jack's mind all night.

"Coffee before we start?" he inquired ingratiatingly.

"Coffee at the ranch," Jack answered.

In their expeditious preparations for departure he hummed no snatches of song as a paeon of stretching muscles and the expansion of his being with the full tide of the conscious life of day; and this, too, was contrary to custom.

Before it was fairly light they were on the road, with Jack urging P.D. forward at a trot. The silence was soft with the shimmer of dawn; all glistening and still the roofs and trees of Little Rivers took form. The moist sweetness of its gardens perfumed the fresh morning air in greeting to the easy traveller, while the makers of gardens were yet asleep.

It was the same hour that Mary had hurried forth after her wakeful night to stop the duel in the _arroyo_. As Jack approached the Ewold home he had a glimpse of something white, a woman's gown he thought, that disappeared behind the vines. He concluded that Mary must have risen early to watch the sunrise, and drew rein opposite the porch; but through the lace-work of the vines he saw that it was empty. Yet he was positive that he had seen her and that she must have seen him coming. She was missing the very glorious moment which she had risen to see. A rim of molten gold was showing in the defile and all the summits of the range were topped with flowing fire.

"Mary!" he called.

There was no answer. Had he been mistaken? Had mental suggestion played him a trick? Had his eyes personified a wish when they saw a figure on the steps?

"Mary!" he called again, and his voice was loud enough for her to have heard if she were awake and near. Still there was no answer.

The pass had now become a flaming vortex which bathed him in its far-spreading radiance. But he had lost interest in sunrises. A last backward, hungry glance over his shoulder as he started gave him a glimpse through the open door of the living-room, and he saw Mary leaning

against the table looking down at her hands, which were half clasped in her lap, as if she were waiting for him to get out of the way.

Thus he understood that he had ended their comradeship when he had broken through the barrier on the previous afternoon, and the only thing that could bring it back was the birth of a feeling in her greater than comradeship. His shoulders fell together, the reins loosened, while P.D., masterless if not riderless, proceeded homeward.

"Hello, Jack!"

It was the greeting of Bob Worthier, the inspector of ditches, who was the only man abroad at that hour. Jack looked up with an effort to be genial and found Bob closely studying his features in a stare.

"What's the matter, Bob?" he asked. "Has my complexion turned green over night or my nose slipped around to my ear?"

"I was trying to make out if you do look like him!" Bob declared.

"Like whom? What the deuce is the mystery?"

"What--why, of course you're the most interested party and the only Little Riversite that don't know about it, seh!"

After all, there was some compensation for early rising. Bob expanded with the privilege of being the first to break the news.

"If you'd come yesterday you'd have seen him. He went by the noon train," he said, and proceeded with the story of Prather.

Jack had never heard of the man before and was obviously uninterested. He did not seem to care if a dozen doubles came to town.

"Oh, yes, there's another thing concerning you," Bob continued. "I was so interested in telling you about Prather that I near forgot it. A swell-looking fellow--says he's a doctor and he's got New York written all over him--came in yesterday particularly to see you."

Though it was a saying in Little Rivers that nobody ever found Jack at a loss, he started perceptibly now. His fingers worked nervously on the reins and he bit his lips in irritation.

"He was asking a lot of questions about you," Bob added.

By this time Jack had summoned back his smile. He did not seem to mind if a dozen doctors came to town at the same time as a dozen doubles.

"Did you tell him that I had a cough--kuh-er?" he asked, casually.

"Why, no! I said you could thrash your weight in wildcats and he says, 'Well, he'll have to, yet!' and then shut up as if he'd overspoke himself--and I judge that he ain't the kind that does that often. But say, Jack," Bob demanded, in the alarm of local partisanship which apprehends that it may unwittingly have served an outside interest, "did you want us to dope it out that you were an invalid? We ain't been getting you in wrong, I hope?"

"Not a bit!" answered Jack with a reassuring slap on Bob's shoulder. "Was

his name Bennington?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well," said Jack thoughtfully and with a return of his annoyance, "he will find me at home when he calls." And P.D. knew that the reins were still held in listless hands as he turned down the side street toward the new ranch.

Firio was feeling like an astrologer who had lost faith in his crystal ball. An interrogation had taken the place of his confident "_Si, si_" of desert understanding of the mind of his patron. Jack had broken camp with the precipitancy of one who was eager to be quit of the trail and back at the ranch; yet he gave his young trees only a passing glance before entering the house. He had not wanted coffee on the road, yet coffee served with the crisp odor of bacon accompanying its aroma, after his bath and return to ranch clothes, found no appetite. He was as a man whose mind cannot hold fast to anything that he is doing. Firio, restless, worried, his eyes flicking covert glances, was frequently in and out of the living-room on one excuse or another.

"What work to-day?" he asked, as he cleared away the breakfast dishes. "What has Senor Jack planned for us to do?"

"The work to-day? The work to-day?" Jack repeated absently. "First the mail." He nodded toward a pile on the table.

"And I shall make ready to stay a long time?" Firio insinuated softly.

"No!" Jack answered to space.

The pyramid of mail might have been a week's batch for the Doge himself. At the bottom were a number of books and above them magazines which Jack had subscribed for when he found that they were not on the Doge's list. There was only one letter as a first-class postage symbol of the exile's intimacy with the outside world, and out of this tumbled a check and a blank receipt to be filled in. He tore off the wrappers of the magazines as a means of some sort of physical occupation and rolled them into balls, which he cast at the waste-basket; but neither the contents of the magazines nor those of the newspapers seemed to interest him. His aspect was that of one waiting in a lobby to keep an appointment.

When he heard steps on the porch he sang out cheerily, "Come in!" but, contrary to the habit of Little Rivers hospitality, he did not hasten to meet his caller, and any keenness of anticipation which he may have felt was well masked.

There entered a man of middle age, with close-cropped gray beard, clad in soft flannels, the trousers bottoms turned up in New York fashion for negligee business suits for that spring. To the simple interior of a western ranch house he brought the atmosphere of complex civilization as a thing ineradicably bred into his being. It was evident, too, that he had been used to having his arrival in any room a moment of importance which summoned the rapt attention of everybody, whether nurses, fellow physicians, or the members of the patient's family. But this time that was lacking. The young man leaning against the table was not visibly impressed.

"Hello, doctor!" said Jack, as unconcernedly as he would have passed the

time of day with Jim Galway in the street.

"Hello, Jack!" said the doctor.

Jack went just half-way across the room to shake hands. Then he dropped back to his easy position, with the table as a rest, after he had set a chair for the visitor.

"How do you like Little Rivers?" Jack asked.

"I have been here only thirty-six hours," answered the doctor, avoiding a direct answer. He was pulling off his silk summer gloves, making the operation a trifle elaborate, one which seemed to require much attention. "I came pretty near mistaking another man for you, but his mole patch saved me. I didn't think you could have grown one out here. Wonderfully like you! Have you met him?"

He glanced up as he asked this question, which seemed the first to occur to him as a warming-up topic of conversation before he came to the business in hand.

"No. I have just heard of him," Jack answered.

The doctor smiled at his gloves, which he now folded and put in his pocket. Don't the lecturers to young medical students say, "Divert your patient's mind to some topic other than himself as you get your first impression"? Now Dr. Bennington drew forward in his chair, rested the tips of the long fingers of a soft, capable hand on the edge of the table, and looked up to Jack in professional candor, sweeping him with the knowing eye of the modern confessor of the secrets of all manner of mankind. With the other hand he drew a stethoscope from his side coat-pocket.

"Well, Jack, you can guess what brought me all the way from New York--just five minutes' work!" and he gave the symbol of examination a flourish in emphasis.

"I don't think I have forgotten the etiquette of the patient on such occasions," Jack returned. "It is an easy function in this Arizona climate."

He drew his shirt up from a compact loin and lean middle, revealing the arch of his deep chest, the flesh of which was healthy pink under neck and face plated with Indian tan. The doctor's eyes lighted with the bliss of a critic used to searching for flaws at sight of a masterpiece. While he conducted the initial plottings with the rubber cup which carried sounds to one of the most expensive senses of hearing in America, Jack was gazing out of the window, as if his mind were far away across the cactus-spotted levels.

"Breathe deep!" commanded the doctor.

Jack's nostrils quivered with the indrawing of a great gust of air and his diaphragm swelled until his ribs were like taut bowstrings.

"And you were the pasty-faced weakling that left my office five years ago--and you, you husky giant, have brought me two thousand miles to see if you were really convalescent!"

"I hope the trip will do you good!" said Jack, sweetly.

"But it is great news that I take back, great news!" said the doctor, as he put the stethoscope in his pocket.

"Yes?" returned Jack, slipping his head through his shirt. "You don't find even a speck?"

"Not a speck! No sign of the lesion! There is no reason why you should not have gone home long ago."

"No?" Jack was fastening his string tie and doing this with something of the urban nicety with which the doctor had folded his gloves. That tie was one of the few inheritances from complex civilization which still had Jack's favor.

"What have you found to do all these years?"

Jack was surprised at the question.

"I have just wandered about and read and thought," he explained.

"Without developing any sense of responsibility?" demanded the doctor in exasperation.

"I have tried to be good to my horses, and of late I have taken to ranching. There is a lot of responsibility in that and care, too. Take the scale, for instance!"

"A confounded little ranch out in this God-forsaken place, that a Swede immigrant might run!"

"No, the Swedes aren't particularly good at irrigation, though better than the Dutch. You see, the Hollanders are used to having so much water that--"

Jack was leaning idly against the table again. The fashionable practitioner, accustomed to having his words accepted at their cost price in gold, broke in hotly:

"It is past all understanding! You, the heir to twenty millions!"

"Is it twenty now?" Jack asked softly and sadly.

"Nearer thirty, probably! And shirking your duty! Shirking and for what--for what?"

Jack faced around. The doctor, meeting a calm eye that was quizzically challenging, paused abruptly, feeling that in some way he had been caught at a professional disadvantage in his outburst of emotion.

"Don't you like Little Rivers?" asked Jack.

"I should be bored to death!" the doctor admitted, honestly.

"Well, you see this air never healed a lesion for you! You never uttered a prayer to it for strength with every breath! And, doctor," Jack hesitated, while his lips were half open, showing his even teeth slightly apart in the manner of a break in a story to the children

where he expected them to be very attentive to what was coming, "you can take a piece of tissue and analyze it, yes, a piece of brain tissue and find all the blood-vessels, but not what a man was thinking, can you? Until you can take a precipitate of his thoughts--the very thoughts he is unconscious of himself--and put them under a microscope, why, there must be a lot of guesswork about the source of all unconventional human actions."

Jack laughed over his invasion of psychology; and when he laughed in a certain way the impulse to join him was strong, as Mary first found on the pass. So the doctor laughed, partly in relief, perhaps, that this uncertain element which he was finding in Jack had not yet proved explosive.

"That would make a capital excuse for a student flunking in examinations!" he said.

"It might be a worthy one--not that I say it ought to pass him."

"Now, Jack," the doctor began afresh, the reassuring force of his personality again in play.

He took a step and raised his hands as if he would put them on Jack's shoulders. One could imagine him driving hypochondria out of many a patient's mind by thus making his own vigorous optimism flow down from his fingertips, while he looked into the patient's eye. But his hands remained in the air, though Jack had been only smiling at him. This was not the way to handle this patient, something told his trained, sensitive instinct in time, and he let his hands fall in semblance of a gesture of protest, gave a shrug and came directly to the point very genuinely.

"Well, Jack--your father!"

"Yes." And Jack's face was still and blank, while shadows played over it in a war among themselves. "He did not even tell me you were coming," he added.

"Perhaps he feared that it would give you time to develop a cough or you would start overland to Chihuahua so I should miss you. Jack, he needs you! All that fortune waits for you!"

"Now that I am strong, yes! He did not come out to see me even during the first year when I had not the health to go to him, nor did he think to come with you."

"He--he is a very busy man!" explained the doctor, in ready championship. And yet he looked away from Jack, and when he looked back it was with an appeal to conscience rather than to filial affection. "Is it right to remain, however much you like this desert life? Have you any excuse?"

"Yes, an overwhelming one!" exclaimed Jack in a voice that was high-pitched and determined, while his eyes burned and no trace of humor remained on lips that were as firm as the outline of his chin. "Yes, one that thrills me from head to foot with the steady ardor of the soldier who makes a siege!"

"I--I--you are beyond me! Then you will stay? You are not coming home?"

"Yes," Jack answered, in another mood, but one equally rigid. "I am

coming at once. That was all settled last night under the stars. I have found the courage!"

"The courage to go to twenty millions!" gasped the doctor. "But--good! You will go! That is enough! Why shouldn't we take the same train back?" he went on enthusiastically. "I shall be coming through here in less than a week. You see, I am so near California that I simply had to steal a few days with my sister, who can't come East on account of her health. I have been so tied down to practice that I have not seen her for fifteen years. That will give you time to arrange your affairs. How about it?"

"It would be delightful, but--" Jack was hesitating. "No, I will refuse. You see, I rode horseback when I entered this valley for the first time and I should like to ride out in the way I came. Just sentiment!"

"Jack!" exclaimed the doctor.

He was casting about how to express his suspicion when something electric checked him--a current that began in Jack's measured glance. Jack was not mentioning that his word was being questioned, but something still and effective that came from far away out on the untrod desert was in the room. It fell on the nerves of the ambassador from the court of complex civilization like a sudden hush on a city's traffic. Jack broke the silence by asking, in a tone of lively hospitality:

"You will join me at luncheon?"

"I should like to," answered the doctor, "but I can catch a train on the other trunk line that will give me a few more hours with my sister. And what shall I wire your father? Have you any suggestion?"

"Why, that he will be able to judge for himself in a few days how near cured I am."

"You will wire him the date of your arrival?"

"Yes."

"Jack," said the doctor at the door, "that remark of yours about the analysis of brain tissue and of thought put a truth very happily. Come and see me and let me know how you get on. Good-by!"

He took his departure thoughtfully, rather than with a sense of triumph over the success of a two-thousand-mile mission in the name of twenty millions.

XXI

"GOOD-BY, LITTLE RIVERS!"

It was the thing thrilling him with the ardor of a soldier preparing for a siege that sent Jack to the Ewolds' later in the morning. He had come determined to finish the speech that he had called up to Mary from the canyon. As he crossed the cement bridge, Ignacio appeared on the path and took his position there obdurately, instead of standing to one side with

a nod, as usual, to let the caller pass.

"Senorita Ewold is not at home!" he announced, before Jack had spoken.

"Not even in the garden?"

"No, senor."

"But she will be back soon?"

"I do not think so."

Ignacio's face was as blank as a wall, but knowingly, authoritatively blank. His brown eyes glistened with cold assurance. He seemed to have become the interpreter of a message in keeping with Mary's flight from the pass and her withdrawal from the porch when she had seen Jack approaching. Here was a new barrier which did not permit even banter across the crest. She must know that he was going, for the news of his approaching departure had already spread through the town. She had chosen not to see him again, even for a farewell.

For a little time he stood in thought, while Ignacio remained steadfast on the path, watchful, perhaps, for the devil in Senor Don't Care to appear. Suddenly Jack's features glowed with action; he took a step as if he would sweep by Ignacio on into the garden. But the impulse instantly passed. He stopped, his face drawn as it had been when he fell limp against the hedge stricken by the horror of his seeming brutality to Pedro Nogales, and turned away into the street with a mask of smiles for the greetings and regrets of the friends whom he met.

Worth twenty millions or twenty cents, he was still Jack to Little Rivers; still the knight who had come over the range to vanquish Pete Leddy; still a fellow-rancher in the full freemasonry of calloused hands; still the joyous teller of stories. The thought of losing him set tendrils in the ranchers' hearts twitching in sympathy with tendrils in his own, which he found rooted very deep now that he must tear them out.

That afternoon at the appointed hour for his departure every man, woman, and child had assembled at the end of the main street, where it broke into the desert trail. The principal found an excuse for dismissing school an hour earlier than usual. That is, everyone was present except Mary. The Doge came, if a little late, to fulfil his function as chosen spokesman for all in bidding Jack Godspeed on his journey.

"Senor Don't Care, you are a part of the history of Little Rivers!" he said, airily. "You have brought us something which we lacked in our singularly peaceful beginning. Without romance, sir, no community is complete. I have found you a felicitous disputant whom I shall miss; for you leave me to provide the arguments on both sides of a subject on the same evening. Our people have found you a neighbor of infinite resources of humor and cheer. We wish you a pleasant trail. We wish you warm sunshine when the weather is chill and shade when the weather is hot, and that you shall ever travel with a singing heart, while old age never overtakes the fancy of youth."

Every one of the familiar faces grouped around the fine, cultured old face of the Doge expressed the thoughts to which he had given form.

"May your arguments be as thick as fireflies, O Doge!" Jack answered,

"everyone bearing a torch to illumine the outer darkness of ignorance! May every happy thought I have for Little Rivers spring up in a date-tree wonderful! Then, before the year is out, you will have a forest of date-trees stretching from foothills to foothills, across the whole valley."

"And one more about the giant with the little voice and the dwarf with the big voice and the cat with the stripes down her back!" cried Belvy Smith, spokeswoman for the children. "Are they just going on forever having adventures and us never knowing about them?"

"No. I have been holding back the last story," Jack said. "Both the giant and the dwarf were getting old, as you all know, and they were pretty badly battered up from their continual warfare. Why, the scar which the giant got on his forehead in their last battle was so big that if the dwarf had had it there would have been no top left to his head. After the cat had lost that precious black tip to her tail she became more and more thoughtful. She made up her mind to retire and reform and have a permanent home. And you know what a gift she had for planning out things and how clever she was about getting her own way. Now she sat in a hedge corner thinking and thinking and looking at the stubby end of her tail, and suddenly she cried, 'Eureka!' And what do you think she did? She went to a paint shop and had her left ear painted yellow and her right ear painted green. So, now you can see her any day sunning herself on the steps of the cottage where the giant and the dwarf live in peace. Whenever they have an inclination to quarrel she jumps between them and wiggles the yellow ear at the giant and the green ear at the dwarf, which fusses them both so that they promise to be good and rush off to get her a saucer of milk."

"A green ear and a yellow ear! What a funny looking cat she must be!" exclaimed Belvy.

"So she says to herself between purrs," concluded Jack. "But she is a philosopher and knows that she would look still funnier if she had lost her ears as Jag Ear has. Good-by, children! Good-by, everybody! Good-by, Little Rivers!"

Jack gave P.D. a signal and the crowd broke into a cheer, which was punctuated by the music of Jag Ear's bells as his burrohood got in motion. The Doge, who had brought his horse, mounted.

"I will ride a little distance with you," he said.

He appeared like a man who had a great deal on his mind and yet was at a loss for words. There was the unprecedented situation of silence between the two exponents of persiflage in Little Rivers.

"I--" he began, and paused as if the subject were too big for him and it were better not to begin at all. Then he drew rein.

"Luck, Jack!" he said, simply, and there was something like pity in his tone.

"And Mary--you will say good-by to her and thank her!" said Jack.

"I think you may meet her," answered the Doge. "She went away early taking her luncheon, before she knew that you were going."

So Ignacio had been acting on his own authority! The thrill of the news singing in Jack's veins was too overwhelming for him to notice the challenge and apprehension in the Doge's glance. The Doge saw the glow of a thousand happy, eager thoughts in Jack's face. He hesitated again on the brink of speech, before, with a toss of his leonine head as if he were veritably leaving fate's affairs to fate, he turned to go; and Jack mechanically touched P.D.'s rein, while he gazed toward the pass. P.D. had not gone many steps when Jack heard the same sonorous call that had greeted him that first night when he stopped before the door of the Ewolds; the call of a great, infectious fellowship between men:

"Luck, Sir Chaps! I defy you to wear your spurs up the Avenue! Give my love to that new Campanile in Babylon, the Metropolitan tower! Get it in the mist! Get it under the sun! Kiss your hand to golden Diana, huntress of Manhattan's winds! Say ahoy to old Farragut! And on gray days have a look for me at the new Sorollas in the Museum! Luck, Sir Chaps!"

"Good crops and a generous mail, O Doge!"

Jack rode fast, in the gladness of a hope this side of the pass and in the face of shadows on the other side which he did not attempt to define. To Firio he seemed to have grown taller and older.

XXII

"LUCK, JACK, LUCK!"

Apprehensively he watched the end of the ribbon running under P.D.'s hoofs for the sight of a horsewoman breaking free of the foothills. The momentary fear which rode with him was that Mary might be returning earlier than usual. If they met on the road--why, the road was without imagination and, in keeping with her new attitude toward him, she might pass him by with a nod. But at the top of the pass imagination would be supreme. There they had first met; there they had found their first thought in common in the ozone which had meant life to them both.

He did not look up at the sky changes. As he climbed the winding path worn by moccasined feet before the Persians marched to Thermopylae, his mind was too occupied making pictures of its own in glowing anticipation to have any interest in outside pictures. This path was narrow. Here, at least, she must pause; and she must listen. Every turn which showed another empty stretch ahead sent his spirits soaring. Then he saw a pony with an empty side-saddle on the shelf. A few steps more and he saw Mary.

She was seated with the defile at her back, her hands clasped over her knee. In this position, as in every position which she naturally took, she had a pliant and personal grace. The welter of light of the low sun was ablaze in her face. Her profile had a luminous wistfulness. Her lashes were half closed, at once retaining the vision of the panorama at her feet as a thing of atmospheric enjoyment and shutting it out from the intimacy of her thoughts. And more enveloping than the light was the silence which held her in a spell as still as the rocks themselves, waiting on time's dispensation where time was nothing. Yet the soft movement of her bosom with her even breaths triumphed in a life supreme and palpitant over all that dead world.

Thus he drank her in before the crunch of a stone under his heel warned her of his presence and set her breaths going and coming in quick gusts as she wheeled around, half rising and then dropping back to a position as still as before, with a trace of new dignity in her grace, while her starkness of inquiry gradually changed to stoicism.

"Mary, I came upon you very suddenly," he said.

"Yes"--a bare, echoing monosyllable.

He stepped to one side to let Firio and his little cavalcade pass. All the while she continued to look at him through the screen of her half-closed lashes in a way that set her repose and charm apart as something precious and cold and baffling. Now he realized that he had made a breach in the barrier of their old relations only to find himself in a garden whose flowers fell to ashes at his touch. He saw the light that enveloped her as an armor far less vulnerable than any wall, and the splendor of her was growing in his eyes.

Jag Ear's bells with their warm and merry notes became a faint tinkle that was lost in the depths of the defile. The two were alone on the spot where the Eternal Painter had introduced them so simply as Jack and Mary, and where he, as the easy traveller, had listened to her plead for his own life. It was his turn to plead. She was not to be won by fighting Leddys or tearing up pine-trees by their roots. That armor was without a joint; a lance would bend like so much tin against its plates, and yet there must be some alchemy that would make it melt as a mist before the sun. It was tenanted by a being all sentiency, which saw him through her visor as a passer-by in a gallery. But one in armor does not fly from passers-by as she had flown while he was climbing up the canyon wall with his pine-tree branch.

"I have learned now to look over any kind of a precipice without getting dizzy," she announced, quietly.

He was not the Jack who had come over the ledge in the energy of his passion yesterday to find her gone. He had turned gentle and was smiling with craved permission for a respite from her evident severity as he dropped to a half-lying posture near her. Overhead, the Eternal Painter was throwing in the smoky purple of a false thunderhead, sweeping it away with the promise of a downpour, rolling in piles of silver clouds and drawing them out into filmy fingers melting into a luminous blue.

"One can never tire of this," he said, tentatively.

"To me it is all!" she answered, in an absorption with the scene that made him as inconsequential as the rocks around her.

"And you never long for cities, with their swift currents and busy eddies?" he asked.

"Cities are life, the life of humanity, and I am human. I--" The unfinished sentence sank into the silence of things inexpressible or which it was purposeless to express.

Her voice suggested the tinkle of Jag Ear's bells floating away into space. If a precipitate were taken from her forehead, in keeping with Jack's suggestion to Dr. Bennington, it would have been mercury, which is

so tangible to the eye and intangible to the touch. Press it and it breaks into little globules, only to be shaken together in a coherent whole. If there is joy or pain in the breaking, either one must be glittering and immeasurable.

"But Little Rivers is best," she added after a time, speaking not to him, but devoutly to the oasis of green.

In the crystal air Little Rivers seemed so near that one could touch the roofs of the houses with the fingertips of an extended arm, and yet so diminutive in the spacious bosom of the plateau that it might be set in the palm of the hand.

Jack was as one afraid of his own power of speech. A misplaced word might send her away as oblivious of him as a globule of mercury rolling free from the grasp. Here was a Mary unfathomed of all his hazards of study, undreamed of in all his flights of fancy.

"It is my last view," he began. "I have said all my good-bys in town. I am going."

Covertly, fearfully, he watched the effect of the news. At least now she would look around at him. He would no longer have to talk to a profile and to the golden mist of the horizon about the greatest thing of his life. But there was no sign of surprise; not even an inclination of her head.

"Yes," she told the horizon; and after a little silence added: "The time has come to play another part?"

She asked the question of the horizon, without any trace of the old banter over the wall. She asked it in confirmation of a commonplace.

"I know that you have always thought of me as playing a part. But I am not my own master. I must go. I--"

"Back to your millions!" She finished the sentence for him.

"Then you--you knew! You knew!" But his exclamation of astonishment did not move her to a glance in his direction or even a tremor.

"Yes," she went on. "Father told me about your millions last night. He has known from the first who you were."

"And he told no one else in Little Rivers? He never mentioned it to me or even to you before!"

"Why should he when you did not mention it yourself? His omission was natural delicacy, in keeping with your own attitude. Isn't it part of the custom of Little Rivers that pasts melt into the desert? There is no standard except the conduct of the present!"

And all this speech was in a monotone of quiet explanation.

"He did not even tell you until last night! Until after our meeting on the other side of the pass! It is strange! strange!" he repeated in the insistence of wonder.

He saw the lashes part a little, then quiver and close as she lifted

her gaze from the horizon rim to the vortex of the sun. Then she smiled wearily.

"He likes a joke," she said. "Probably he enjoyed his knowledge of your secret and wanted to see if I would guess the truth before you were through playing your part."

"But the part was not a part!" he said, with the emphasis of fire creeping along a fuse. "It was real. I do not want to leave Little Rivers!"

"Not in your present enthusiasm," she returned with a warning inflection of literalness, when he would have welcomed satire, anger, or any reprisal of words as something live and warm; something on which his mind could lay definite hold.

In her impersonal calm she was subjecting him to an exquisite torture. He was a man flayed past all endurance, flayed by a love that fed on the revelation of a mystery in her being superbly in control. The riot of all the colors of the sky spoke from his eyes as he sprang to his feet. He became as intense as in the supreme moment in the _arroyo_; as reckless as when he walked across the store toward a gun-muzzle. Only hers were this time the set, still features. His were lighted with all the strength of him and all the faith of him.

"A part!" he cried. "Yes, a part--a sovereign and true part which I shall ever play! I was going that day we first met, going before the legate of the millions came to me. Why did I stay? Because I could not go when I saw that you wanted to turn me out of the garden!"

His quivering words were spoken to a profile of bronze, over which flickered a smile as she answered with a prompting and disinterested analysis.

"You said it was to make callouses on your hands. But that must have been persiflage. The truth is that you imagined a challenger. You wanted to win a victory!" she answered.

"It was for you that I calloused my hands!"

"Time will make them soft!"

She was half teasing now, but teasing through the visor, not over the wall.

"And if I sought victory I saw that I was being beaten while I made a profession of you, not of gardening! Yes, of you! I could confess it to all the world and its ridicule!"

"Jack, you are dramatic!"

If she would only once look at him! If he could only speak into her eyes! If her breaths did not come and go so regularly!

"Why did I take to the trail after Pedro Nogales struck at me with his knife? Because I saw the look on your face when you saw that I had broken his arm. I had not meant to break his arm--yet I know that I might have done worse but for you! I did not mean to kill Leddy--yet there was something in me which might have killed him but for you!"

"I am glad to have prevented murder!" she answered almost harshly.

A shadow of horror, as if in recollection of the scene in the _arroyo_ and beside the hedge, passed over her face.

"Yes, I understand! I understand!" he said. "And you must hear why this terrible impulse rose in me."

"I know."

"You know? You know?" he repeated.

"About the millions," she corrected herself, hastily. "Go on, Jack, if you wish!" Urgency crept into her tone, the urgency of wishing to have done with a scene which she was bearing with the fortitude of tightened nerves.

"It was the millions that sent me out here with a message, when I did not much care about anything, and their message was: 'We do not want to see you again if you are to be forever a weakling. Get strong, for our power is to the strong! Get strong, or do not come back!'"

"Yes?"

For the first time since he had begun his story she looked fairly at him. It was as if the armor had melted with sympathy and pity and she, in the pride of the poverty of Little Rivers, was armed with a Samaritan kindness. For a second only he saw her thus, before she looked away to the horizon and he saw that she was again in armor.

"And I craved strength! It was my one way to make good. I rode the solitudes, following the seasons, getting strength. I rejoiced in the tan of my arm and the movement of my own muscles. I learned to love the feel of a rifle-stock against my shoulder, the touch of the trigger to my finger's end. I would shoot at the cactus in the moonlight--oh, that is difficult, shooting by moonlight!--and I gloried in my increasing accuracy--I, the weakling of libraries and galleries and sunny verandas of tourist resorts! Afraid at first of a precipice's edge, I came to enjoy looking over into abysses and in spending a whole day climbing down into their depths, while Firio waited in camp. And at times I would cry out: 'Millions, I am strong! I am not afraid of you! I am not afraid of anything!' In the days when I knew I could never be acceptable as their master I knew I was in no danger of ever having to face them. When I had grown strong, less than ever did I want to face them. I know not why, but I saw shadows; I looked into another kind of depths--mental depths--which held a message that I feared. So I procrastinated, staying on in the air which had given me red blood. But that was cowardly, and that day I came over the pass I was making my last ride in the kingdom of irresponsibility. I was going home!

"When you asked me not to face Leddy I simply had to refuse. I had just as soon as not that Leddy would shoot at me, because I wanted to see if he would. Yes, I was strong. I had conquered. And if Leddy hit me, why, I did not have to go back to battle with the shadows--the obsession of shadows which had grown in my mind as my strength grew. When I was smiling in Leddy's muzzle, as they say I did, I was just smiling exultantly at the millions that had called me a weakling, and saying, like some boaster, 'Could you do this, millions?' I--I--well, Mary, I--I

have told you what I never was quite able to tell myself before."

"Thank you, Jack!" she answered, and all the particles of sunlight that bathed her seemed to reflect her quiet gladness as something detached, permeating, and transcendent.

"When Leddy challenged me I wanted to fight," he went on. "I wanted to see how cool I, the weakling whom the millions scorned, could be in battle. After Leddy's shot in the _arroyo_ I found that strength had discovered something else in me--something that had lain dormant in boyhood and had not awakened to any consciousness of itself in the five years on the desert--something of which all my boyhood training made me no less afraid than of the shadows, born of the blood, born of the very strength I had won. It seemed to run counter to books and gardens and peace itself--a lawless, devil-like creature! Yes, I gloried in the fact that I could kill Leddy. It was an intoxication to hold a steady bead on him. And you saw and felt that in me--yes, I tell you everything as a man must when he comes to a woman offering himself, his all, with his angels, his devils, and his dreams!"

He paused trembling, as before a judge. She turned quickly, with a sudden, winsome vivacity, the glow of a great satisfaction in her eyes and smiling a comradeship which made her old attitude over the wall a thing of dross and yet far more intimate. Her hand went out to meet his.

"Jack, we have had good times together," she said. "We were never mawkish; we were just good citizens of Little Rivers, weren't we? And, Jack, every mortal of us is partly what he is born and the rest is what he can do to bend inheritance to his will. But we can never quite transform our inheritance and if we stifle it, some day it will break loose. The first thing is to face what seems born in us, and you have made a good beginning."

She gave his hands a nervous, earnest clasp and withdrew hers as she rose. So they stood facing each other, she in the panoply of good will, he with his heart on his sleeve. The swiftly changing pictures of the Eternal Painter in his evening orgy seemed to fill the air with the music of a symphony in its last measures, and her very breaths and smiles to be keeping time with its irresistible movement toward the finale.

"I must be starting back, Jack," she said.

"And, Mary, I must learn how to master the millions. Oh, I have not the courage of the little dwarf pine in the canyon! Mary, Mary, I calloused my hands for you! I want to master the millions for you! I would give you the freedom of Little Rivers and all the cities of the world!"

"No, Jack! This is my side of the pass. I shall be very happy here."

"Then I will stay in Little Rivers! I will leave the millions to the shadows! I will stay on ranch-making, fortune-making. Mary, I love you! I love you!"

There was no staying the flame of his feeling. He seized her hands; he drew her to him. But her hands were cold; they were shivering.

"Jack! No, no! It is not in the blood!" she cried in the face of some mocking phantom, her calmness gone and her words rocking with the tumult of emotion.

"In the blood, Mary? What do you mean? What do you know that I don't know? Do you know those shadows that I cannot understand better than I?" he pleaded; and he was thinking of the Doge's look of pity and challenge and of the meeting long ago in Florence as the hazy filaments of a mystery.

"No, I should not have said that. What do I know? Little--nothing that will help! I know what is in me, as I know what is in you. I am afraid of myself--afraid of you!"

"Mary, I will fight all the shadows!" He drew her close to him resistlessly in his might.

"Jack, you will not use your strength against me! Jack!"

He saw her eyes in a mist of pain and reproach as he released her. And now she threw back her head; she was smiling in the philosophy of garden nonsense as she cried:

"Good-by, Jack! Luck against the dinosaur! Don't press him too hard when he is turning a sharp corner. Remember he has a long reach with his old paleozoic tail. Luck!" with a laugh through her tears; a laugh with tremulous cheer in it and yet with the ring of a key in the lock of a gate.

Unsteadily he bent over and taking her hands in his pressed his lips to them.

"Yes, luck!" he repeated, and half staggering turned toward the defile.

"Luck!" she called after him when he was out of sight. "Luck!" she called to the silence of the pass.

Three days with the trail and the Eternal Painter mocking him, when the singing of Spanish verses that go click with the beat of horse-hoofs in the sand sounded hollow as the refrain of vain memories, and from the steps of a Pullman he had a final glimpse of Firio's mournful face, with its dark eyes shining in the light of the station lamp. Firio had in his hand a paper, a sort of will and testament given him at the last minute, which made him master in fee simple of the ranch where he had been servant, with the provision that the Doge of Little Rivers might store his overflow of books there forever.

PART II

HE FINDS HIMSELF

XXIII

LABELLED AND SHIPPED

Behold Jack clad in the habiliments of conventional civilization taken from the stock of ready-made suitings in an El Paso store! They were of the Moscowitz and Guggenheim type, the very latest and nattiest, as advertised in popular prints. The dealer said that no gentleman could be well dressed without them. He wanted to complete the transformation with a cream-colored Fedora or a brown derby.

"I'll wait on the thirty-third degree a little longer," said Jack, fondling the flat-brimmed cowpuncher model of affectionate predilection. Swinging on a hook on the sleeper with the sway of the train, its company was soothing to him all the way across the continent.

The time was March, that season of the northern year when winter growing stale has a gritty, sticky taste and the relief of spring seems yet far away. After the desert air the steam heat was stifling and nauseating. Jack's head was a barrel about to burst its hoops; his skin drying like a mummy's; his muscles in a starchy misery from lack of exercise. He felt boxed up, an express package labelled and shipped. When he crawled into his berth at night it was with a sense of giving himself up to asphyxiation at the whim of strange gods.

If you have ever come back to town after six months in the woods, six months far from the hysteria of tittering electric bells, the brassy honk-honk of automobiles, the clang of surface cars and the screech of their wheels on the rails, multiply your period of absence by ten, add a certain amount of desert temperament, and you will vaguely understand how the red corpuscles were raising rebellion in Jack's artery walls on the morning of his journey's end. From the ferryboat on the dull-green bosom of the river he first renewed his memory of the spectral and forbidding abysses and pinnacles of New York. Here time is everything; here man has done his mightiest in contriving masses to imitate the architectural chaos of genesis. A mantle of chill, smoky mist formed the dome of heaven, in which a pale, suffused, yellowish spot alone bespoke the existence of a sun in the universe.

In keeping with his promise to Dr. Bennington he had wired to his father, naming his train; and in a few minutes Wingfield, Sr. and Wingfield, Jr. would meet for the first time in five years. Jack was conscious of a faster beating of his heart and a feeling of awesome expectancy as the crowd debouched from the ferryboat. At the exit to the street a big limousine was waiting. The gilt initials on the door left no doubt for whom it had been sent. But there was no one to meet him, no one after his long absence except a chauffeur and a footman, who glanced at Jack sharply. After the exchange of a corroborative nod between them the footman advanced.

"If you please, Mr. Wingfield," he said, taking Jack's suit case.

"What would Jim Galway think of me now!" thought Jack. He put his head inside the car cautiously. "Another box!" he thought, this time aloud.

"You have the check for it, sir?" asked the footman, thinking that Jack was using the English of the mother island for trunk.

"No. That's all my baggage."

In the tapering, cut-glass vase between the two front window-panels of the "box" was a rose--a symbol of the luxury of the twenty millions, evidently put there regularly every morning by direction of their master.

Its freshness and color appealed to Jack. He took it out and pressed it to his nostrils.

"Just needs the morning sun and the dew to be perfect," he said to the amazed attendants; "and I will walk if you will take the suit case to the house."

He kept the rose, which he twirled in his fingers as he sauntered across town, now pausing at curb corners to glance back in thoughtful survey, now looking aloft at the peaks of Broadway which lay beyond the foothills of the river-front avenues.

"All to me what the desert is to other folks!" he mused; "desert, without any cacti or mesquite! All the trails cross one another in a maze. A boxed-up desert--boxes and boxes piled on top of one another! Everybody in harness and attached by an invisible, unbreakable, inelastic leash to a box, whither he bears his honey or goes to nurse his broken wings!--so it seems to me and very headachy!"

At Madison Square he was at the base of the range itself; and halting on the corner of Twenty-third Street and the Avenue he was a statue as aloof as the statue of Farragut from his surroundings. Salt sea spray ever whispers in the atmosphere around the old sailor. How St. Gaudens created it and keeps it there in the heart of New York is his secret. Possibly the sculptor put some of his soul into it as young Michael Angelo did into his young David.

It is a great thing to put some of your soul into a thing, whether it is driving a nail or moulding a piece of clay into life. There are men who pause before the old Admiral and see the cutwater of men-of-war's bows and hear the singing of the signal halyards as they rise with the command to close in. Perhaps the Eternal Painter had put a little of his soul into the heart of Jack; for some busy marchers of the Avenue trail as they glanced at him saw the free desert and heard hoof-beats in the sand. Others seeing a tanned Westerner kissing his hand to Diana of Madison Square Garden probably thought him mad. Next, performing another sentimental errand for the Doge of Little Rivers, his gaze rose along the column of the Metropolitan tower. Its heights were half shrouded in mist, through which glowed the gold of the lantern.

"Oh, bully! bully!" he thought. "The only sun in sight a manufactured one, shining on top of a manufactured mountain! It is a big business building a mountain; only, when God Almighty scattered so many ready-made ones about, why take the trouble?" he concluded. "Or so it seems to me," he added, sadly, in due appreciation of the utterly reactionary mood of a man who has been boxed up for a week.

Now he turned toward a quarter which he had, thus far, kept out of the compass of observation. He looked up the jagged range of Broadway where, over a terra-cotta pile, floated a crimson flag with "John Wingfield" in big, white letters.

"My mountain! My box! My millions!" he breathed half audibly.

How the people whom he passed, their faces speaking city keenness of ambition, must envy his position! How little reason they had to envy him, he thought, as he walked around the great building and saw his name glaring at him in gilt letters over the plate-glass windows and on all the delivery wagons, open-mouthed for the packages being wheeled out

under the long glass awning.

"A whole block now! Yes, the doctor was right. It must be thirty instead of twenty millions!" he concluded, as his vision swept the straight-line, window-checked mass of the twelve stories. "And I do wish we had a tower! If one could go up on top of a tower and look out over the range now and then and breathe deep, it would help."

When he entered the main door he paused in a maze, gazing at the acreage of counters manned by clerks and the aisles swarming with shoppers under the glare of the big, electric globes, and listening to the babble of shrill talk, the calls of the elevator boys, the coughing of the pneumatic tubes and the clang of the elevator doors. It was all like some devilishly complicated dream from which he would never awake. He must have a little time in order to orient himself before he could think rationally. The roar of the train still obsessed him; the air in the store seemed more stifling than that of the sleeper.

So he decided that, rather than be shot up into The Presence by the elevator, he would gradually scale the heights. Ascending stairway after stairway, he ranged back and forth over the floors, a stranger in his own wonderland. When he reached the eleventh floor, with only one more to the offices, the whole atmosphere seemed suddenly to turn rare with expectancy; a rustle to run through all the goods on the counters; the very Paris gowns among which he was standing to be called to martial attention.

"The boss!" he heard one of the model girls say.

Turning to follow her nod toward the stairway, Jack saw, two-thirds of the way up the broad flight, a man past middle age, in dark gray suit and neutral tie, rubbing his palms together as he surveyed a stratum of his principality. The sight of him to Jack was like the touch of a myriad electric needles that pricked sharply, without exhilaration.

"The boss is likely to run up that way any time of the day," said the model girl to a customer; "and what he don't see don't count!"

"Not much older; not much changed!" thought Jack; and his realization of the disinterestedness of his observation tipped the needles with acid.

In the sharpness of the master's button-counting survey there was swift finality; and his impressions completed, analyzed, docketed for reference, he ran on up the flight with light step, still rubbing the palms of his hands in the unctuously well-contained and appreciative sense of his power. To Jack he was a fascinating, grand, distant figure, this of his own father, yet mortally near.

If the model girl had had the same keenness of observation for what is borne in the face as for what is worn on the back, she could not have failed to note the strong family resemblance between the young man standing near her and the man who had paused on the stairway. This glimpse of his father's mastery of every detail of that organization which he had built, this glimpse of cool, self-centered authority, only reminded Jack of his own ignorance and flightiness in view of all that would be expected of him. He knew less than one of the cash girls about how to run the store. A duel with Leddy was a simple matter beside this battle he had to wage.

He mounted the last flight of stairs into an area of glass-paneled doors, behind which the creative business of the great concern was conducted. Out of one marked "Private," closing it softly and stepping softly, came a round-shouldered, stooping man of middle age, with the apprehensive and palliating manner of a long-service private secretary who has many things to remember and many persons to appease with explanations. It was evident that Peter Mortimer had just come from The Presence. At sight of Jack he drew back in a surprise that broke into a beaming delight which played over his tired and wrinkled features in ecstasy.

"Jack! Jack! You did it! You did it!" he cried.

"Peter!" Jack seized the secretary's hands and swung them back and forth.

"You've got a grip of iron! And tanned--my, how you're tanned! You did it, Jack, you did it! It hardly seems credible, when I think of the last time I saw you."

It was then that the secretary had seen a Jack with his eyes moist; a Jack pasty-faced, hollow-cheeked; and, in what was a revolutionary outburst for a unit in the offices, Peter Mortimer had put his arm around the boy in a cry for the success of the Odyssey for health which the heir was about to begin. And Mortimer's words were sweet, while the words of the farewell from the other side of the glass-paneled door marked "Private" were acrid with the disappointed hopes of the speaker.

"You have always been a weakling, Jack, and I have had little to say about your rearing. Go out to the desert and stay--stay till you are strong!" declared the voice of strength, as if glad to be freed of the sight of weakness in its own image.

"Father did not come to meet me?" Jack observed questioningly now to Mortimer.

"He was very busy--he did not feel certain about the nature of your telegram--he--" and Mortimer's impulses withdrew into the shell of the professional private secretary.

"I wired that he should see for himself if I were well. So he shall!" said Jack, turning toward the door.

"Yes--that will be all right--yes, there is no one with him!"

Mortimer, in the very instinct of long practice, was about to go in to announce the visitor, but paused. As Jack entered, whatever else may have been in his eyes, there was no moisture.

XXIV

IN THE CITADEL OF THE MILLIONS

John Wingfield, Sr. sat at a mahogany table without a single drawer, in the centre of a large room with bare, green-tinted walls. His oculist had said that green was the best color for the eyes. Beside the green blotting-pad in front of him was a pile of papers. These would either be

disposed of in the course of the day or, if any waited on the morrow's decision, would be taken away by Peter Mortimer overnight. When he rose to go home it was always with a clear desk; a habit, a belief of his singularly well-ordered mind in the mastery of the teeming detail that throbbed under the thin soles of his soft kid shoes. On the other side of the pad was the telephone, and beyond it the supreme implements of his will, a row of pearl-topped push-buttons.

The story of John Wingfield, Sr.'s rise and career, as the lieutenants of the offices and the battalions of the shopping floors knew it, was not the story, perhaps, as Dr. Bennington or Peter Mortimer knew it; but, then, doctors and private secretaries are supposed to hold their secrets. There was little out of the commonplace in the world's accepted version. You may hear its like from the moneyed host at his dinner table in New York or as he shows you over the acres of his country estate, enthusing with a personal narrative of conquest which is to him unique. John Wingfield, Sr. makes history for us in the type of woman whom he married and the type of son she bore him.

He was the son of a New England country clergyman, to whom working his way through college in order to practise a profession made no appeal. Birth and boyhood in poverty had taught him, from want of money, the power of money. He sought the centre of the market-place. At sixteen he was a clerk, marked by his industry not less than by his engaging manners, on six dollars a week in the little store that was the site of his present triumph. Of course he became a partner and then owner. It was his frequent remark, when he turned reminiscent, that if he could only get as good clerks as he was in his day he would soon have a monopoly of supplying New York and its environs with all it ate and wore and needed to furnish its houses; which raises the point that possibly such an equality of high standards in efficiency might make all clerks employers.

The steady flame of his egoism was fanned with his Successes. Without real intimates or friends, he had an effective magnetism in making others do his bidding. It had hardly occurred to him that his discovery of the principle of never doing anything yourself that you can win others to do for you and never failing, when you have a minute to spare, to do a thing yourself when you can do it better than any assistant, was already a practice with leaders in trade and industry before the Pharaohs.

Life had been to him a ladder which he ascended without any glances to right or left or at the rung that he had left behind. The adaptable processes of his mind kept pace with his rise. He made himself at home in each higher stratum of atmosphere. His marriage, delayed until he was forty and already a man of power, was still another upward step. Alice Jamison brought him capital and position. The world was puzzled why she should have accepted him; but this stroke of success he now considered as the vital error of a career which, otherwise, had been flawlessly planned. Yet he could flatter his egoism with the thought that it was less a fault of judgment than of the uncertainty of feminine temperament, which could not be measured by logic.

New York saw little of Mrs. Wingfield after Jack's birth. Her friends knew her as a creature all life and light before her marriage; they realized that the life and light had passed out of her soon after the boy came; and thenceforth they saw and heard little of her. She had given herself up to the insistent possession and company of her son. Those who met her when travelling reported how frail she was and how constrained.

Jack was fourteen when his mother died. He was brought home and sent to school in America; and two-years later Dr. Bennington announced that the slender youngster, who had been so completely estranged from the affairs of the store, must matriculate in the ozone of high altitudes instead of in college, if his life were to be saved. Whether Jack were riding over the _mesas_ of Arizona or playing in a villa garden in Florence, John Wingfield, Sr.'s outlook on life was the same. It was the obsession of self in his affairs. After the eclipse of his egoism the deluge. The very thought that anyone should succeed him was a shock reminding him of growing age in the midst of the full possession of his faculties, while he felt no diminution of his ambition.

"I am getting better," came the occasional message from that stranger son. And the father kept on playing the tune of accruing millions on the push-buttons. His decision to send Dr. Bennington to Arizona came suddenly, just after he had turned sixty-three. He had had an attack of grip at the same time that his attention had been acutely called to the demoralization of another great business institution whose head had died without issue, leaving his affairs in the hands of trustees.

Two days of confinement in his room with a high pulse had brought reflection and the development of atavism. What if the institution built as a monument to himself should also pass! What if the name of Wingfield, his name, should no longer float twelve stories high over his building! He foresaw the promise of companionship of a restless and ghastly apparition in the future.

But he recovered rapidly from his illness and his mental processes were as keen and prehensile as ever. Checking off one against the other, with customary shrewdness, he had a number of doctors go over him, and all agreed that he was good for twenty years yet. Twenty years! Why, Jack would be middle-aged by that time! Twenty years was the difference between forty-three and sixty-three. Since he was forty-three he had quintupled his fortune. He would at least double it again. He was not old; he was young; he was an exceptional man who had taken good care of himself. The threescore and ten heresy could not apply to him.

Bennington's telegram irritated him with its lack of precision. Fifteen hundred dollars and expenses to send an expert to Arizona and in return this unbusinesslike report: "You will see Jack for yourself. He is coming."

In the full enjoyment of health, observing every nice rule for longevity, his slumber sweet, his appetite good, John Wingfield, Sr. had less interest in John Wingfield, Jr. than he had when his bones were aching with the grip. Jack's telegram from Chicago announcing the train by which he would arrive aroused an old resentment, which dated far back to Jack's childhood and to a frail woman who had been proof against her husband's will.

Did this home-coming mean a son who could learn the business; a strong, shrewd, cool-headed son? A son who could be such an adjutant as only one who is of your own flesh and blood can be in the full pursuit of the same family interest as yourself? If Jack were well, would not Bennington have said so? Would he not have emphasized it? This was human nature as John Wingfield, Sr. knew it; human nature which never missed a chance to ingratiate itself by announcing success in the service of a man of power.

The spirit of his farewell message to Jack, which said that strength might return but bade weakness to remain away, and the injured pride of seeing a presentment of wounded egoism in the features of a sickly boy, which had kept him from going to Arizona, were again dominant. Yet that morning he had a pressing sense of distraction. Even Mortimer noticed it as something unusual and amazing. He kept reverting to Jack's history between flashes of apprehension and he was angry with himself over his inability to concentrate his mind. Concentration was his god. He could turn from lace-buyer to floor-walker with the quickness of the swing of an electric switch. Concentrate and he was oblivious to everything but the subject in hand. He was in one of the moments of apprehension, half staring at the buttons on the desk rather than at the papers, when he heard the door open without warning and looked up to see a lean, sturdy height filling the doorway and the light from the window full on a bronzed and serene face.

More than ever was Jack like David come over the hills in his incarnation of sleeping energy. Instead of a sling he carried the rose. Into the abode of the nicely governed rules of longevity came the atmosphere of some invasive spirit that would make the stake of life the foam on the crest of a charge in a splendid moment; the spirit of Senor Don't Care pausing inquiringly, almost apologetically, as some soldier in dusty khaki might if he had marched into a study unawares.

Jack was waiting, waiting and smiling, for his father to speak. In a swift survey, his features transfixed at first with astonishment, then glowing with pride, the father half rose from his chair, as if in an impulse to embrace the prodigal. But he paused. He felt that something under his control was getting out of his control. He felt that he had been tricked. The boy must have been well for a long time. Yes! But he was well! That was the vital point. He was well, and magnificent in his vigor.

The father made another movement; and still Jack was waiting, inquiring yet not advancing. And John Wingfield, Sr. wished that he had gone to the station; he wished that he had paid a visit to Arizona. This thought working in his mind supplied Jack's attitude with an aspect which made the father hesitate and then drop back into his chair, confused and uncertain for the first time in his own office.

"Well, Jack, you--you surely do look cured!" he said awkwardly. "You see, I--I was a little surprised to see you at the office. I sent the limousine for you, thinking you would want to go straight to the house and wash off the dust of travel. Didn't you connect?"

"Yes, thank you, father--and when you didn't meet me--"

"I--I was very busy. I meant to, but something interrupted--I--" The father stopped, confounded by his own hesitation.

"Of course," said Jack. He spoke deferentially, understandingly. "I know how busy you always are."

Yet the tone was such to John Wingfield, Sr.'s ears that he eyed Jack cautiously, sharply, in the expectancy that almost any kind of undisciplined force might break loose from this muscular giant whom he was trying to reconcile with the Jack whom he had last seen.

"I thought I'd stretch my legs, so I came over to the store to see how it

had grown," said Jack. "I don't interrupt--for a moment?"

He sat down on the chair opposite his father's and laid his faded cowpuncher hat and the rose on the desk. They looked odd in the company of the pushbuttons and the pile of papers in that neutral-toned room which was chilling in its monotony of color. And though Jack was almost boyishly penitent, in the manner of one who comes before parental authority after he has been in mischief, still John Wingfield, Sr. could not escape the dead weight of an impression that he was speaking to a stranger and not to his own flesh and blood. He wished now that he had shown affection on Jack's entrance. He had a desire to grip the brown hand that was on the edge of the desk fingering the rose stem; but the lateness of the demonstration, its futility in making up for his previous neglect, and some subtle influence radiating from Jack's person, restrained him. It was apparent that Jack might sit on in silence indefinitely; in a desert silence.

"Well, Jack, I hear you had a ranch," said the father, with a faint effort at jocularly.

"Yes, and a great crop of alfalfa," answered Jack, happily.

"And it seems that all the time you were away you have never used your allowance, so it has just been piling up for you."

"I didn't need it. I had quite sufficient from the income of my mother's estate."

"Yes--your mother--I had forgotten!"

"Naturally, I preferred to use that, when I was of so little service to you unless I got strong, as you said," Jack said, very quietly.

Now came another silence, the silence of luminous, unsounded depths concealing that in the mind which has never been spoken or even taken form. Jack's garden of words had dried up, as his ranch would dry up for want of water. He rose to go, groping for something that should express proper contrition for wasted years, but it refused to come. He picked up the rose and the hat, while the father regarded him with stony wonder which said: "Are you mine, or are you not? What is the nature of this new strength? On what will it turn?"

For Jack's features had set with a strange firmness and his eyes, looking into his father's, had a steady light. It seemed as if he might stalk out of the office forever, and nothing could stop him. But suddenly he flashed his smile; he had looked about searching for a talisman and found it in the rose, which set his garden of words abloom again.

"This room is so bare it must be lonely for you," he said. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to cheer it up a bit? To have this rose in a vase on your table where you could see it, instead of riding about in an empty automobile box?"

"Why, there is a whole cold storage booth full of them down on the first floor!" said the father.

"Yes, I saw them in their icy prison under the electric light bulbs. The beads of water on them were like tears of longing to get out for the joy of their swan song under a woman's smiles or beside a sick bed," said

Jack, in the glow of real enthusiasm.

"Good line for the ad writer!" his father exclaimed, instinctively. "You always did have fanciful ideas, Jack."

"Yes, I suppose I have!" he said, with some surprise and very thoughtfully. "I suppose that I was born with them and never weeded them out."

"No doubt!" and the father frowned.

Surveying the broad shoulders before him, he was thinking how nothing but aimlessness and fantasies and everything out of harmony with the career to come had been encouraged in the son. But he saw soberness coming into Jack's eyes and with it the pressure of a certain resoluteness of purpose. And now Jack spoke again, a trifle sadly, as if guessing his father's thoughts.

"It will be a case of weeding for me in the future, won't it?" he asked wanly, as he rose. "I am full of foolish ideas that are just bound to run away with me."

"Jack! Jack!" John Wingfield, Sr. put his hands out to the shoulders of his son and gripped them strongly, and for a second let his own weight half rest on that sturdy column which he sensed under the grip. His pale face, the paleness of the type that never tans, flushed. "Jack, come!" he said.

He permitted himself something like real dramatic feeling as he signalled his son to follow him out of the office and led the way to a corner of one of the balconies where, under the light from the glass roof of the great central court, he could see down the tiers of floors to the jewelry counter which sparkled at the bottom of the well.

"Look! look!" he exclaimed, rubbing his palms together with a peculiar crisp sound. "All selling my goods! All built from the little store where I began as a clerk!"

"It's--it's immense!" gasped Jack; and he felt a dizziness and confusion in gazing at this kind of an abyss.

"And it's only beginning! It's to go on growing and growing! You see why I wanted you to be strong, Jack; why it would not do to be weak if you had all this responsibility."

This was a form of apology for his farewell to Jack, but the message was the same: He had not wanted a son who should be of his life and heart and ever his in faults and illnesses. This was the recognizable one of the shadows between them now recalled. He had wanted a fresh physical machine into which he could blow the breath of his own masterful being and instil the cunning of his experience. He saw in this straight, clean-limbed youth at his side the hope of Jack's babyhood fulfilled, in the projection of his own ego as a living thing after he himself was gone.

"And it is to go on growing and growing, in my name and your name--John Wingfield!"

Jack was swallowing spasmodically; he moistened his lips; he grasped the balcony railing so tight that his knuckles were white knobs on the bronze

back of his hand. The father in his enthusiasm hardly noticed this.

"What couldn't I have done," he added, "if I had had all this to begin with! All that you will have to begin with!"

Jack managed a smile, rather thin and wavering.

"Yes, I am going to try my best."

"All I ask! You have me for a teacher and I know one or two little things!" said the father, fairly grinning in the transmission of his joke. "Now, you must be short on clothes," he added; "so you can get something ready-made downstairs while you have some making at Thompson's."

"Don't you buy your clothes, your best clothes, I mean, in your own store?" Jack asked. It was his first question in getting acquainted with his future property.

"No. We cater to a little bigger class of trade--one of the many twists of the business," was the answer. "And now we'll meet at dinner, shall we, and have a good long talk," he concluded, closing the interview and turning to the door, his mind snapping back to the matter he was about to take up when he had been interrupted with more eagerness than ever, now that his egoism thrilled with a still greater purpose.

"I--I left my hat on your desk," Jack explained, as he followed his father into the office.

"Well, you don't want to be carrying packages about," said John Wingfield, Sr. "That is hardly the fashion in New York, though John Wingfield's son can make it so if he wants to. I'll have that flat-brimmed western one sent up to the house and you can fit out with another when you go downstairs for clothes. That is, I suppose you will want to keep this as a memento, eh?" and he held out the cowpuncher, sweeping it with a sardonic glance.

"No," Jack answered decisively, out of the impulse that came with the sight of the veteran companion that had shielded him from the sun on the trail. It was good to have any kind of an impulse after his giddiness on the balcony at sight of all the phantasmagoria of detail that he must master.

If he were to be equal to this future there must be an end of temptation. He must shake himself free of the last clinging bit of chrysalis of the old life. His amazed father saw the child of the desert, where convention is made by your fancy and the supply of water in your canteen, go to the window and raise the sash. Leaning out, he let the hat drop into Broadway, with his eyes just over the line of the ledge while he watched it fall, dipping and gliding, to the feet of a messenger boy, who picked it up, waved it gleefully aloft before putting it over his cap, and with mock strides of grandeur went his way.

"That gave him a lot of pleasure--and a remarkably quick system for delivering goods, wasn't it?" said Jack, cheerfully.

"Yes, I should say so!" assented his father, returning to his seat.

"Dinner at seven!" he called before the door closed; and as his finger sought one of the push-buttons it rested for a moment on the metal edge

of the socket, his head bowed, while an indefinable emotion, mixed of prophecy and recollection, must have fluttered through the routine channels of his vigorous mind.

XXV

"BUT WITH YOU, 'YES, SIR'"

As Jack came out of the office, Mortimer appeared from an adjoining room in furtive, mouselike curiosity.

"Not much damage done!" said Jack, in happy relief from the ordeal. "I am without a hat, but I have the rose." He held it up before Mortimer's worn, kindly face that had been so genuine in welcome. "Yes, I must have kept it to decorate you, Peter!"

Ineffectually, in timorous confusion, the old secretary protested while Jack fastened it in his buttonhole.

"And you are going to help me, aren't you, Peter?" Jack went on, seriously. "You are going to hold up a finger of warning when I get off the course. I am to be practical, matter-of-fact; there's to be an end to all fantastic ideas."

An end to all fantastic ideas! But it was hardly according to the gospel of the matter-of-fact to take Burleigh, the fitter, out to luncheon. Jack might excuse himself on the ground that he had not yet begun his apprenticeship and had several hours of freedom before his first lesson at dinner. This ecstasy of a recess, perhaps, made him lay aside the derby, which the clerk said was very becoming, and choose a softer head-covering with a bit of feather in the band, which the clerk, with positive enthusiasm, said was still more becoming. At all events, it was easy on his temples, while the derby was stiff and binding and conducive to a certain depression of spirits.

Burleigh, the fitter, was almost as old as Mortimer. He rose to the exceptional situation, his eyes lighting as he surveyed the form to be clothed with a professional gratification unsurpassed by that of Dr. Bennington in plotting Jack's chest with a stethoscope.

"Yes, sir, we will have that dinner-jacket ready to-night, sir, depend upon it--and couldn't I show you something in cheviots?"

Jack broke another precedent. A Wingfield, he decided to patronize the Wingfield store, because he saw how supremely happy every order made Burleigh.

"You can do it as well as Thompson's?" he asked.

"With you, yes, sir--though Thompson is a great expert on round shoulders. But with you, yes, sir!"

When the business of measuring was over, while Burleigh peered triumphant over the pile of cloths from which the masterpieces were to be fashioned, Jack said that he had a ripping appetite and he did not see why he and

Burleigh should not appease their hunger in company. Burleigh gasped; then he grinned in abandoned delight and slipped off his shiny coat and little tailor's apron that bristled with pins.

They went to a restaurant of reputation, which Jack said was in keeping with the occasion when a man changed his habits from Arizona simplicity to urban multiplicity of courses. And what did Burleigh like? Burleigh admitted that if he were a plutocrat he would have caviar at least once a day; and caviar appeared in a little glass cup set in the midst of cracked ice, flanked by crisp toast. After caviar came other things to Burleigh's taste. He was having such an awesomely grand feast that he was tongue-tied; but Jack could never eat in silence until he had forgotten how to tell stories. So he told Burleigh stories of the trail and of life in Little Rivers in a way that reflected the desert sunshine in Burleigh's eyes. Burleigh thought that he would like to live in Little Rivers. Almost anyone might after hearing Jack's description, in the joy of its call to himself.

"Now, if you would trust me," said Burleigh, when they left the restaurant, "I should like to send out for some cloths not in stock for a couple of suits. And couldn't I make you up three or four fancy waistcoats, with a little color in them--the right color to go with the cloth? You can carry a little color--decidedly, yes."

"Yes, I rather like color," said Jack, succumbing to temptation, though he felt that the heir to great responsibilities ought to dress in the most neutral of tones.

"And I should like to select the ties to go with the suits and a few shirts, just to carry out my scheme--a kind of professional triumph for me, you see. May I?"

"Go ahead!" said Jack.

"And you can depend on your evening suit to be up in time. But I am going to rush a little broader braid on those ready-made trousers--you can carry that, too," Burleigh concluded.

When they parted Jack turned into Fifth Avenue. Before he had gone a block the bulky eminence of a Fifth Avenue stage awakened his imagination. How could anybody think of confinement in a taxicab when he might ride in the elephant's howdah of that top platform, enjoying mortal superiority over surrounding humanity? Jack hung the howdah with silken streamers and set a mahout's turban on the head of the man on the seat in front of him, while the glistening semi-oval tops of the limousines floating in the mist of the rising grade from Madison Square to Forty-second Street, swarmed and halted in a kind of blind, cramped _pas de quatre_ from cross street to cross street, amid the breaking surge of pedestrians.

"Such a throbbing of machine motion," he thought, "that I don't see how anybody can have an emotion of his own without bumping into somebody else's."

It was a scene of another age and world to him, puzzling, overpowering, dismal, mocking him with a sense of loneliness that he had never felt on the desert. Could he ever catch up with this procession which had all the time been moving on in the five years of his absence? Could he learn to talk and think in the regulated manner of the traffic rules of

convention? The few chums of his brief home school-days were long away from the fellowship of academies; they had settled in their grooves, with established intimacies. If he found his own flock he could claim admission to the fold only with the golden key of his millions, rather than by the password of kindred understanding.

The tripping, finely-clad women, human flower of all the maelstrom of urban toil, in their detachment seemed only to bring up a visualized picture of Mary. What would he not like to do for her! He wished that he could pick up the Waldorf and set it on the other side of the street as a proof of the overmastering desire that possessed him whenever she was in his mind.

And the Doge! He was the wisest man in the world. With a nod of well-considered and easy generosity Jack presented him with the new Public Library. And then all the people on the sidewalks vanished and the buildings melted away into sunswept levels, and the Avenue was a trail down which Mary came on her pony in the resplendent sufficiency of his dreams.

"Great heavens!" he warned himself. "And I am to take my first lesson in running the business this evening! What perfect lunacy comes from mistaking the top of a Fifth Avenue stage for a howdah!"

XXVI

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

How thankful he was that the old brick corner mansion in Madison Avenue, with age alone to recommend its architecture of the seventies--let it stand for what it was--had not been replaced by one of stone freshly polished each year! The butler who opened the door was new and stiffer than the one of the old days; but he saw that the broad hall, with the stairs running across the rear in their second flight, was little more changed than the exterior.

Five years since he had left that hall! He was in the thrall of anticipation incident to seeing old associations with the eyes of manhood. The butler made to take his hat, but Jack, oblivious of the attention, went on to the doorway of the drawing-room, his look centering on a portrait that faced the door. In this place of honor he saw a Gainsborough. He uttered a note of pained surprise.

"There used to be another portrait here. Where is it?" he demanded.

The butler, who had heard that the son of the house was an invalid, had not recovered from his astonishment at the appearance of health of the returned prodigal.

"Upstairs, sir," he answered. "When Mr. Wingfield got this prize last year, sir--"

Though the butler had spoken hardly a dozen words, he became conscious of something atmospheric that made him stop in the confusion of one who finds that he has been garrulous with an explanation that does

not explain.

"Please take this upstairs and bring back the other," said Jack.

"Yes, sir. You will be going to your room, sir, and while--" The butler had a feeling of a troublesome future between two masters.

"Now, please!" said Jack, settling into a chair to wait.

The Gainsborough countess, with her sweeping plumes, her rich, fleshy, soft tones, her charming affectation, which gave you, after the art interest, no more human interest in her than in a draped model, was carried upstairs and back came the picture that it had displaced. The frame still bore at the bottom the title "Portrait of a Lady," under which it had been exhibited at the Salon many years ago. It was by a young artist, young then, named Sargent. He had the courage of his method, this youngster, no less than Hals, who also worked his wonders with little paint when this suited his genius best. The gauze of the gown where it blended with the background at the edge of the line of arm was so thin, seemingly made by a single brush-stroke, that it almost showed the canvas.

A purpose in that gauze: The thinness of transparency of character! The eyes of the portrait alone seemed deep. They were lambent and dark, looking straight ahead inquiringly, yet in the knowledge that no answer to the Great Riddle could change the course of her steps in the blind alley of a life whose tenement walls were lighted with her radiance. You could see through the gown, through the flesh of that frail figure, so lacking in sensuousness yet so glowing with a quiet fire, to the soul itself. She seemed of such a delicate, chaste fragility that she could be shattered by a single harsh touch. There would be no outcry except the tinkle of the fragments. The feelings of anyone who witnessed the breaking and heard the tinkle would be a criterion of his place in the wide margin between nerveless barbarism and sensitive gentility.

"I give! I give! I give!" was her message.

For a long time, he had no measure of it, Jack sat studying the portrait, set clear in many scenes of memory in review. It had been a face as changeable as the travels, ever full of quick lights and quick shadows. He had had flashes of it as it was in the portrait in its very triumph of resignation. He had known it laughing with stories of fancy which she told him; sympathetic in tutorial illumination as she gave him lessons and brought out the meaning of a line of poetry or a painting; beset by the restlessness which meant another period of travel; intense as fire itself, gripping his hands in hers in a defiance of possession; in moods when both its sadness and its playfulness said, "I don't care!" and again, fleeing from his presence to hide her tears.

It was with the new sight of man's maturity and soberness that he now saw his mother, feeling the intangible and indestructible feminine majesty of her; feeling her fragility which had brought forth her living soul in its beauty and impressionableness as a link with the cause of his Odyssey; believing that she was rejoicing in his strength and understanding gloriously that it had only brought him nearer to her.

After he had been to his room to dress he returned to the same chair and settled into the same reverie that was sounding depths of his being that he had never suspected. He was mutely asking her help, asking the support

of her frail, feminine courage for his masculine courage in the battle before him; and little tremors of nervous determination were running through him, when he heard his father's footstep and became conscious of his father's presence in the doorway.

There was a moment, not of hesitation but of completing a thought, before he looked up and rose to his feet. In that moment, John Wingfield, Sr. had his own shock over the change in the room. The muscles of his face twitched in irritation, as if his wife's very frailty were baffling invulnerability. Straightening his features into a mask, his eyes still spoke his emotion in a kind of stare of resentment at the picture.

Then he saw his son's shoulders rising above his own and looked into his son's eyes to see them smiling. Long isolated by his power from clashes of will under the roof of his store or his house, the father had a sense of the rippling flash of steel blades. A word might start a havoc of whirling, burning sentences, confusing and stifling as a desert sandstorm; or it might bring a single killing flash out of gathering clouds.

Thus the two were facing each other in a silence oppressive to both, which neither knew how to break, when relief came in the butler's announcement of dinner. Indeed, by such small, objective interruptions do dynamic inner impulses hang that this little thing may have suppressed the lightnings.

The father was the first to speak. He hoped that a first day in New York had brought Jack a good appetite; certainly, he could see that the store had given him a wonderful fit for a rush order.

XXVII

BY RIGHT OF ANCESTRY

There were to be no stories of Little Rivers at dinner; no questions asked about desert life. This chapter of Jack's career was a past rung of the ladder to John Wingfield, Sr. who was ever looking up to the rungs above. The magnetism and charm with which he won men to his service now turned to the immediate problem of his son, whom he was to refashion according to his ideas.

"Are you ready to settle down?" he asked, half fearful lest that scene in the drawing-room might have wrought a change of purpose.

In answer he was seeing another Jack; a Jack relaxed, amiable, even amenable.

"If you have the patience," said Jack. "You know, father, I haven't a cash-register mind. I'm starting out on a new trail and I am likely to go lame at times. But I mean to be game."

He looked very frankly and earnestly into his father's eyes.

"Wild oats sown! My boy, after all!" thought the father. "Respected his mother! Well, didn't I respect mine? Of course--and let him! It is good

principles. It is right. He has health; that is better than schooling."

In place of the shock of the son's will against his, he was feeling it as a force which might yet act in unison with his. He expanded with the pride of the fortune-builder. He told how a city within a city is created and run; of tentacles of investment and enterprise stretching beyond the store in illimitable ambition; how the ball of success, once it was set rolling, gathered bulk of its own momentum and ever needed closer watching to keep it clear of obstacles.

"And I am to stand on top like a gymnast on a sphere or be rolled under," thought Jack. "And I'll have cloth of gold breeches and a balancing pole tipped with jewels; but--but--"

"A good listener, and that is a lot!" thought the father, happily.

Jack had interrupted neither with questions nor vagaries. He was gravely attentive, marveling over this story of a man's labor and triumph.

"And the way to learn the business is not from talks by me," said his father, finally. "You cannot begin at the top."

"No! no!" said Jack, aghast. "The top would be quite too insecure, too dizzy to start with."

"Right!" the father exclaimed, decidedly. "You must learn each department of itself, and then how it works in with the others. It will be drudgery, but it is best--right at the bottom!"

"Yes, father, where there is no danger of a fall."

"You will be put on an apprentice salary of ten dollars a week."

"And I'll try to earn it."

"Of course, you understand that the ten is a charge against the store. That's business. But as for a private allowance, you are John Wingfield's son and--"

"I think I have enough of my own for the present," Jack put in.

"As you wish. But if you need more, say the word. And you shall name the department where you are to begin. Did you get any idea of which you'd choose from looking the store over to-day?"

"That's very considerate of you!" Jack answered. He was relieved and pleased and made his choice quickly, though he mentioned it half timidly as if he feared that it might be ridiculous, so uncertain was he about the rules of apprenticeship.

"You see I have been used to the open air and I'd like a little time in which to acclimatize myself in New York. Now, all those big wagons that bring the goods in and the little wagons that take them out--there is an out-of-door aspect to the delivery service. Is that an important branch to learn?"

"Very--getting the goods to the customer--very!"

"Then I'll start with that and sort of a roving commission to look over

the other departments."

"Good! We will consider it settled. And, Jack, every man's labor that you can save and retain efficiency--that is the trick! Organization and ideas, that's what makes the employer and so makes success. Why, Jack, if you could cut down the working costs in the delivery department or improve the service at the present cost, why--" John Wingfield, Sr. rubbed the palms of his hands together delightedly.

Everything was going finely--so far. He added that proviso of _so far_ instinctively.

"Besides, Jack," he went on, changing to another subject that was equally vital to his ego, "this name of Wingfield is something to work for. I was the son of a poor New England clergyman, but there is family back of it; good blood, good blood! I was not the first John Wingfield and you shall not be the last!"

He rose from the table, bidding the servant to bring the coffee to the drawing-room. With the same light, quick step that he ascended the flights in the store, he led the way downstairs, his face alive with the dramatic anticipation that it had worn when he took Jack out of the office to look down from the balcony of the court.

"Ah, we have something besides the store, Jack!" he was saying, in the very exultation of the pride of possession, as he went to the opposite side of the mantel from the mother's portrait and turned on the reflector over a picture.

Jack saw a buccaneer under the brush of the gold and the shadows of Spain; a robust, ready figure on fighting edge, who seemed to say, "After you, sir; and, then, pardon me, but it's your finish, sir!"

"It's a Velasquez!" Jack exclaimed.

"And you knew that at a glance!" said his father.

"Why, yes!"

"Not many Velasquezes in America," said the father, thinking, incidentally, that his son would not have to pay the dealers a heavy toll for an art education, while he revelled in a surprise that he was evidently holding back.

"Or many better Velasquezes than this, anywhere," added Jack. "What mastery! What a gift from heaven that was vouchsafed to a human being to paint like that!"

He was in a spell, held no less by the painter's art than by the subject.

"Absolutely a certified Velasquez, bought from the estate of Count Galting," continued his father. "I paid a cool two hundred and fifty thousand for it. And that isn't all, Jack, that isn't all that you are going to drudge for as an apprentice in the delivery department. I know what I am talking about. I wasn't fooled by any of the genealogists who manufacture ancestors. I had it all looked up by four experts, checking one off against another."

"Yes," answered Jack, absently. He had hardly heard his father's words.

In fervent scrutiny he was leaning forward, his weight on the ball of the foot, the attitude of the man in the picture.

"And who do you think he is--who?" pursued John Wingfield, Sr.

"A man who fought face to face with the enemy; a man whom men followed! Velasquez caught all that!" answered Jack.

"That old fellow was a great man in his day--a great Englishman--and his name was John Wingfield! He was your ancestor and mine!"

After a quick breath of awakening comprehension Jack took a step nearer the portrait, all his faculties in the throes of beaming inquiry of Senor Don't Care and desert freedom, in the self-same, alert readiness of pose as the figure he was facing.

"They say I resemble him!" The father repeated that phrase which he had used in benignant satisfaction to many a guest, but now seeing with greedy eyes a likeness between his son and the ancestor deeper than mere resemblance of feature, he added: "But you--you, Jack, you're the dead spit of him!"

"Yes," said Jack, as if he either were not surprised or were too engrossed to be interested. To the buccaneer's "After you, sir; and, then, your finish, sir!" he seemed to be saying, in the fully-lived spirit of imagination: "A good epitaph, sir! I'll see that it is written on your tombstone!"

The father, singularly affected by the mutual and enjoyed challenge that he was witnessing, half expected to see a sword leap out of the scabbard of the canvas and another from Jack's side.

"If he had lived in our day," said the father, "he would have built himself a great place; he would have been the head of a great institution, just as I am."

"Two centuries is a long way to fetch a comparison," answered Jack, hazily, out of a corner of his brain still reserved for conversation, while all the rest of it was centered elsewhere. "He might have been a cow-puncher, a revolutionist, or an aviator. Certainly, he would never have been a camp-follower."

"At all events, a man of power. It's in the blood!"

"It's in the blood!" Jack repeated, with a sort of staring, lingering emphasis. He was hearing Mary's protest on the pass; her final, mysterious reason for sending him away; her "It's not in the blood!" There could be no connection between this and the ancestor; yet, in the stirred depths of his nature, probing the inheritance in his veins, her hurt cry had come echoing to his ears.

"Why, I would have paid double the price rather than not have got that picture!" the father went on. "There is a good deal of talk about family trees in this town and a strong tendency in some quarters for second generations of wealth to feel a little superiority over the first generation. Here I come along with an ancestor eight generations back, painted by Velasquez. I tell you it was something of a sensation when I exhibited him in the store!"

"You--you--" and Jack glanced at his father perplexedly; "you exhibited him in the store!" he said.

"Why, yes, as a great Velasquez I had just bought. I didn't advertise him as my ancestor, of course. Still, the fact got around; yes, the fact got around, Jack."

While Jack studied the picture, his father studied Jack, whose face and whose manner of blissful challenge to all comers in the unconcern of easy fatality and ready blade seemed to grow more and more like that of the first John Wingfield. At length, Jack passed over to the other side of the mantel and turned on the reflector over the portrait of his mother; and, in turn, standing silently before her all his militancy was gone and in its place came the dreamy softness with which he would watch the Eternal Painter cloud-rolling on the horizon. And he was like her not in features, not in the color of hair or eyes, but in a peculiar sensitiveness, distinguished no less by a fatalism of its own kind than was the cheery aggressiveness of the buccaneer.

"Yes, father," he said, "that old ruffian forebear of ours could swear and could kill. But he had the virtue of truth. He could not act or live a lie. And I guess something else--how supremely gentle he could be before a woman like her. Velasquez brought out a joyous devil and Sargent brought out a soul!"

John Wingfield, Sr., who stood by the grate, was drumming nervously on the mantel. The drumming ceased. The fingers rested rigid and white on the dark wood. Alive to another manifestation of the lurking force in his son, he hastened to change the subject.

"I had almost forgotten that you always had a taste for art, Jack."

"Yes, from her;" which was hardly changing the subject.

"As for the first John Wingfield, you may be sure that I wanted to know everything there was to know about the old fellow," said the father. "So I set a lot of bookworms looking up the archives of the English and Spanish governments and digging around in the libraries after material. Then I had it all put together in proper shape by a literary sharp."

"You have that!" cried Jack. "You have the framework from which you can build the whole story of him--the story of how he fought and how Velasquez came to paint him? Oh, I want to read it!" With an unexplored land between gilt-tooled covers under his arm he went upstairs early, in the transport of wanderlust that had sent him away over the sand from Little Rivers. _Si, si_, Firio, outward bound, camp under the stars! If Senor Don't Care's desert journeys were over--and he had no thought but that they were--there was no ban on travelling in fancy over sea trails in the ancestor's company.

Jack was with the buccaneer when he boarded the enemy at the head of his men; with him before the Board of Admiralty when, a young captain of twenty-two, he refused to lie to save his skin; with him when, in answer to the scolding of Elizabeth, then an old woman, he said: "It is glorious for one who fought so hard for Your Majesty to have the recognition even of Your Majesty's chiding in answer to the protest of the Spanish ambassador," which won Elizabeth's reversal of the Admiralty's decision; with him when, in a later change of fortune, he went to the court of Spain for once on a mission which required a sheathed blade; with him

when the dark eye of Velasquez, who painted men and women of his time while his colleagues were painting Madonnas, glowed with a discoverer's joy at sight of this fair-haired type of the enemy, whom he led away to his studio.

More than once was there mention of the fact that this terrible fighter was gentle with women and fonder of the company of children than of statesmen or courtiers. He had married the daughter of a great merchant, a delicate type of beauty; the last to fascinate a buccaneer, according to the gossips of the time. Rumor had it that he had taken her for the wherewithal to pay the enormous debts contracted in his latest exploit. To disprove this he went to sea in a temper with a frigate and came back laden with the treasure of half a dozen galleons, to find that his wife had died at the birth of a son. He promised himself to settle down for good; but the fog of London choked lungs used to soft airs; he heard the call of the sun and was away again to seek adventure in the broiling reaches of the Caribbean. A man of restless, wild spirit, breathing inconsistencies incomprehensible to the conventions of Whitehall! And his son had turned a Cromwellian, who, in poverty, sought refuge in America when Charles II. came to the throne; and from him, in the vicissitudes of five generations, the poor clergyman was descended.

Thus ran the tale in its completeness. The end of the ancestor's career had been in keeping with its character and course. He had been spared the slow decay of faculties in armchair reminiscence. He had gone down in his ship without striking his colors, fighting the Spaniards one to three. When Jack closed the cover on the last page tenderly and in enraptured understanding, it was past midnight.

The spaciousness of the sea under clouds of battle smoke had melted into the spaciousness of the desert under the Eternal Painter's canopy. Then four walls of a bedroom in Madison Avenue materialized, shutting out the horizon; a carpet in place of sand formed the floor; and in place of a blanket roll was a canopied bed upon which a servant had laid out a suit of pajamas. In the impulse of a desire to look into the face of the first John Wingfield in the light of all he now knew, Jack went downstairs, and in the silence of the house drank in the portrait again.

"You splendid old devil, you!" he breathed, understandingly. "How should you like to start out delivering goods with me in the morning?"

XXVIII

JACK GETS A RAISE

The next morning Jack went down town with his father in the limousine. About an hour later, after he had been introduced to the head of the delivery division, he was on his way up town beside a driver of one of the wagons on the Harlem route. He was in the uniform of the Wingfield light cavalry, having obtained a cap with embroidered initials on the front. The driver was like to burst from inward mirth, and Jack was regarding the prospect with veritable juvenile zest.

At dinner that evening John Wingfield, Jr. narrated his experiences of the day to John Wingfield, Sr. with the simplicity and verisimilitude

that always make for both realism and true comedy.

"But, Jack, you took me too literally! It is hardly in keeping with your position! You--"

"Why, I thought that the only way to know the whole business was to play every part. Didn't you ever deliver packages in person in your early days?"

"I can't say that I did!" the father admitted wryly.

"Then it seems to me that you missed one of the most entertaining and instructive features," Jack continued. "You cannot imagine the majestic feminine disdain with which you may be informed that a five-cent bar of soap should be delivered at the back door instead of the front door. The most indignant example was a red-haired woman who was doing her own work in a flat. She fairly blazed. She wanted to know if I didn't know what dumb-waiters were for."

"And what did you say?" the father asked wearily; for the ninth John Wingfield had a limited sense of humor.

"Oh, I try, however irritating the circumstances, to be most courtly, for the honor of the store," said Jack. "I told her that I was very sorry and I would speak to you in person about the mistake."

"You mean that you admitted who you were?"

"Oh, no! The red-haired woman laughed and took the package in at the front door," Jack responded. Anybody in Little Rivers would have understood just how he looked and smiled and why it was that the red-haired woman laughed.

"Jack--now, really, Jack, this is not quite dignified!" expostulated the father. "What do you think your ancestor would say to it?"

"I suspect that he would have made an even more ingratiating bow to the lady than I could," said Jack, thoughtfully. "They had the grand manner better developed in his day than in ours."

In the ensuing weeks John Wingfield, Sr. dwelt in a kind of infernal wonder about his son. He was cheered when some friend of his world who had met Jack in the garb of his caste, as fitted by Burleigh, would say: "Fine, strapping son you have there, Wingfield!" He was abashed and dumfounded when Jack announced that he had taken Mamie Devore, who sold culinary utensils in the basement, out to luncheon with her "steady company," Joe Mathewson, driver of one of the warehouse trucks.

"They were a little awed at first," Jack explained, "but they soon became natural. I don't know anything pleasanter than making people feel perfectly natural, do you? You see, Joe and Mamie are very real, father, and most businesslike; an ambitious, upstanding pair. They're going to have two thousand dollars saved before they marry."

"I don't believe that a woman ought to work out after she's married," was the way Joe put it. And Mamie, with her eyes fairly devouring him, snapped back: "No, she'd have enough to do looking after you, you big old bluff!"

"Mamie is a wiry little thing and Joe is a heavyweight, with a hand almost as big as a baseball mit. That's partly why their practical romance is so fascinating. Why, it's wonderful the stories that are playing themselves out in that big store, father! Well, you see Joe is on a stint--two thousand before he gets Mamie. He had been making money on the side nights in boxing bouts. But Mamie stopped the fighting. She said she was not going to have a husband with the tip of his nose driven up between his eyes like a bull-dog's. And what do you imagine they are going to do with the two thousand? Buy a farm! Isn't that corking!"

John Wingfield, Sr. shrugged his shoulders, but did not express his feelings with any remark. It seemed to him that Jack must have been born without a sense of proportion.

With the breaking of spring, when gardens were beginning to sprout, Jack broadened his study to the trails of Westchester, Long Island, and New Jersey, coursed by the big automobile vans of the suburban delivery. To the people of the store, whose streets he traversed at will in unremitting wonder over its varied activities, he had brought something of the same sensation that he had to an Arizona town. He came to know the employees by name, even as he had his neighbors in Little Rivers. He nodded to the clerks as he passed down an aisle. They watched for his coming and brightened with his approach and met his smile with their smiles. In their idle moments he would stop and talk of the desert.

Although he was learning to like the store as a community of human beings its business was as the works of a watch, when all he knew was how to tell the time by the face. But he tried hard to learn; tried until his head was dizzy with a whirl of dissociated facts, which he knew ought to be associated, and under the call of his utter restlessness would disappear altogether for two or three days.

"Relieving the pressure! It's a safety-valve so I shan't blow up," he explained to his father, sadly.

"Take your time," said John Wingfield, Sr., having in mind a recent talk with Dr. Bennington.

Jack listened faithfully to his father's clear-cut lessons. He asked questions which only made his father sigh; for they had little to do with the economy of working costs. All his suggestions were extravagant; they would contribute to the joy of the employees, but not to profit. And other questions made his father frown in devising answers which were in the nature of explanations. Born of his rambling and humanly observant relations with every department, they led into the very heart of things in that mighty organization. There were times when it was hard for him to control his indignation. There were trails leading to the room with the glass-paneled door marked "Private" which he half feared to pursue.

Thus, between father and son remained that indefinable chasm of thought and habit which filial duty or politeness could not bridge. No stories of the desert were ever told at home, though it was so easy to tell them to Burleigh or Mathewson, those contrasts in a pale fitter of clothes and a herculean rustler of dry-goods boxes. But echoes of the tales came to the father through his assistants. He had the feeling of some stranger spirit in his own likeness moving there in the streets of his city under the talisman of a consanguinity that was nominal. One day he put an inquiry to the general manager concretely, though in a way to avoid the appearance of asking another's opinion about his own son.

"He has your gift of winning men to him. There is no denying his popularity with the force," said the general manager, who was a diplomat.

The same question was put to Peter Mortimer.

"We all love him. I think a lot of people in the store would march out to the desert after him," said Mortimer, with real rejoicing in his candor and courage. Indeed, of late he had been developing cheer as well as courage, imbibing both, perhaps, from the roses in the vase on his employer's desk. Jack had ordered a fresh bunch put there every day; and when employees were sick packages of grapes and bunches of flowers came to them, in Little Rivers fashion, with J.W. on the card, as if they had come from the head of the firm himself.

"Maybe Jack will soften the old man a little," ran a whisper from basement to roof. For the battalions called him "Jack," rather than "Mr. Wingfield," just as Little Rivers had.

"The boy's good nature isn't making him too familiar with the employees?" was a second question which the father had asked both the general manager and Mortimer.

"No. That is the surprising thing--the gift of being friendly without being familiar," answered the manager.

"He's got a kind of self-respect that induces respect in others," said Peter.

John Wingfield, Sr. was the proprietor of the store, but the human world of the store began to feel a kind of proprietorship in Jack, while its guardian interest in helping him in his mistakes was common enough to be a conspiracy.

And the callouses were gone from his hands. There was no longer a dividing line between tan and white on his forehead. No outward symbol of the desert clung to his person except the moments of the far vision of distances in his eyes. Superficially, on the Avenue he would have been taken for one of his caste.

But tossing a cowpuncher hat out of a window into Broadway was easier than tossing a thing out of mind. He sat up nights to write to Mary. Letter after letter he poured out as a diary of his experiences in his new world, letters breathing a pupil's hope of learning and all that pupil's sorry vagaries. No answer ever came, not even to the most appealing ones about his most adventurous conflicts with the dinosaur. He felt the chagrin of the army of unpublished novelists who lay their hearts bare on the stone slab of the dissectors in a publisher's office. He might as well have thrown all he wrote into the waste-basket so far as any result was concerned; yet he kept on writing as if it were his glorious duty to report to her as his superior. But he found a more responsive correspondent in Jim Galway; and this was the letter he received:

"DEAR JACK:

"The whole valley is not yet sprouting with dates as you said it would from your thinking of us. Maybe we didn't use the right seed. Your ranch is still called Jack's ranch, and Firio is doing his best and about the

best I ever knew in an Indian. But as you always said, Indians are mostly human, like the rest of us, barring a sort of born twist in their intellect for which they aren't responsible. You see, Jack, a lot of your sayings still live with us, though you are gone.

"Well, Firio keeps your P.D. exercised and won't let anybody but himself ride him. He says you will need him. For you can't budge the stubborn little cuss. He declares you're coming back. When we tell him you're worth twenty millions and he's plumb full of primitive foolishness and general ignorance of the outside world, he says, ' _Si_ , he will come back!' like some heathen oracle that's strong on repetition and weak on vocabulary.

"Of course you know about the new addition to our citizenship, John Prather, that double of yours that you didn't happen to meet. And I might mention that by this time, after we've seen so much of him, we agree with the Doge that he doesn't look a bit like you. Well, he's making a fine ranch across the road from you, but hiring all his work done, which ain't exactly according to Little Rivers custom, as you will remember. The Doge sets a lot by him, though I can't see how there's much in common between them. This fellow's not full of all that kind of scholastic persiflage that you are, Jack. He's so all-fired practical his joints would crack if he wasn't so oily; and he's up to old man Lefferts' pretty often.

"He goes to Phoenix a good deal. When I was there the other day I heard he was circulating around among the politicians in his quiet way, and I saw him and Pete Leddy hobnobbing together. I didn't like that. But when I told the Doge of it he said he guessed there wasn't much real hobnobbing. The Doge is certainly strong for Prather. Another thing I heard was that, after all, old man Lefferts' two partners aren't dead, and Prather's been hunting them up.

"Come to think of it, I didn't tell you that Pete Leddy and some of the gang have been back in town. Of course we have every confidence in the Doge, he's been so fair to this community. Still, some of us can't help having our private suspicions, considering what a lot we have at stake. And four or five of us was talking the other night, when suddenly we all agreed how you'd shine in any trouble, and if there was going to be any--not that there is--we wished you were here.

"Well, Jack, the pass hasn't changed and the sunsets are just as grand as ever and the air just as free. The pass won't have changed and the sunsets will be doing business at the old stand when the antiquaries are digging up the remote civilization of Little Rivers and putting it in a high scale because they ran across a pot of Mrs. Galway's jam in the ruins--the same hifalutin compliment being your own when you were nursing your wound, as you will remember.

"Here's wishing you luck from the whole town, way out here in nowhere.

"As ever yours,

"James R. Galway.

"P.S. Belvy Smith wants to know if you won't write just one story. I told her you were too busy for such nonsense now. But she refuses to believe it. She says being busy doesn't matter to you. She says the stories just pop out. So I transmit her request. J.R.G."

"P.D. waiting!" breathed Jack. "No changing Firio! He is like the pass. I wonder how Wrath of God and Jag Ear are!"

He wrote a story for Belvy. He wrote to Firio in resolute assertion that he would never require the services of P.D. again, when he knew that Firio, despite the protests, would still keep P.D. fit for the trail. He wrote to Jim Galway how immersed he was in his new career, but that he might come for a while--for a little while, with emphasis--if ever Jim wired that he was needed.

"That was a good holiday--a regular week-end debauch away from the shop!" he thought, when the letters were finished.

Soon after this came an event which, for the first time, gave John Wingfield, Sr. a revelation of the side of his son that had won Little Rivers and the interest of the rank and file of the store. Among Jack's many suggestions, in his aim to carry out his father's talk about the creative business sense the first night they were together, had been one for a suburban clubbing delivery system. It had been dismissed as fantastic, but Jack had asked that it be given a trial and his father had consented. Its basis was a certain confidence in human nature. Jack and his father had dined together the evening after the master of the push-buttons had gone through the final reports of the experiment.

"Well, Jack, I am going to raise your salary to a hundred a week," the father announced.

"On the ground that if you pay me more I might make myself worth more?" Jack asked respectfully.

"No, as a matter of business. Whenever any man makes two dollars for the store, he gets one dollar and I keep the other. That is the basis of my success--others earning money for me. Your club scheme is a go. As the accountant works it out, it has brought a profit of two hundred a week."

"Then I have done something worth while, really?" Jack asked, eagerly, but half sceptical of such good fortune.

"Yes. You have created a value. You have used your powers of observation and your brain. That's the thing that makes a few men employers while the multitude remains employees."

"Father! Then I am not quite hopeless?"

"Hopeless! My son hopeless! No, no! I didn't expect you to learn the business in a week, or a month, or even a year. Time! time!"

Nor did John Wingfield, Sr. wish his son to develop too rapidly. Now that he was so sure of beating threescore and ten, while retaining the full possession of his faculties, if he followed the rules of longevity, he would not have welcomed a son who could spring into the saddle at once. He wanted to ride alone. He who had never shared his power with anyone! He who had never admitted anyone into even a few shares of company partnership in his concern! Time! time! The boy would never fall heir to undivided responsibility before he was forty. John Wingfield, Sr. was pleased with himself; pleased over a good sign; and he could not deny that he was pleased at the sudden change in Jack. For he saw Jack's eyes sparkling into his own; sparkling with comradeship and spontaneous

gratification. Was the boy to be his in thought and purpose, after all? Yes, of course; yes, inevitably, with the approach of maturity. Gradually the flightiness of his upbringing would wear off down to the steel, the hard-tempered, paternal steel.

"You can scarcely realize what a fight it has been for me until you know the life I led out in Arizona, getting strong for you and the store," Jack began.

"Strong for me! For the store! Yes, Jack!" There was an emphasis on the subjective personal pronoun--for him; for the store!

The father's face beamed a serene delight. This Jack accepted as the expression of sympathy and understanding which he had craved. It was to him an inspiration of fellowship that set the well of his inner being in overflow and the force of his personality, which the father had felt uncannily before the mother's picture, became something persuasive in its radiance rather than something held in leash as a threatening and volcanic element. Now he could talk as freely and happily of the desert to his father as to Burleigh and Mathewson. He told of the long rides; of Firio and Wrath of God. He made the tinkle of Jag Ear's bells heard in the silence of the dining-room as it was heard in the silences of the trail. He mentioned how he was afraid to come back after he was strong.

"Afraid?" queried his father.

"Yes. But I was coming--coming when, at the top of the pass, I saw Little Rivers for the first time."

He sketched his meeting with Mary Ewold; the story of the town and the story of Jasper Ewold as he knew it, now glancing at his father, now seeming to see nothing except visualization of the pictures of his story. The father, looking at the table-cloth, at times playing with his coffee-spoon, made no comment.

"And that first night I saw that Jasper Ewold had met me somewhere before. But--" he went on after going back to the incident of the villa in his childhood--"that hardly explained. How could he remember the face of a grown man from the face of a boy? Jasper Ewold! Do you recall ever having met him? He must have known my mother. Perhaps he knew you, though why he should not have told me I don't know."

"Yes, yes--Jasper Ewold," said the father. "I knew him in his younger days. His was an old family up in Burbridge, the New England town where I came from. Too much college, too much travel, as I remember, characterized Jasper Ewold. No settled point of view; and I judge from what you say that he must have run through his patrimony. One of the ups and downs of the world, Jack. And he never mentioned that he had met me?"

"No."

"Probably a part of that desert notion of freemasonry in keeping pasts a secret. But why did you stay on after you had recovered from your wound?" he asked penetratingly, though he was looking again at the bottom of his coffee-cup.

"For a reason that comes to a man but once in his life!" Jack answered.

Had the father looked up--it was a habit of his in listening to any

report to lower his eyes, his face a mask--he might have seen Jack's face in the supremacy of emotion, as it was when he had called up to Mary from the canyon and when he had pleaded with her on the pass. But John Wingfield, Sr. could not mistake the message of a voice vibrating with all the force of a being let free living over the scene. With the shadows settling over his eyes, Jack came to her answer and to the finality of her cry:

"It's not in the blood!"

The only sound was a slight tinkle of a spoon against the coffee-cup. Looking at his father he saw a nervous flutter in his cheeks, his lips hard set, his brow drawn down; and the rigidity of the profile was such that Jack was struck by the shiver of a thought that it must have been like his own as others said it was when he had gripped Pedro Nogales's arm. But this passed quickly, leaving, however, in its trail an expression of shock and displeasure.

"So it was the girl, that kept you--you were in love!" John Wingfield, Sr. exclaimed, tensely.

"Yes, I was--I am! You have it, father, the unchangeable all of it! I face a wall of mystery. 'It's not in the blood!' she said, as if it were some bar sinister. What could she have meant?"

In the fever of baffled intensity crying for light and help, he was sharing the secret that had beset him relentlessly and giving his father the supreme confidence of his heart. Leaning across the table he grasped his father's hand, which lay still and unresponsive and singularly cold for a second. Then John Wingfield, Sr. raised his other hand and patted the back of Jack's hesitantly, as if uncertain how to deal with this latest situation that had developed out of his son's old life. Finally he looked up good-temperedly, deprecatingly.

"Well, well, Jack, I almost forgot that you are young. It's quite a bad case!" he said.

"But what did she mean? Can you guess? I have thought of it so much that it has meant a thousand wild things!" Jack persisted desperately.

"Come! come!" the father rallied him. "Time, time!"

He gripped the hand that was gripping his and swung it free of the table with a kindly shake. All the effective charm of his personality which he never wasted, the charm that could develop out of the mask to gain an end when the period of listening was over, was in play.

"She excited the opposition of the strength in you," he said. "You ask what did she mean? It is hard to tell what a woman means, but I judge that she meant that it was not in her blood to marry a fellow who went about fighting duels and breaking arms. She would like a more peaceful sort; and, yes, anything that came into her mind leaped out and you were mystified by her strange exclamation!"

"Perhaps. I suppose that may be it. It was just myself, just my devil!" Jack assented limply.

"Time! time! All this will pass."

Jack could not answer that commonplace with one of his own, that it would not pass; he could only return the pressure when his father, rising and coming around the table, slipped his arm about the son in a demonstration of affection which was like opening the gate to a new epoch in their relations.

"And you would have killed Leddy! You could have broken that Mexican in two! I should like to have seen that! So would the ancestor!" said the father, giving Jack a hug.

"Yes, but, father, that was the horror of it!"

"Not the power to do it--no! I mean, Jack, that in this world it is well to be strong."

"And you think that I am no longer a weakling?" Jack asked strangely; "that I carried out your instructions when you sent me away?"

"Oh, Jack, you remember my farewell remark? It was made in irritation and suffering. That hurt me. It hurt my pride and all that my work stands for. It hurt me as much as it hurt you. But if it was a whip, why, then, it served a purpose, as I wanted it to."

"Yes, it was a whip!" said Jack, mechanically.

"Then all ends well--all quits! And, Jack," he swung Jack, who was unresisting but unresponsive, around facing him, "if you ever have any doubts or any questions to ask bring them to me, won't you?"

"Yes."

"And, Jack, a hundred a week to-morrow! You're all right, Jack!" And he gave Jack a slap on the back as they left the dining-room.

XXIX

A MEETING ON THE AVENUE TRAIL

Light sang in the veins and thoughts of a city. Light cleansed the streets of vapors. Light, the light of the sunshine of late May, made a far different New York from the New York under a blanket of March mist of the day of Jack's arrival. The lantern of the Metropolitan tower was all blazing gold; Diana's scarf trailed behind her in the shimmering abandon of her *_honi soit qui mal y pense_* chases on Olympus; Admiral Farragut grew urbane, sailing on a smooth sea with victory won; General Sherman in his over-brightness, guided by his guardian lady, still gallantly pursued the tone of time in the direction of the old City Hall and Trinity; and the marble facade of the new library seemed no less at home than under an Agean sky. An ecstasy, blinding eyes to blemishes, set critical faculties to rejoicing over perfections. They graciously overlooked the blotch of red brick hiding the body of St. Patrick's on the way up town in gratitude for twin spires against the sky.

Enveloping radiance gilded the sharp lines of skyscrapers and swept away the shadows in the chasms between them. It pointed the bows of busy tugs

with sprays of diamonds falling on the molten surface of rivers and bays. It called up paeans of childish trebles from tenement alleys; slipped into the sickrooms of private houses, delaying the advent of crape on the door; and played across the rows of beds in the public wards of hospitals in the primal democracy of the gift of ozone to the earth.

The milky glass roof of the central court of the Wingfield store acted as a screen to the omnipotent visitor, but he set unfiltered patches of delight in the aisles and on the counters near the walls. Mamie Devore and Burleigh and Peter Mortimer and many other clerks and employees asked if this were like a desert day and Jack said that it was. He longed to be free of all roofs and feel the geniality of the hearth-fire of the planetary system penetrating through his coat, his skin, his flesh, into his very being. Why not close the store and make a holiday for everybody? he asked himself; only to be amazed, on second thought, at such a preposterous suggestion from a hundred-dollar-a-week author of created profits in the business. He was almost on the point of acting on another impulse, which was that he and his father break away into the country in a touring car, not knowing where they were going to stop until hunger overtook an inn. This, too, he dismissed as a milder form of the same demoralizing order of heresy, bound to be disturbing to the new filial relations springing from the night when he had told his desert story over the coffee, which, contrary to the conventional idea of an exchange of confidences clearing the mind of a burden, had only provoked more restlessness.

At least, he would fare forth for a while on the broad asphalt trail that begins under the arch of the little park and runs to the entrance of the great park. Even as the desert has its spell of overawing stillness in an uninhabited land, so this trail had its spell of congested human movement in the heart of habitations. A broad, luminous blade lay across the west side of the street and left the other in shade; and all the world that loved sunshine and had no errands on the east side kept to the west side. There was a communism of inspiration abroad. It was a conqueror's triumph just to be alive and feel the pulse-beat of the throng. The very over-developed sensitiveness of city nerves became something to be thankful for in providing the capacity for keener enjoyment as compensation for the capacity for keener pain.

Womankind was in spring plumage. The mere consciousness of the value of light to their costumes, no less than the elixir in their nostrils, gave vivacity to their features. As usual, Jack was seeing them only to see Mary. The creation of no couturier could bear rivalry with the garb in which his imagination clothed her. He found himself suddenly engrossed in a particular exhibit of fashion's parade a little distance ahead and going in the same direction as himself, a young woman in a simplicity of gown to which her carriage gave the final touch of art. Her steps had a long-limbed freedom and lightness, with which his own steps ran in a rhythm to the music of some past association. The thrall of a likeness, which more and more possessed him, made him hasten to draw near for a more satisfying glimpse.

The young woman turned her head to glance into a shop-window and then there could be no mistaking that cheek and chin and the peculiar relation of the long lashes to the brow. It was the profile whose imprint had become indelible on his mind when he had come round an elbow of rock on Galeria. The Jack of wild, tumultuous pleading who had parted from Mary Ewold on the pass became a Jack elate with the glad, swimming joy of May sunshine at seeing and speaking to her again.

"Mary! Mary!" he cried. "My, but you've become a grand swell!" he breathed delectably, with a fuller vision of her.

"Jack!"

There was a nervous twitching of her lips. He saw her eyes at first in a blaze of surprise and wonder; then change to the baffling sparkle, hiding their depths, of the slivers of glass on the old barrier. His smile and hers in unspoken understanding said that two comrades of another trail had met on the Avenue trail. There had not been any Leddy; there had not been any scene on the pass. They were back to the conditions of the protocol he had established when they started out from the porch of the Ewold bungalow in the airiest possible mood to look at a parcel of land.

"And you also have become a grand swell!" she said. "Did you expect that I should be in a gray riding-habit? Certainly I didn't expect to see you in chaps and spurs."

It was brittle business; but with a common resource in play they managed it well. And there they were walking together, noted by passers-by for their youth and beaming oblivion to everything but themselves.

"How long have you been here?" Jack asked.

"Two weeks," she answered.

Two weeks in the same town and this his first glimpse of her! What a maze New York was! What a desert waste of two weeks!

"Yes. Our decision to come was rather abrupt," she explained. "A sudden call to travel came to father; came to him like an inspiration that he could not resist. And how happily he has entered into the spirit of the city again! It has made him young."

"And it has been quite like martyrdom for you!" Jack put in, teasingly.

"Terrible! Sackcloth and ashes!"

"I see you are wearing the sackcloth."

She laughed outright, with a downward glance at her gown, at once in guilt and appreciation.

"Another whim of father's."

"The Doge a scapegoat for fashion!"

"Not a scapegoat--a partisan! He insisted on going to one of the best places. Could I resist? I wanted to see how I felt, how I appeared."

"The veritable curiosity of a Japanese woman getting her first foreign gown!"

"Thank you! That is another excuse."

"And it certainly looks very well," Jack declared.

"Do you think so?" Mary flushed slightly. She could not help being

pleased. "After six years, could I drop back into the old chrysalis naturally, without awkwardness? Did I still know how to wear a fine gown?"--and the gift for it, as anyone could see, was born in her as surely as certain gifts were born in Jack. "But," she added, severely, "I have only two--just two! And the cost of them! It will take the whole orange crop!"

Just two, when she ought to have twenty! When he would have liked to put all the Paris models in the store in a wagon and, himself driving, deliver them at her door!

"Having succumbed to temptation, I enjoy it out of sheer respect to the orange crop," Mary said; "and yes, because I like beautiful gowns; wickedly, truly like them! And I like the Avenue, just as I like the desert."

And all that she liked he could give her! And all that he could give she had stubbornly refused!

The liveliness of her expression, the many shades of meaning that she could set capering with a glance, were now as the personal reflection of the day and the scene. Their gait was a sauntering one. They went as far as the Park and started back, as if all the time of the desert were theirs. They stopped to look into the windows of shops of every kind, from antiques to millinery. When he saw a hat which he declared, after deliberate, critical appraisal, would surely become her, she asked boldly if it were better than the one she wore.

"I mean an extra hat; that one more hat would have the good fortune of becoming you!"

"Almost a real contribution to the literature of compliments!" she answered, unruffled.

He thought, too, that she ought to have a certain necklace in a jeweler's window.

"To wear over my riding-habit or when I am digging in the flower beds?" she inquired.

When they passed a display of luxuries for masculine adornment, she found a further retort in suggesting that he ought to have a certain giddy fancy waistcoat. He complimented her on her taste, bought the waistcoat and, going to the rear of the shop, returned wearing it with a momentarily appreciated show of jaunty swagger.

"Why be on the Avenue and not buy?" he queried, enthusing with a new idea.

Jim Galway should have a cowpuncher hat as a present. The style of band was a subject of discussion calling on their discriminative views of Jim's personal tastes. This led to thoughts of others in Little Rivers who would appreciate gifts, and to the purchase of toys for the children, a positive revel. When they were through it was well past noon and they were in the region of the restaurants. The sun in majestic altitude swept the breadth of the Avenue.

"Shall we lunch--yes, and in the Best Swell Place?" he asked, as if it were a matter-of-course part of the programme, while inwardly he was

stirred with the fear of her refusal. He felt that any minute she might leave him, with no alternative but another farewell. She hesitated a moment seriously, then accepted blithely and naturally.

"Yes, the Best Swell Place--let's! Who isn't entitled to the Best Swell Place occasionally?"

After an argument in comparison of famous names, they were convinced that they had really chosen the Best Swell Place by the fact of a vacant table at a window looking out over a box hedge. Jack told the waiter that the assemblage was not an autocracy, but a parliament which, with a full quorum present, would enjoy in discursive appreciation selections from the broad range of a bill of fare.

A luncheon for two narrows a walk on the Avenue, where you are part of a crowd, into restricted intimacy. He was feeling the intoxication of her inscrutability, catching gleams of the wealth that lay beyond it, across the limited breadth of a table-cloth. He forgot about the unspoken conditions in a sally which was like putting his hand on top of the barrier for an impetuous leap across.

"I wrote you stacks of letters," he said, "and you never sent me one little line; not even 'Yours received and contents noted!'"

In a flash all intimacy vanished. She might have been at the other end of the dining-room in somebody else's party nodding to him as to an acquaintance. Her answer was delayed about as long as it takes to lift an arrow from a quiver and notch it in a bowstring.

"A novel may be very interesting, but that does not mean that I write to the author!"

He imagined her going through the meal in polite silence or in measured commonplaces, turning the happy parliament into a frigid Gothic ceremony. Why had he not kept in mind that sufficient to the hour is the pleasure of it? Famished for her companionship, a foolhardy impulse of temptation had risked its loss. The waiter set something before them and softly withdrew. Jack signaled the unspoken humility of being a disciplined soldier at attention on his side of the barrier and Mary signaled a trifle superior but good-natured acceptance of his apology and promise of better conduct.

They were back to the truce of nonsense, apostrophizing the cooking of the Best Swell Place, setting exclamations to their glimpses of people passing in the street. For they had never wanted for words when talking across the barrier; there was paucity of conversation only when he threatened an invasion.

While a New Yorker meeting a former New Yorker on the desert might have little to tell not already chronicled in the press, a Little Riversite meeting a former Little Riversite in New York had a family budget of news. How high were Jack's hedges? How were the Doge's date-trees? How was this and that person coming on? Listening to all the details, Jack felt homesickness creeping over him, and he clung fondly to every one of the swiftly-passing moments. By no reference and by no inference had she suggested that there was ever any likelihood of his meeting or hearing from her again. A thread of old relations had been spun only to be snapped. She was, indeed, as a visitation developed out of the sunshine of the Avenue, into which she would dissolve.

"I was to meet father at a bookstore at three," she said, finally, as she rose.

"Inevitably he would be there or in a gallery," said Jack.

"He has done the galleries. This is the day for buying books--still more books! I suppose he is spending the orange crop again. If you keep on spending the same orange crop, just where do you arrive in the maze of finance?"

"I should not like to say without consulting the head book-keeper or, at least, Peter Mortimer!"

They were coming out of the door of the Best Swell Place, now. A word and she would be going in one direction and he in another. How easily she might speak that word, with an electric and final glance of good-will!

"But I must say howdy do to the Doge!" he urged. "I should like to see him buying books. What a prodigal debauch of learning! I cannot miss that!"

"It is not far," she said, prolonging Paradise for him.

A few blocks below Forty-second Street they turned into a cross street which was the same that led to the Wingfield house; and halfway to Madison Avenue they entered a bookstore. The light from low windows spreading across the counters blended with the light from high windows at the back, and here, on a platform at the head of the stairs, before a big table sat the Doge, in the majesty of a great patron of literature, with a clerk standing by in deftly-urging attentiveness. Mary and Jack paused at the foot of the stairs watching him. Gently he was fingering an old octavo; fingering it as one would who was between the hyperionic desire of possession and a fear that a bank account owed its solvency to keeping the amounts of deposits somewhere in proportion to the amount of withdrawals.

"No, sir! No more, you tempter!" he declared. "No more, you unctuous ambassador from the court of Gutenberg! Why, this one would take enough alfalfa at the present price a ton to bury your store under a haycock as high as the Roman Pantheon!"

The Doge rose and picked up his broad-brimmed hat, prepared to fly from danger. He would not expose himself a moment longer to the wiles of that clerk.

"I'll wait for my daughter down there in the safe and economical environs of the popular novels fresh from the press!" he said.

Turning to descend the stairs he saw the waiting pair. He stopped stock still and threw up his hand in a gesture of astonishment. His glance hovered back and forth between Jack's face and Mary's, and then met Jack's look with something of the same challenge and confidence of his farewell on the road out of Little Rivers, and in an outburst of genial raillery he began the conversation where he had left off with the final call of his personal good wishes and his salutations to certain landmarks of New York.

"Well, well, Sir Chaps! I saw Sorolla in his new style; very different

from the academics of the young Sorolla. He has found his mission and let himself go. No wonder people flocked to his exhibitions on misty days! The trouble with our artists is that they are afraid to let themselves go, afraid to be popular. They think technique is the thing, when it is only the tool. Why, confound it all! all the great masters were popular in their day--Venetian, Florentine, Flemish! Confound it, yes! And not one Velasquez"--evidently he was talking partly to get his bearings after his shock at seeing Jack--"no, not one Velasquez in the Metropolitan! I go home without seeing a Velasquez. They have the Catherine Lorillard Wolfe collection, thousands of square yards of it, and yes, cheer up! Thank heaven, they have some great Americans, Inness and Martin and Homer and our exile Whistler, who annexed Japan, and our Sargent, born in Florence. And I did see the Metropolitan tower. I take off my hat, my broad-brimmed hat, wishing that it were as big as a carter's umbrella, to that tower. I hate to think it an accident of chaos like the Grand Canyon. I rather like to think of it as majestic promise."

The Doge had talked so fast that he was almost out of breath. He was ready to yield the floor to Jack.

"I kissed my hand to Diana for you!" said Jack. "And what do you think? The lady in answer shook out her scarf and something white and small fluttered down. I picked it up. It was a note."

"Did you open that note?" asked the Doge in haughty suspicion.

"Naturally."

"Wasn't it marked personal for me?"--this in fine simulation of indignation.

"Without address!"

"I am chagrined and surprised at Diana," said the Doge ruefully. "It's the effect of city association. As a matter of course, she ought to have given it to Mercury, or at least to one of the Centaurs, considering all the horseshows that have been held under her skipping toes! Well, what did she say? Being a woman of action she was brief. What did she say?"

"It was in the nature of a general personal complaint. Her costume is in need of repair; it is flaking disgracefully. She said that if you had not forsaken your love of the plastic for love of the graphic arts you would long ago have stolen a little gold off the Eternal Painter's palette, just to clothe her decently for the sake of her own self-respect--the town having set her so high that its sense of propriety was quite safe."

"I stand convicted of neglect," said the Doge, coming down to the floor of the store. "I will shoot her a bundle of gold leaf from the top of the pass on a ray of evening sunshine."

There, he gave Jack a pat on the shoulder; a hasty, playful, almost affectionate demonstration, and broke off with a shout of:

"Persiflage, sir, persiflage!"

"It is manna to me!" declared Jack, in the fulness and sweetness of the sensation of the atmosphere of Little Rivers reproduced in New York.

"And not a Velasquez in the Metropolitan!" mused the Doge, bustling along

the aisle hurriedly. "Well, Mary, we have errands to do. There is no time to spare."

They were at the door, Jack in wistful insistence, hungry for their companionship, and the Doge and Mary in common hesitancy for a phrase before parting from him. He was ahead of the phrase.

"But there is a Velasquez, one of the greatest of Velasquezes, just a few steps from here! It would take only a minute to see it."

"A Velasquez a few steps from here!" cried the Doge. "Where? Be exact, before I let my hopes rise too high."

"The subject is an ancestor of mine. My father has it."

Jack had looked in the direction of the Wingfield house on the Madison Avenue corner as he spoke, and the Doge had followed his glance. The eagerness passed from the Doge's face, but not its intensity. That was transmuted into something staring and hard.

"A very great Velasquez!" Jack repeated.

"My _amour propre_!" the Doge said, in whispered abstraction, using the French which so exactly expresses the rightness of an inner feeling that will not let one do a thing however much he may wish to. Then a wave of confusion passed over his face, evidently at the echo of his thoughts in the form of words come unwittingly from his lips. He tried to retrieve his exclamation in an effort at the forensic: "The _amour propre_ of any American is hurt by the thought that he must go to a private gallery to see a Velasquez in the greatest city of the land!"

But it was a lame explanation. Clearly, some old antipathy had been aroused in Jasper Ewold; and it made him hesitate to enter the big red brick house on the corner.

"And we have a wonderful Sargent, too, a Sargent of my mother!" Jack proceeded.

"Yes, yes!" said the Doge, and eagerness returned; a strange, moving eagerness that seemed to come from the same depths as the exclamation that had arrested his acceptance of the invitation at the outset. It held the monosyllables like drops of water trembling before they fell.

"I should like you to see them both," said Jack.

"Yes," said the Doge, the word an echo rather than consent.

"There is no one at home at this hour; you will have all the time you can spare for the pictures."

In the ascendancy of his ardor to retain the joy of their company and in the perplexity of mystery injected afresh into his relations with Mary, Jack was hardly conscious that his urging was only another way of saying that his father was absent. And Mary had not thrown her influence either for or against going. She was watching her father, curiously and penetratingly, as if trying to understand the source of the emotion that he was seeking to control.

"Why, in that case," exclaimed the Doge, "why, you see," he went on to

explain, "we desert folk, though we are used to galleries, are a little diffident about meeting people who live in big mansions. I mean, people who have not had the desert training that you have had, Sir Chaps. If it is only a matter of looking at a picture without any social responsibilities, and that picture a Velasquez, why, we must take the time, mustn't we, Mary?"

"Yes," Mary assented.

With Mary on one side of him and Jack on the other, the Doge was walking heavily and slowly.

"At what period of Velasquez's career?" he asked, vacantly.

"When he was young and the subject was middle-aged, a Northerner, with fair hair and lean muscles under a skin bronzed by the tropics, and the unquenchable fire of youth in his eyes."

"That ought to be a good Velasquez," said the Doge.

At the bottom step of the flight up to the entrance to the house he hesitated. He appeared to be very old and very tired. His face had gone quite pale. The lids hung heavily over his eyes. Jack dropped back in alarm to assist him; but his color quickly returned and the old challenge was in his glance as it met Jack's.

"Now for your Velasquez!" he exclaimed, with calm vigor.

Once in the hall, Jack stood to one side of the door of the drawing-room to let the Doge enter first. As the old man crossed the threshold his hands were clasped behind him; his shoulders had fallen together, not in weariness now, but in a kind of dazed, studious expectancy; and he faced the "Portrait of a Lady."

"This is the Sargent," he said slowly, his lips barely opening in mechanical and absent comment. "A good Sargent!"

He was as still as the picture in his bowed and earnest gaze into her eyes, except for an occasional nervous movement of the fingers. All the surroundings seemed to melt into a neutral background for the two; there was nothing else in the room but the scholar in his age and the "Portrait of a Lady" in her youth. Jack saw the Doge's face, its many lines expressive as through a mist of time, its hills and valleys in the sun and the shadow of emotions as variable as the mother's in life, speaking personal resentment and wrong, admiration and tenderness, grievous inquiry and philosophy, while the only answer was the radiant, "I give! I give!" Finally, the Doge tightened the clasp of his hands, with a quiver of his frame, as he turned toward Jack.

"Yes, a really great Sargent--a Sargent of supreme inspiration!" he said. "Now for your Velasquez!"

Before the portrait of the first John Wingfield, Jasper Ewold's head and shoulders recovered their sturdiness of outline and his features lighted with the veritable touch of the brush of genius itself. He was the connoisseur who understands, whose joy of possession is in the very tingling depths of born instinct, rich with training and ripened by time. It was superior to any bought title of ownership. In the presence of a supreme standard, every shade of discriminative criticism and appraisal

became threads woven into a fabric of rapture.

"Mary," he said, his voice having the mellowness of age in its deep appreciation, "Mary, wherever you saw this--skied or put in a corner among a thousand other pictures, in a warehouse, a Quaker meetinghouse, anywhere, whatever its surroundings--should you feel its compelling power? Should you pause, incapable of analysis, in a spell of tribute?"

"Yes, I don't think I am quite so insensible as not to realize the greatness of this portrait, or that of the Sargent, either," she answered.

"Good! I am glad, Mary, very glad. You do me credit!"

Now he turned from the artist to the subject. He divined the kind of man the first John Wingfield was; divined it almost as written in the chronicle which Jack kept in his room in hallowed fraternity. Only he bore hard on the unremitting, callous, impulsive aggressiveness of a fierce past age, with its survival of the fittest swordsmen and buccaneers, which had no heroes for him except the painters, poets, and thinkers it gave to posterity.

"Fire-eating old devil! And the best thing he ever did, the best luck he ever had, was attracting the attention of a young artist. It's immortality just to be painted by Velasquez; the only immortality many a famous man of the time will ever know!"

He looked away from the picture to Jack's face keenly and back at the picture and back at Jack and back at the picture once more.

"Yes, yes!" he mused, corroboratively; and Jack realized that at the same time Mary had been making the same comparison.

"Very like!" she said, with that impersonal exactness which to him was always the most exasperating of her phases.

Then the Doge returned to the Sargent. He was standing nearer the picture, but in the same position as before, while Jack and Mary waited silently on his pleasure; and all three were as motionless as the furniture, had it not been for the nervous twitching of the Doge's fingers. He seemed unconscious of the passing of time; a man in a maze of absorption with his thoughts. Jack was strangely affected. His brain was marking time at the double-quick of fruitless energy. He felt the atmosphere of the room surcharged with the hostility of the unknown. He was gathering a multitude of impressions which only contributed more chaos to chaos. His sensibilities abnormally alive to every sound, he heard the outside door opened with a latch-key; he heard steps in the hall, and saw his father's figure in the doorway of the drawing-room.

John Wingfield, Sr. appeared with a smile that was gone in a flash. His face went stark and gray as stone under a frown from the Doge to Jack; and with an exclamation of the half-articulate "Oh!" of confusion, he withdrew.

Jack looked around to see the Doge half turned in the direction of the door, gripping the back of a chair to steady himself, while Mary was regarding this sudden change in him in answer to the stricken change in the intruder with some of Jack's own paralysis of wonder. The Doge was the first to speak. He fairly rocked the chair as he jerked his hand free

of its support, while he shook with a palsy which was not that of fear, for there was raging color in his cheeks. The physical power of his great figure was revealed. For the first time Jack was able to think of him as capable of towering militancy. His anger gradually yielded to the pressure of will and the situation. At length he said faintly, with a kind of abyssmal courtesy:

"Thank you, Sir Chaps! Now I shall not go back to the desert without having seen a Velasquez. Thank you! And we must be going."

Jack had an impulse, worthy of the tempestuous buccaneer of the picture, to call to his father to come down; and then to bar the front door until his burning questions were heard. The still light in Mary's eyes would have checked him, if not his own proper second thought and the fear of precipitating an ungovernable crisis. There had been shadows, real shadows, he was thinking wildly; they were not born of desert imaginings; and out of the quandary of his anguish came only the desire not to part from the Doge and Mary in this fashion! No, not until in some way equilibrium of mind was restored.

Though he knew that they did not expect or want his company, he went out into the street with them. He would go as far as their hotel, he remarked, in the bravery of simulated ease. The three were walking in the same relative positions that they had before, with the Doge's bulk hiding Mary from Jack's sight. The Doge set a rapid pace, as if under the impetus of a desire to escape from the neighborhood of the Wingfield house.

"Well, Sir Chaps," he said, after a while, "it will be a long time before the provincials come to New York again. Why, in this New York you can spend a patrimony in two weeks"--this with an affected amusement at his own extravagance--"and I've pretty nearly done it. So we fly from temptation. Yes, Mary, we will take the morning train."

"The morning train!" Mary exclaimed; and her surprise left no doubt that her father's decision was new to her. Was it due to an exchange of glances between a stark face and a face crimson with indignation which Jack had already connected with the working out of his own destiny?

"Yes, that is better than spending our orange crop again!" she hastened to add, with reassuring humor. "I'm fairly homesick for our oasis."

"We've had our fill of the big city," said the Doge, feelingly, "and we are away to our little city of peace where we turned our backs under with the first furrows in the virgin soil."

Then silence. The truce of nonsense was dead. Persiflage was dead. Jack was as a mute stranger keeping at their side unasked, while the only glimpse he had of Mary was the edge of her hat and her fingertips on her father's sleeve. Silence, which he felt was as hard for them as for him, lasted until they were at the entrance to the quiet little hotel on a cross-town street where the Ewolds were staying; and having the first glimpse of Mary's eyes since they had started, he found nothing fathomable in them except unmistakable relief that the walk was over.

"Thank you for showing me the Velasquez," said the Doge.

"Thank you, Jack," Mary added.

Both spoke in a manner that signaled to him the end of all things, but an end which he could not accept.

"I--I--oh, there are a thousand questions I--" he broke out, desperately.

The muscles of his face tightened. Unconsciously he had leaned forward toward the Doge in his intensity, and his attitude had become that of the Wingfield of the portrait. A lower note of command ran through the misery of his tone.

Jasper Ewold stared at him in a second of scrutiny, at once burningly analytic and reflective. Then he flushed as he had at sight of the figure in the drawing-room doorway. His look plainly said: "How much longer do you mean to harass me?" as if Jack's features were now no less the image of a hard and bitter memory than those of John Wingfield, Sr. Jack drew back hurt and dumb, in face of this anger turned on himself. At length, the Doge mustered his rallying smile, which was that of a man who carries into his declining years a burden of disappointments which he fears may, in his bad moments, get the better of his personal system of philosophy.

"Come, Mary!" he said, drawing his arm through hers. He became, in an evident effort, a grand, old-fashioned gentleman, making a bow of farewell. "Come, Mary, it's an early train and we have our packing yet to do."

This time it was, indeed, dismissal; such a dismissal with polite urgency as a venerable cabinet minister might give an importunate caller who is slow to go. He and Mary started into the hotel. But he halted in the doorway to say over his shoulder, with something of his old-time cheer, which had the same element of pity as his leave-taking on the trail outside of Little Rivers:

"Luck, Sir Chaps!"

"Luck!" Mary called in the same strained tone that she had called to Jack when he went over the pass on his way to New York, the tone that was like the click of a key in the lock of a gate.

XXX

WITH THE PHANTOMS

As Jack left the hotel entrance he was walking in the treadmill mechanics of a prisoner pacing a cell, without note of his surroundings, except of dim, moving figures with which he must avoid collision. The phantoms of his boyhood, bulky and stiflingly near, had a monstrous reality, yet the ghostly intangibility that mocked his sword-thrusts of tortured inquiry. At length his distraction centered on the fact that he and his father were to dine alone that evening.

They dined alone regularly every Wednesday, when Jack made a report of his progress and received a lesson in business. It was at the last council of this kind that John Wingfield, Sr. had bidden his son to bring all questions and doubts to him. Now Jack hailed the weekly function as having all the promise of relief of a surgeon's knife. Fully

and candidly he would unburden himself of every question beating in his brain and every doubt assailing his spirit.

By the time that he was mounting the steps of the house his growing impatience could no longer bear even the delay of waiting on dinner. When he entered the hall he was the driven creature of an impelling desire that must be satisfied immediately.

"Will you ask my father if he will see me at once?" he said to the butler.

"Mr. Wingfield left word that he had to go into the country for the night," answered the butler. "I am sorry, sir," he added confusedly, in view of the blank disappointment with which the information was received.

In dreary state Jack dined by himself in the big dining-room, leaving the food almost untouched. At intervals he was roused to a sense of his presence at table by the servant's question if he should bring another course. Without waiting for the last one, he went downstairs to the drawing-room, and standing near the "Portrait of a Lady," again poured out his questions, receiving the old answer of "I give! I give!" which meant, he knew, that she had given all of herself to him. Saying after saying of hers raced through his mind without throwing light on the mystery, which had the uncanniness of a conspiracy against him.

And after his mother, Mary had influenced him more than any other person. She had brought life to the seeds which his mother had planted in his nature. That new life could not die, but without her it could not flourish. Her cry of "It's not in the blood!" again came echoing to his ears. What had she meant? The question sent him to the Ewolds' hotel; it sent this note up to her room:

"MARY:

"In behalf of old desert comradeship, if I were in trouble wouldn't you help me all you could? If I were in darkness and you could give me light, would you refuse? Won't you see me for a few moments, if I promise to keep to my side of the barrier which you have raised between us? I will wait here in the lobby a long time, hoping that you will.

"JACK."

"All the light I have to give. I also am in darkness," came the answer in a nervous, impulsive hand across a sheet of paper; and soon Mary herself appeared from the elevator, not in the fashion of the Avenue, but in simple gray coat and skirt, such as she wore at home. She greeted him in a startled, half-fearful manner, as if her presence were due to the impulsion of duty rather than choice.

"Shall we walk?" she asked, turning toward the door in the welcome of movement as a steady influence in her evident emotion.

There they were in the old rhythm of step of Little Rivers companionship on a cross-town street. He saw that the costly hat that he had selected for her in the display of a shop-window after all was not the equal of the plain model with a fetching turn to the brim and a single militant feather, which she wore that evening. The light feather boa around her neck on account of the cool night air seemed particularly becoming. He was near, very near, her, so near that their elbows touched; but the

nearness was like that of a picture out of a frame which has come to life and may step back into cold canvas at any moment. Oh, it was hard, in the might of his love for her, not to forget everything else and cry out another declaration, as he had from the canyon! But her face was very still. She was waiting for him to begin, while her fingers were playing nervously with the tip of her boa.

"I must be frank, very frank," he said.

"Yes, Jack, or why speak at all?"

"From the night of my arrival in Little Rivers, when the Doge at once recognized who I was without telling me, I saw that, under his politeness and his kindness, he was hostile to my presence in Little Rivers."

"Yes, I think that in a way he was," she answered.

"I was conscious that something out of the past was between him and me, and that it included you in a subtle influence that nothing could change. And this afternoon, while you were at the house and my father came to the drawing-room door, I could not help noticing how the Doge was overcome. You noticed it, too?"

"Yes, I never saw my father in such anger before. It seemed to me that he could have struck down that man in the doorway!" There was a perceptible shudder, but she did not look up, her glance remaining level with the flags.

"And on the pass you said, 'It's not in the blood!'" he continued. "Yes, almost in terror you said it, as if it spelled an impassable gulf between us. Why? why? Mary, haven't I a right to know?"

As he broke off passionately with this appeal, which was as the focus of all the fears that had tormented him, they were immediately under the light of a street lamp. She turned her head toward him resolutely, in the mustering of her forces for an ordeal. Her face was pale, but there was an effort at the old smile of comradeship.

"Yes, as I said, the little light that I have is yours, Jack," she began. "But there is not much. It is, perhaps, more what I feel than what I know that has influenced me. All that my father has ever said about you and your father and your relations to us was the night after I returned from the pass ahead of you, when you had descended into the canyon to frighten me with the risk you were taking."

"I did not mean to frighten you!" he interjected. "I only followed an impulse."

"Yes, one of your impulses, Jack," she remarked, comprehendingly. "Father and I have been so much together--indeed, we have never been apart--that there is more than filial sympathy of feeling between us. There is something akin to telepathy. We often divine each other's thoughts. I think that he understood what had taken place between us on the pass; that you had brought on some sort of a crisis in our relations. It was then that he told me who you were, as you know. Then he talked of you and your father--you still wish to hear?"

"Yes!"

"And you will listen in silence?"

"Yes!"

"I will grant your defence of your father, but you will not argue? I am giving what you ask, in justice to myself; I am giving my reasons, my feelings."

"No, I will not argue."

Their tones were so low that a passer-by would have hardly been conscious that they were talking; but had the passer-by caught the pitch he might have hazarded many guesses, every one serious.

"Then, I will try to make clear all that father said. You were the image of your father--a smile and a square chin. The smile could charm and the chin could kill. He liked you for some things that seemed to spring from another source, as he called it; but these would vanish and in the end you would be like your father, as he knew when he saw you break Pedro Nogales's arm. And you gloried in your strength; as you told me on the pass and as I saw for myself in the duel. And to you, father said, victory was the supreme guerdon of life. It ran triumphant and inextinguishable in your veins."

"I--" he said, chokingly; but remembered his promise not to argue.

"Any opposition, any refusal excited your will to overcome it in the sheer joy of the exercise of your strength. This had been your father's story in everything, even in his marriage."

She paused.

"There is nothing more? No further light on his old relations with my father and mother?" he asked.

"Only a single exclamation, 'It's not in the blood for you to believe in Jack Wingfield, Mary!' And after that he turned silent and moody. I pressed him for reasons. He answered that he had told me enough. I had to live my own life; the rest I must decide for myself. I knew that I was hurting him sorely. I was striking home into that past about which he would never speak, though I know it still causes him many days of suffering."

"But on the desert there is no past!" Jack exclaimed.

"Yes, there is, Jack. There is your own heart. On the desert your past is not shared with others. But to-night, after I received your note, I did try, for the second time in my life, to share father's. I told him your request; I spoke of the scene in your drawing-room; I asked him what it meant. He answered that you must learn from one nearer you than he was, and that he never wanted to think of that scene again."

It was she who had chosen the direction at the street corners. They were returning now toward the hotel. The fingers which had been playing with the boa had crumpled the end of it into a ball, which they were gripping so tightly that the knuckles were little white spots set in a blood-red background. She was suffering, but determined to leave nothing unsaid.

"Jack, when I said 'It's not in the blood' I was more than repeating my

father's words. They expressed a truth for me. I meant not only rebellion against what was in you, but against the thing that was in me. Why, Jack, I do not even remember my own mother! I have only heard father speak of her sadly when I was much younger. Of late years he has not mentioned her. He and the desert and the garden are all I have and all I know; and probably, yes--probably I'm a strange sort of being. But what I am, I am; and to that I will be true. Father went to the desert to save my life; and broken-hearted, old, he is greater to me than the sum of any worldly success. And, Jack, you forget--riding over the pass so grandly with your impulses, as if to want a thing is to get it--you--but we have had good times together; and, as I said, you belong on one side of the pass and I on the other. This and much else, which one cannot see or define, is between us. From the day you came, some forbidding influence seemed at work in my father's life and mine; and when you had gone another man, with your features and your smile, came to Little Rivers; one that I understand even less than you!"

Jack recalled the references to the new rancher by Bob Worther on the day of his departure for the East and, later, in Jim Galway's letter. But he did not speak. Something more compelling than his promise was keeping him silent: her own apprehension, with its story of phantoms of her own.

"And yesterday I saw your father's face," she went on, "as it appeared in the doorway for a second before he saw my father and was struck with fear, and how like yours it was--but more like John Prather's. And the high-sounding preachments about the poverty that might go with fine gowns became real to me. They were not banal at all. They were simple truth, free of rhetoric and pretence. I knew that my cry of 'It's not in the blood' was as true in me as any impulse of yours ever could be in you!"

To the end, under the dominance of her will, she had not faltered; and with the end she looked up with a faint smile of stoicism and an invincible flame in her eyes. Anything that he might be able to say would be as flashing a blade in and out of a blaze. She had become superior to the resources of barrier or armor, confident of a self whose richness he realized anew. He saw and felt the tempered fineness of her as something that would mind neither siege nor prayer.

"I am not afraid," she said, "and I know that you are not. It is all right!" Then she added, with a desperate coolness, but still clasping the boa rigidly: "The hotel is only a block away, and to-morrow you will be back in the store and I shall soon be on my side of the pass."

This was her right word for a situation when his temples were throbbing, harking back, with time's reversal of conditions, to a situation after the duel in the _arroyo_ was over and he had used the right word when her temples were throbbing and her hands splashed. If retribution were her object, she had repaid in nerve-twitch of torture for nerve-twitch of torture. The picture that had been alive and out of its frame was back on cold canvas. Even the girl he had known across the barrier, even the girl in armor, seemed more kindly. But one can talk, even to a picture in a frame; at least, Jack could, with wistful persistence.

"You don't mind if I tell you again--if I speak my one continuous thought aloud again?" he asked. "Mary, I love you! I love you in such a way that I"--with a faint bravery of humor as he saw danger signals--"I would build mud-houses all day for you to knock to pieces!"

"Foolish business, Jack!" she answered.

"Or drag a plow."

"Very hard work!"

"Or set out to tunnel a mountain single-handed, with hammer and chisel."

"I think you would find it dreadfully monotonous at the end of the first week."

He had spoken his extravagances without winning a glance from her. She had answered with a precision that was more trying than silence.

"_I_ shouldn't find it so if you were in the neighborhood to welcome me when I knocked off for the day," he declared. "You see, I can't help it. I can't help what is in me, just as surely as the breath of life is in me."

"Jack!" she flashed back, with arresting sharpness, but without looking around, while her step quickened perceptibly, "suppose I say that I am sorry and I, too, cannot help it; that I, too, have temperament, as well as you;" her tone was almost harsh; "that even you cannot have everything you command; that for you to want a thing does not mean that I want it; that I cannot help the fact that I do not--"

With a quick interruption he stayed the end of the sentence, as if it were a descending blade.

"Don't say that!" he implored. "It is too much like taking a vow that might make you fearfully stubborn in order to live up to it. Perhaps the thing will come some day. It's wonderful how such a thing does come. You see, I speak from experience," he went on, in wan insistence, with the entrance to the hotel in sight. "Why, it is there before you realize it, like the morning sunshine in a room while you are yet asleep. And you open your eyes and there is the joyous wonder, settling itself all through you and making itself at home forever. You know for the first time that you are alive. You know for the first time that you were born into this world merely because one other person was born into it."

"Very well said," she conceded, in hasty approval, without vouchsafing him a glance. "I begin to think you get more inspiration for compliments on this side of the pass than on the other,"--and they were at the hotel door. Precipitately she hastened through it, as if with her last display of strength after the exhaustion of that walk.

XXXI

PRATHER WOULD NOT WAIT

When he returned to the house, Jack found a letter that had come in the late mail from Jim Galway:

"First off, that story you sent for Belvy," Jim wrote. "We've heard it read and reread, and the more it's worn with reading the fresher it gets in our minds. As I size up the effect on the population, we folks in the

forties and fifties got more fun out of it than anybody except the folks in the seventies and the five-to-twelve-year-olds. Some of the thirteen and fourteen-year-olds were inclined to think at first that it wasn't quite grown up enough for them, until they saw what fashionable literature it was becoming. Then their dignified maturity limbered up a little. Jack, it certainly did us a world of good. It seemed as if you were back home again."

"Back home again!" Jack repeated, joyously; and then shook his head at himself in solemn warning.

"And those of us that don't take our meat without salt sort of needed cheering up," Jim went on. "Only a few days after I wrote you, the Doge and Mary suddenly started for New York. Maybe he has looked you up." (The "maybe" followed an "of course," which had been scratched through.) "And maybe if he has you know more about what is going on here than we do. We practically don't know anything; but I've sure got a feeling of that uncertainty in the atmosphere that I used to have before a cyclone when I lived in Kansas. This Prather, that so many thought at first looked like you, has also gone to New York.

"He left only two days ago. Maybe you will run across him. I don't know, but it seems to me he's gone to get the powder for some kind of a blow-up here. Jack, you know what would happen if we lost our water rights and you know what I wrote you in my last letter. Leddy and Ropey Smith are hanging around all the time, and since the Doge went a whole lot of fellows that don't belong to the honey-bee class have been turning up and putting up their tents out on the outskirts, like they expected something to happen. If things get worse and I've got something to go on and we need you, I'm going to telegraph just as I said I would; because, Jack, though you're worth a lot of millions, somehow we feel you're one of us.

"Very truly yours for Little Rivers,

"JAMES R. GALWAY.

"P.S.--Betsy said to put in P.S. because P.S.'s are always the most important part of a letter. She wants to know if you won't write another story."

"I will!" said Jack. "I will, immediately!"

He made it a long story. He took a deal of pains with it in the very relief of something to do when sleep was impossible and he must count the moments in wretched impatience until his interview with the one person who could answer his questions.

As he went down town in the morning the very freshness of the air inspired him with the hope that he should come out of his father's office with every phantom reduced to a figment of imagination springing from the abnormality of his life-story; with a message that should allay Mary's fears and soften her harshness toward him; with the certainty that the next time he and his father sat together at dinner it would be in a permanent understanding, craved of affection. Mary might come to New York; the Doge might spend his declining years in leisurely patronage of bookshops and galleries; and he would learn how to run the business, though his head split, as became a simple, normal son.

These eddying thoughts on the surface of his mind, however, could not

free him of a consciousness of a deep, unsounded current that seemed to be the irresistible, moving power of Mary's future, the store's, his fathers, Jasper Ewold's and his own. With it he was going into a gorge, over a cataract, or out into pleasant valleys, he knew not which. He knew nothing except that there was no stopping the flood of the current which had its source in streams already flowing before he was born. When the last question had been asked his future would be clear. Relief was ahead, and after relief would come the end of introspection and the beginning of his real career.

But another question was waiting for him in the store. It was walking the streets of his father's city in the freedom of a spectator who comes to observe and not to buy. Crossing the first floor as he came to the court, Jack saw, with sudden distinctness among the many faces coming and going, a profile which, in its first association, developed on his vision as that of his own when he shaved in front of the ear in the morning. He had only a glimpse before it was turned away and its owner, a young man in a quiet gray suit, started up the stairs.

Jack studied the young man's back half amusedly to see if this, too, were like his own, and laughed at himself because he was sure that he would not know his own back if it were preceding him in a promenade up the Avenue. In peculiar suspense he was hoping that the young man would pause and look around, as his father always did and shoppers often did, in a survey of the busy, moving picture of the whole floor. But the young man went on to the top of the flight. There he proceeded along the railing of the court. His profile was again in view under a strong light, and Jack realized that his first recognition of a resemblance was the recognition of an indisputable fact.

"Have I a double out West and another in New York?" he thought. "It gives a man a kind of secondhand feeling!"

Then he recalled Jim's letter saying that John Prather had gone to New York. Was this John Prather? He had no doubt that it was when the object of his scrutiny, with full face in view, stopped and leaned over the balcony just above the diamond counter. There was a mole patch on the cheek such as Jack remembered that the accounts of John Prather had mentioned.

"I am as much fussed as the giant was at the sight of yellow!" Jack mused.

But for the mole patch the features were his own, as he knew them, though no one not given to more frequent personal councils with mirrors than Senor Don't Care of desert trails knows quite the lights and shadows of his own countenance, which give it its character even more than does its form. John Prather was regarding the jewelry display, where the diamonds were scintillating under the light from the milk glass roof, with a smile of amused contemplation. His expression was unpleasant to Jack. It had a quality of satire and of covetousness as its owner leaned farther over the rail and rubbed the palms of his hands together as gleefully as if the diamonds were about to fly into his pockets by enchantment.

All the time Jack had stood motionless in fixed and amazed observation. He wondered that his stare had not drawn the other's attention. But John Prather seemed too preoccupied with the dazzle of wealth to be susceptible to any telepathic influence.

"Great heavens! I am gaping at him as if he were climbing hand over hand up the face of a sky-scraper!" Jack thought. It was time something happened. Why should he get so wrought up over the fact that another man looked like him? "I'll get acquainted!" he declared, shaking himself free of his antipathy. "We are both from Little Rivers and that's a ready excuse for introducing myself."

As he started across the floor toward the stairs, Prather straightened from his leaning posture. For an instant his glance seemed to rest on Jack. Indeed, eye met eye for a flash; and then Prather moved away. His decision to go might easily have been the electric result of Jack's own decision to join him. Jack ran up the stairs. At the head of the flight he saw, at half the distance across the floor, Prather's back entering an elevator on the down trip. He hurried forward, his desire to meet and speak with the man whose influence Jim Galway and Mary feared now overwhelming.

"Hello!" Jack sang out; and this to Prather's face after he had turned around in the elevator.

In the second while the elevator man was swinging to the door, Jack and Prather were fairly looking at each other. Prather had seen that Jack wanted to speak to him, even if he had not heard the call. His answer was a smile of mixed recognition and satire. He made a gesture of appreciative understanding of the distinction in their likeness by touching the mole on his cheek with his finger, which was Jack's last glimpse of him before he was shot down into the lower regions of the store.

"He did it neatly!" Jack gasped, with a sense of defeat and chagrin. "And it is plain that he does not care to get acquainted. Perhaps he takes it for granted that I am not friendly and foresaw that I would ask him a lot of questions about Little Rivers that he would not care to answer." At all events, the only way to accept the situation was lightly, his reason insisted. "Having heard about the likeness, possibly he came to the store to have a look at me, and after seeing me felt that he had been libeled!"

But his feelings refused to follow his reason in an amused view.

"I do not like John Prather!" he concluded, as he took the next elevator to the top floor. "Yes, I liked Pete Leddy better at our first meeting. I had rather a man would swear at me than smile in that fashion. It is much more simple."

The incident had had such a besetting and disagreeable effect that Jack would have found it difficult to rid his mind of it if he had not had a more centering and pressing object in prospect in the citadel of the push-buttons behind the glass marked "Private."

John Wingfield, Sr. looked up from his desk in covert watchfulness to detect his son's mood, and he was conscious of a quality of manner that recalled the returning exile's entry into the same room upon his arrival from the West.

"Well, Jack," the father said, with marked cheeriness, "I hear you have been taking a holiday. It's all right, and you will find motoring beats pony riding."

"In some ways," Jack answered; and then he came a step nearer, his hand resting on the edge of the desk, as he looked into his father's eyes with glowing candor.

John Wingfield, Sr.'s eyes shifted to the pushbuttons and later to a paper on the desk, with which his fingers played gently. He realized instantly that something unusual was on Jack's mind.

"Father," Jack went on, "I want a long talk quite alone with you. When it is over I feel that we shall both know each other better; we can work together in a fuller understanding."

"Yes, Jack," answered the father, cautiously feeling his way with a swift upward glance, which fell again to the paper. "Well, what is it now? Come on!"

"There are a lot of questions I want to ask--family questions."

"Family questions?" The fingers paused in playing with the paper for an instant and went on playing again. The soft hands were as white as the paper. "Family questions, eh? Well, there isn't much to our family except you and I and that old ancestor--and a long talk, you say?"

"Yes. I thought that probably this would be a good time; you could give me an hour now. It might not take that long."

Jack's voice was even and engaging and respectful. But it seemed to fill the room with many echoing whispers.

"I have a very busy day before me," the father said, still without looking up. He was talking to a little pad at one corner of the green blotter which had a list of his appointments. "Your questions are not so imperative that they cannot wait?"

"Then shall it be at dinner?" Jack asked.

"At dinner? No. I have an engagement for dinner."

"Shall you be home early? Shall I wait up for you?" Jack persisted.

"Yes, that's it! Say at nine. I'll make a point of it--in the library at nine!" John Wingfield, Sr.'s hand slipped away from the papers and patted the back of Jack's hand. "And come on with your questions. I will answer every one that I can." He was looking up at Jack now, smilingly and attractively in his frankness. "Every one that I can, from the first John Wingfield right down to the present!"

But the hand that lay on Jack's was cold and its movement nervous and spasmodic.

"Thank you, father. I knew you would. I haven't forgotten your wish that I should bring all my doubts and questions to you," said Jack, happily. And in an impulse which had the devoutness of a rising hope he took that cold, soft hand in both of his and gave it a shake; and the feel of the son's grip, firm and warm, remained with John Wingfield, Sr. while he stared at the door through which Jack had passed out. When he had pulled himself together he asked Mortimer to connect him with Dr. Bennington.

"Doctor, I want a little talk with you to-night before nine," he said.

"Could you dine with me--not at the house--say at the club?
Yes--excellent--and make it at seven. Yes. Good-by!"

XXXII

A CRISIS IN THE WINGFIELD LIBRARY

A library atmosphere was missing from the Wingfield library, with its heavy panelling and rows of red and blue morocco backs. Rather the suggestion was of a bastion of privacy, where a man of action might make his plans or take counsel at leisure amid rich and mellow surroundings. Here, John Wingfield, Sr. had gained points through post-prandial geniality which he could never have won in the presence of the battery of push-buttons; here, his most successful conceptions had come to him; here, he had known the greatest moments of his life. He was right in saying that he loved his library; but he hardly loved it for its books.

When he returned to the house shortly before nine from his session with Dr. Bennington, it was with the knowledge that another great moment was in prospect. He took a few turns up and down the room before he rang for the butler to tell Jack that he had come in. Then he placed a chair near the desk, where its occupant would sit facing him. After he sat down he moved the desk lamp, which was the only light in the room, so that its rays fell on the back of the chair and left his own face in shadow--a precaution which he had taken on many other occasions in adroitness of stage management. He drew from the humidor drawer of his desk a box of the long cigars with blunt ends which need no encircling gilt band in praise of their quality.

As Jack entered, the father welcomed him with a warm, paternal smile. And he remembered that John Wingfield, Sr. could smile most pleasantly, and he knew the value of his smile. Jack answered the smile with one of his own, a little wan, a little subdued, yet enlivening under the glow of his father's evident happiness at seeing him. The father, who had transgressed the rules of longevity by taking a second cigar after dinner, now pushed the box across the desk to his son. Jack said that he would "roll one"; he did not care to smoke much. He produced a small package of flake tobacco and a packet of rice paper and with a deftness that was like sleight of hand made a cigarette without spilling a single flake. He had not always chosen the "makings" in place of private stock Havanas, but it seemed to suit his mood to-night.

"That is one of the things you learned in the West," the father observed affably, to break the ice.

"I can do them with one hand," Jack answered. "But you are likely to have an overflow--which is all right when you have the whole desert for the litter. Besides, in a library it would have the effect of gallery play, I fear."

He was seated in a way that revealed all the supple lines of his figure. However relaxed his attitude before his father, it was always suggestive of latent strength, appealing at once to paternal pride and paternal uncertainty as to what course the strength would take. His face under the light of the lamp was boyish and singularly without trace of guile.

The father struck a match and held it to light his son's cigarette; another habit of his which he had found flattering to men who were brought into the library for conference. Jack took a puff slowly and, after a time, another puff, and then dropped the cigarette on the ash receiver as much as to say that he had smoked enough. Something told John Wingfield, Sr. that this was to be a long interview and in no way hurried, as he saw the smile dying on the son's lips and misery coming into the son's eyes.

"These last two days have been pretty poignant for me," Jack began, in a simple, outright fashion; "and only half an hour ago I got this. It was hard to resist taking the first train West." He drew a telegram from his pocket and handed it to his father.

"We want you and though we don't suppose you can come, we simply had to let you know.

"JAMES R. GALWAY."

"It is Greek to me," said the father. "From your Little Rivers friends, I judge."

"Yes. I suppose that we may as well begin with it, as it drove everything else out of my mind for the moment."

John Wingfield, Sr. swung around in his chair, with his face in the shadow. His attitude was that of a companionable listener who is prepared for any kind of news.

"As you will, Jack," he said. "Everything that pertains to you is my interest. Go ahead in your own way."

"It concerns John Prather. I don't know that I have ever told you about him in my talks of Little Rivers."

"John Prather?" The father reflectively sounded the name, the while he studied the spiral of smoke rising from his cigar. "No, I don't think you have mentioned him."

It was Jack's purpose to take his father entirely into his confidence; to reveal his own mind so that there should be nothing of its perplexities which his father did not understand. He might not choose a logical sequence of thought or event, but in the end nothing should be left untold. Indeed, he had not studied how to begin his inquiries. That he had left to take care of itself. His chief solicitude was to keep his mind open and free of bitterness whatever transpired, and it was evident that he was under a great strain.

He told of the coming of John Prather to Little Rivers while he was absent; of the mention of the likeness by his fellow-ranchers; and of the fears entertained by Jim Galway and Mary. When he came to the scene in the store that afternoon it was given in a transparent fulness of detail; while all his changing emotions, from his first glimpse of Prather's profile to the effort to speak with him and the ultimatum of Prather's satirical gesture, were reflected in his features. He was the story-teller, putting his gift to an unpleasant task in illumination of sober fact and not the uses of imagination; and his audience was his father's cheek and ear in the shadow.

"Extraordinary!" John Wingfield, Sr. exclaimed when Jack had finished, glancing around with a shrug. "Naturally, you were irritated. I like to think that only two men have the Wingfield features--the features of the ancestor--yes, only two: you and I!"

"It was more than irritation; it was something profound and disturbing, almost revolting!" Jack exclaimed, under the disagreeable spell of his vivid recollection of the incident. "The resemblance to you was so striking, father, especially in the profile!" Jack was leaning forward, the better to see his father's profile, dim in the half light. "Yes, recognizable instantly--the nose and the lines about the mouth! You have never met anyone who has seen this man? You have never heard of him?" he asked, almost morbidly.

John Wingfield, Sr. broke into a laugh, which was deprecatory and metallic. He looked fairly into Jack's eyes with a kind of inquiring amazement at the boy's overwrought intensity.

"Why, no, Jack," he said, reassuringly. "If I had I shouldn't have forgotten it, you may be sure. And, well, Jack, there is no use of being sensitive about it, though I understand your indignation--especially after he flaunted the fact of the resemblance in such a manner and refused to meet you. From what I have heard about that fight with Leddy--Dr. Bennington told me--I can appreciate why he did not care to meet you." He laughed, more genially this time, in the survey of his son's broad shoulders. "I fear there is something of the old ancestor's devil in you when you get going!" he added.

So his father had seen this, too--what Mary had seen--this thing born in him with the coming of his strength!

"Yes, I suppose there is," he admitted, ruefully. "Yes, I have reason to know that there is."

His face went moody. Any malice toward John Prather passed. He was penitent for a feeling against a stranger that seemed akin to the dormant instinct that had made him glory in holding a bead on Pete Leddy.

"And I am glad of it!" said John Wingfield, Sr., with a flash of stronger emotion than he had yet shown in the interview.

"I am not. It makes me almost afraid of myself," Jack answered.

"Oh, I don't mean firing six-shooters--hardly! I mean backbone," he hastened to add, almost ingratiatingly. "It is a thing to control, Jack, not to worry about."

"Yes, to control!" said Jack, dismally.

He was hearing Ignacio's cry of "The devil is out of Senor Don't Care!" and seeing for the thousandth time Mary's horrified face as he pressed Pedro Nogales against the hedge. Now poise was all on the side of the father, who glanced away from Jack at the glint of the library cases in the semi-darkness in satisfaction. But only a moment did the son's absent mood last. He leaned forward quivering, free from his spell of reflection, and his words came pelting like hail. He was at grip with the phantoms and nothing should loosen his hold till the truth was out.

"Father, I could not fail to see the look on your face and the look on Jasper Ewold's when you found him in the drawing-room!"

At the sudden reversal of his son's attitude, John Wingfield, Sr. had drawn back into the shadow, as, if in defensive instinct before the force that was beating in Jack's voice.

"Yes, I was startled; yes, very startled! But, go on! Speak everything that you have in mind; for it is evident that you have much to say. Go on!" he repeated more calmly, and turned his face farther into the shadow, while he inclined his head toward Jack as if to hear better. One leg had drawn up under him and was pressing against the chair.

Jack waited a moment to gather his thoughts. When he spoke his passion was gone.

"We have always been as strangers, father," he began. "I have no recollection of you in childhood until that day you came as a stranger to the house at Versailles. I was seven, then. My mother was away, as you will recall. I remember that you did not kiss me or show any affection. You did not even say who you were. You looked me over, and I was very frail. I saw that I did not please you; and I did not like you. In my childish perversity I would speak only French to you, which you did not understand. When my mother came home, do you remember her look? I do. She went white as chalk and trembled. I was frightened with the thought that she was going to die. It was a little while before she spoke and when she did speak she was like stone. She asked you what you wanted, as if you were an intruder. You said: 'I have been looking at the boy!' Your expression told me again that you were not pleased with me. Without another word you departed. I can still hear your steps on the walk as you went away; they were so very firm."

"Yes, Jack, I can never forget." The tone was that of a man racked. "What else?" he asked. "Go on, Jack!"

"You know the life my mother and I led, study and play together. And that was the only time you saw me until I was fourteen. I was mortally in awe of you then and in awe of you the day I went West with your message to get strong. But I got strong; yes, strong, father!"

"Yes, Jack," said the father. "Yes, Jack, leave nothing unsaid--nothing!"

Now Jack swept back to the villa garden in Florence, the day of the Doge's call; and from there to the Doge's glance of recognition that first night in Little Rivers; then to the scene in front of the bookstore, when the Doge hesitated about going to see the Velasquez. He pictured the Doge's absorption over the mother's portrait; he repeated Mary's story on the previous evening.

All the while the profile, so dimly outlined in the outer darkness beyond the lamp's circle of light, to which he had been speaking, had not stirred. The father's cigar had gone out. It lay idly in his fingers, which rested on the arm of the chair, above a tiny pile of ashes on the rug. But there was no other sign of emotion, except his half affirmative interjections, with a confessional's encouragement to empty the mind of its every affliction.

"Why were my mother and myself always in exile? What was this barrier between you and her? Why was it that I never saw you? Why this bitterness

of Jasper Ewold against you? Why should that bitterness be turned against me? I want to know, father, so that we can start afresh and right. I no longer want to be in the dark, with its mystery, but in the light, where I can grapple with the truth!"

There was no rancor, no crashing of sentences; only high tension in the finality of an inquiry in which hope and fear rose together.

"Yes, Jack!" exclaimed John Wingfield, Sr., after a silence in which he seemed to be passing all that Jack had said in review. "I am glad you have told me this; that you have come to the one to whom you should come in trouble. You have made it possible for me to speak of something that I never found a way to speak about, myself. For, Jack, you truly have been a stranger to me and I to you, thanks to the chain of influences which you have mentioned."

Very slowly John Wingfield, Sr. had turned in his chair. Distress was rising in his tone as he leaned toward Jack. His face under the rim of light of the lamp had a new charm, which was not that of the indulgent or flattering or winning smile, or the masterful set of his chin on an object. He seemed pallid and old, struggling against a phantom himself; almost pitiful, this man of strength, while his eyes looked into Jack's with limpid candor.

"Jack, I will tell you all I can," he said. "I want to. It is duty. It is relief. But first, will you tell me what your mother told you? What her reasons were? I have a right to know that, haven't I, in my effort to make my side clear?" He spoke in direct, intimate appeal.

Jack's lips were trembling and his whole nature was throbbing in a new-found sympathy. For the first time he saw his father as a man of sensitive feeling, capable of deep suffering. And he was to have the truth, all the truth, in kindness and affection.

"After you had left the house at Versailles," said Jack, "she took me in her arms and said that you were my father. 'Did you like him?' she asked; and I said no, realizing nothing but the childish impression of the interview. At that she was wildly, almost hysterically, triumphant. I was glad to have made her so happy. 'You are mine alone! You have only me!' she declared over and over again. 'And you must never ask me any questions, for that is best.' She never mentioned you afterward; and in all my life, until I was fourteen, I was never away from her."

Again the palm of John Wingfield, Sr.'s hand ran back and forth over his knee and the foot that was against the chair leg beat a nervous tattoo; while he drew a longer breath than usual, which might have been either of surprise or relief. His face fell back behind the rim of the lamp's rays, but he did not turn it away as he had when Jack was talking.

"You know only the Jasper Ewold who has been mellowed by time," he began. "His scholarship was a bond of companionship for you in the isolation of a small community. I know him as boy and young man. He was very precocious. At the age of eight, as I remember, he could read his Caesar. You will appreciate what that meant in a New England town--that he was somewhat spoiled by admiration. And, naturally, his character and mine were very different, thanks to the difference in our situations; for the Ewolds had a good deal of money in those days. I was the type of boy who was ready to work at any kind of odd job in order to get dimes and quarters for my little bank."

"Well, it is quite absurd to go back to that as the beginning of Jasper Ewold's feelings toward me; but one day young Wingfield felt that young Ewold was patronizing him. We had a turn at fisticuffs which resulted in my favor. Jasper was a proud boy, and he never quite forgave me. In fact, he was not used to being crossed. Learning was easy for him; he was good-looking; he had an attractive manner, and it seemed only his right that all doors should open when he knocked. Soon after our battle he went away to school. Not until we were well past thirty did our paths cross again. He was something of a painter, but he really had had no set purpose in life except the pleasures of his intellectual diversions. I will not say that he was wild, but at least he had lived in the abundant freedom of his opportunities. He fell in love at the same time that I did with Alice Jamison. You have seen your mother's picture, but that gives you little idea of her beauty in girlhood."

"I have always thought her beautiful!" Jack exclaimed spontaneously.

"Yes. I am glad. She always was beautiful to me; but I like best to think of her before she turned against me. I like to think of her as she was in the days of our courtship. Fortune favored me instead of Jasper Ewold. I can well understand the blow it was to him, that she should take the storekeeper, the man without learning, the man without family, as people supposed then, when he thought that she belonged entirely to his world. But his enmity thereafter I can only explain by his wounded pride; by a mortal defeat for one used to having his way, for one who had never known discipline. Your mother and I were very happy for a time. I thought that she loved me and had chosen me because I was a man of purpose, while Jasper Ewold was not."

John Wingfield, Sr. spoke deliberately, measuring his thought before he put it into words, as if he were trying to set himself apart as one figure in a drama while he aimed to do exact justice to the others.

"It was soon after you were born that your mother's attitude changed. She was, as you know, supersensitive, and whatever her grievances were she kept them to herself. My immersion in my affairs was such that I could not be as attentive to her as I ought to have been. Sometimes I thought that the advertisement with our name in big letters in every morning paper might be offensive to her; again, that she missed in me the education I had had to forfeit in youth, and that my affection could hardly take its place. I know that Jasper Ewold saw her occasionally, and in his impulse I know that he said things about me that were untrue. But that I pass over. In his place I, too, might have been bitter.

"The best explanation I can find of your mother's change toward me is one that belongs in the domain of psychology and pathology. She suffered a great deal at your birth and she never regained her former strength. When she rose from her bed it was with a shadow over her mind. I saw that she was unhappy and nervous in my presence. Indeed, I had at times to face the awful sensation of feeling that I was actually repugnant to her. She was especially irritable if I kissed or fondled you. She dropped all her friends; she never made calls; she refused to see callers. I consulted specialists and all the satisfaction I had was that she was of a peculiarly high-strung nature and that in certain phases of melancholia, where there is no complete mental and physical breakdown, the patient turns on the one whom she would hold nearest and dearest if she were normal. The child that had taken her strength became the virtual passion of her worship, which she would share with no one.

"When she proposed to go to Europe for a rest, taking you with her, I welcomed the idea. I rejoiced in the hope that the doctors held out that she would come back well, and I ventured to believe in a happy future, with you as our common object of love and care. But she never returned, as you know; and she only wrote me once, a wild sort of letter about what a beautiful boy you were and that she had you and I had the store and I was never to send her any more remittances.

"I made a number of trips to Europe. I could not go frequently, because in those days, Jack, I was a heavy borrower of money in the expansion of my business, and only one who has built up a great business can understand how, in the earlier and more uncertain period of our banking credits, the absence of personal attention in any sudden crisis might throw you on the rocks. Naturally, when I went I wrote to Alice that I was coming; but I always found that she had gone and left no address for forwarding mail from the Credit Lyonnais. Once when I went without writing she eluded me, and the second time I found that she had a cottage at Versailles. That, as you know, was the only occasion when I ever saw you or her until I came to bring you home after her sudden death."

"Yes," Jack whispered starkly. "That day I had left her as well as usual and came home to find her lying still and white on a couch, her book fallen out of her hand onto the floor and--" the words choked in his throat.

"And the stranger, your father, who came for you seemed very hard and forbidding to you!"

"Yes," Jack managed to say.

"But, Jack, when my steps sounded so firm the day I left you at Versailles it was the firmness of force of will fighting to accept the inevitable. For I had seen your face. It was like mine, and yet I had to give you up! I had to give you up knowing that I might not see you again; knowing that this tragic, incomprehensible fatality had set you against me; knowing that any further efforts to see you meant only pain for Alice and for me. Whatever happiness she knew came from you, and that she should have. And remember, Jack, that out of all this tragedy I, too, had my point of view. I had my moments of reproach against fate; my moments of bitterness and anger; my moments when I set all my mind with, volcanic energy into my affairs in order to forget my misfortune. I had to build for the sake of building. Perhaps that hardened me.

"When you came home I saw that you were mine in blood but not mine in heart. All your training had been foreign, all of estrangement from the business and the ways of the home-country; which you could not help, I could not help, nothing now could help. But, after all, I had been building for you; that was my new solace. I wanted you to be equal to what was coming to you, and that change meant discipline. To be frank with you, as you have been with me, you were sickly, hectic, dreamy; and when word came that you must go to the desert if your life were to be saved--well, Jack, I had to put affection aside and consider this blow for what it was, and think not of kind words but of what was best for you and your future. I knew that my duty to you and your duty to yourself was to see you become strong, and for your sake you must not return until you were strong.

"Now, as for the scene in the drawing-room the other day: I could not

forget what Jasper Ewold had said of me. That was one thing. Another was that I had detected his influence over you; an influence against the purpose and steadiness that I was trying to inculcate in you; and suddenly coming upon him in my own house, in view of his enmity and the way in which he had spoken about me, I was naturally startled and indignant and withdrew to avoid a scene. That is all, Jack. I have answered your questions to the best of my knowledge. If others occur to you I will try my best to answer them, too;" and the father seemed ready to submit every recess of his mind to the son's inquisition.

"You have answered everything," said Jack; "everything--fairly, considerately, generously."

There was a flash of triumph in the father's eyes. Slowly he rose and stood with his finger-ends caressing the blotting-pad. Jack rose at the same time, his movement automatic, instinctively in sympathy with his father's. His head was bowed under stress of the emotion, incapable of translation into language, which transfixed him. It had all been made clear, this thing that no one could help. His feeling toward his mother could never change; but penetrating to the depths in which it had been held sacred was a new feeling. The pain that had brought him into the world had brought misery to the authors of his being. There was no phantom except the breath of life in his nostrils which they had given him.

Watchfully, respecting the son's silence, the father's lips tightened, his chin went out slightly and his brows drew together in a way that indicated that he did not consider the battle over. At length, Jack's head came up and his face had the strength of a youthful replica of the ancestor's, radiant in gratitude, and in his eyes for the first time, in looking into his father's, were trust and affection. There was no word, no other demonstration except the steady, liquid look that spoke the birth of a great, understanding comradeship. The father fed his hunger for possession, which had been irresistibly growing in him for the last two months, on that look. He saw his son's strength as something that had at last become malleable; and this was the moment when the metal was at white heat, ready for knowing turns with the pincers and knowing blows of the hammer.

The message from Jim Galway was still on the table where the father had laid it after reading. Now he pressed his fingers on it so hard that the nails became a row of red spots.

"And the telegram, Jack?" he asked.

Jack stared at the yellow slip of paper as the symbol of problems that reappeared with burning acuteness in his mind. It smiled at him in the satire of John Prather triumphing in Little Rivers. It visualized pictures of lean ranchers who had brought him flowers in the days of his convalescence; of children gathered around him on the steps of his bungalow; of all the friendly faces brimming good-will into his own on the day of his departure; of a patch of green in desert loneliness, with a summons to arms to defend its arteries of life.

"They want me to help--I half promised!" he said.

"Yes. And just how can you help?" asked his father, gently.

"Why, that is not quite clear yet. But a stranger, they made me one of themselves. They say that they need me. And, father, that thrilled me. It thrilled the idler to find that there was some place where he could be of service; that there was some one definite thing that others thought he could do well!"

The father proceeded cautiously, reasonably, with his questions, as one who seeks for light for its own sake. Jack's answers were luminously frank. For there was always to be truth between them in their new fellowship, unfettered by hopes or vagaries.

"You could help with your knowledge of law? With political influence? Help these men seasoned by experience in land disputes in that region?"

"No!"

"And would Jasper Ewold, whom I understand is the head and founder of the community, want you to come? Has he asked you?" the father continued, drawing in the web of logic.

"On the contrary, he would not want me."

"And Miss Ewold? Would she want you?"

There Jack hesitated. When he spoke, however, it was to admit the fact that was stabbing him.

"No, she would not. She has dismissed me. But--but I half promised," he added, his features setting firmly as they had after Leddy had fired at him. "It seems like duty, unavoidable."

The metal was cooling, losing its malleability, and the father proceeded to thrust it back into the furnace.

"Then, I take it that your value to Little Rivers is your cool hand with a gun," he said, "and the summons is to uncertainties which may lead to something worse than a duel. You are asked to come because you can fight. Do you want to go for that? To go to let the devil, as you call it, out of you?"

Now the metal was soft with the heat of the shame of the moment when Jack had called to Leddy, "I am going to kill you!" and of the moment when he saw Pedro Nogales's limp, broken arm and ghastly face.

"No, no!" Jack gasped. "I want no fight! I never want to draw a bead on a man again! I never want to have a revolver in my hand again!"

He was shuddering, half leaning against the desk for support. His father waited in observant comprehension. Convulsively, Jack straightened with desperation and all the impassioned pleading to Mary on the pass was in his eyes.

"But the thing that I cannot help--the transcendent thing, not of logic, not of Little Rivers' difficulties--how am I to give that up?" he cried.

"Miss Ewold, you mean?"

"Yes!"

"Jack, I know! I understand! Who should understand if not I?" The father drew Jack's hand into his own, and the fluid force of his desire for mastery was flowing out from his finger-ends into the son's fibres, which were receptively sensitive to the caress. "I know what it is when the woman you love dismisses you! You have her to think of as well as yourself. Your own wish may not be lord. You may not win that which will not be won"--how well he knew that!--"either by protest, by persistence, or by labor. You are dealing with the tender and intangible; with feminine temperament, Jack. And, Jack, it is wise for you, isn't it, to bear in mind that your life has not been normal? With the switch from desert to city life homesickness has crept over you. From to-night things will not be so strange, will they? But if you wish a change, go to Europe--yes, go, though I cannot bear to think of losing you the very moment that we have come to know each other; when the past is clear and amends are at hand.

"And, Jack, if your mother were here with us and were herself, would she want you to go back to take up a rifle instead of your work at my side? I do not pretend to understand Jasper Ewold's or Mary Ewold's thoughts. She has preferred to make another generation's ill-feeling her own in a thing that concerns her life alone. She has seen enough of you to know her mind. For, from all I hear, you have not been a faint-hearted lover. Is it fair to her to follow her back to the desert? Is it the courage of self-denial, of control of impulse on your part? Would your mother want you to persist in a veritable conquest by force of your will, whose strength you hardly realize, against Mary Ewold's sensibilities? And if you broke down her will, if you won, would there be happiness for you and for her? Jack, wait! If she cares for you, if there is any germ of love for you in her, it will grow of itself. You cannot force it into blossom. Come, Jack, am I not right?"

Jack's hands lay cold and limp in his father's; so limp that it seemed only a case of leading, now. Yet there was always the uncertain in the boy; the uncertain hovering under that face of ashes that the father was so keenly watching; a face so clearly revealing the throes of a struggle that sent cold little shivers into his father's warm grasp. Jack's eyes were looking into the distance through a mist. He dropped the lids as if he wanted darkness in which to think. When he raised them it was to look in his father's eyes firmly. There was a half sob, as if this sentimentalist, this Senor Don't Care, had wrung determination from a precipice edge, even as Mary Ewold had. He gripped his father's hands strongly and lifted them on a level with his breast.

"You have been very fine, father! I want you to be patient and go on helping me. The trail is a rough one, but straight, now. I--I'm too brimming full to talk!" And blindly he left the library.

When the door closed, John Wingfield, Sr. seized the telegram, rolled it up with a glad, fierce energy and threw it into the waste-basket. His head went up; his eyes became points of sharp flame; his lips parted in a smile of relief and triumph and came together in a straight line before he sank down in his chair in a collapse of exhaustion. After a while he had the decanter brought in; he gulped a glass of brandy, lighted another cigar, and, swinging around, fell back at ease, his mind a blank except for one glowing thought:

"He will not go! He will give up the girl! He is to be all mine!"

It is said that the best actors never go on the stage. They play real

parts in private life, making their own lines as they watch the other players. One of this company, surveying the glint of his bookcases, was satisfied with the greatest effort of his life in his library.

XXXIII

PRATHER SEES THE PORTRAIT

It did not occur to Jack to question a word of the narrative that had reduced a dismal enigma to luminous, connected facts. With the swift processes of reason and the promptness of decision of which he was capable on occasion, he had made up his mind as to his future even as he ascended the stairs to his room. The poignancy of his father's appeal had struck to the bed-rock of his affection and his conscience, revealing duty not as a thing that you set for yourself, but which circumstances set for you.

Never before had he realized how hopelessly he had been a dreamer. Firio, P.D., Wrath of God, and Jag Ear became the fantastic memory of another incarnation. His devil should never again rejoice in having his finger on a trigger or send him off an easy traveller in search of gorgeous sunrises. His devil should be transformed into a backbone of unremitting apprenticeship in loving service for the father who had built for him in love. Though his head split, he would master every detail of the business. And when Jack stepped into the Rubicon he did not splash around or look back. He went right over to the new country on the other bank.

But there were certain persons whom he must inform of the crossing. First, he wrote a telegram to Jim Galway: "Sorry, but overwhelming duty here will not permit. Luck and my prayers with you." Then to Firio a letter, which did not come quite so easily: "You see by now that you are mistaken, Firio. I am not coming back. Make the most of the ranch--your ranch--that you can." The brevity, he told himself, was in keeping with Firio's own style. Besides, anything more at length would have opened up an avenue of recollections which properly belonged to oblivion.

And Mary? Yes, he would write to her, too. He would cut the last strand with the West. That was best. That was the part of his new courage of self-denial stripping itself of every trammeling association of sentiment. Other men had given up the women of their choice; and he could never be the man of this woman's choice. Somehow, his father's talk had made him realize an inevitable outcome which had better be met and mastered in present fortitude, rather than after prolonged years of fruitless hope centering two thousand miles away. He started a dozen letters to Mary, meaning each to be a fitting envoi to their comradeship and a song of good wishes. Each one he wrote in the haste of having the task quickly over, only to throw away what he had written when he read it. The touch that he wanted would not come. He was simply flashing out a few of a thousand disconnected thoughts that ran away incoherently with his pen.

But wasn't any letter, any communication of any kind, superfluous? Wasn't it the folly of weak and stupid stubbornness? She had spoken her final word in their relations at the hotel door. There was no Little Rivers; there was no Mary; there was nothing but the store. To enforce this fiat

he had only to send the wire to Jim and post the letter to Firio. This he would do himself. A stroll would give him fresh air. It was just what he needed after all he had been through that evening; and he would see the streets not with any memory of the old restlessness when he and his father were strangers, but kindly, as the symbol of the future.

His room was on the second floor. As he left it, he heard the door-bell ring, its electric titter very clear in the silence of the house. No doubt it meant a telegram for his father. At the turn of the stairs on the first floor he saw the back of the butler before the open door. Evidently it was not a matter of a telegram, but of some late caller. Jack paused in the darkness of the landing, partly to avoid the bother of having to meet anyone and partly arrested by the manner of the butler, who seemed to be startled and in doubt about admitting a stranger at that hour. Indistinctly, Jack could hear the caller's voice. The tone was familiar in a peculiar quality, which he tried to associate with a voice that he had heard frequently. The butler, apparently satisfied with the caller's appearance, or, at least, with his own ability to take care of a single intruder, stepped back, with a word to come in. Then, out of the obscurity of the vestibule, appeared the pale face of John Prather. Jack withdrew farther into the shadows instinctively, as if he had seen a ghost; as if, indeed, he were in fear of ghosts.

"I will take your card to Mr. Wingfield," said the butler.

Prather made a perfunctory movement as if for a card-case, but apparently changed his mind under the prompting suggestion that it was superfluous.

"My name is John Prather," he announced. "Mr. Wingfield knows who I am and I am quite sure that he will see me."

While the butler, after rapping cautiously, went into the library with the message, John Prather stood half smiling to himself as he looked around the hall. The effect seemed to please him in a contemplative fashion, for he rubbed the palms of his hands together, as he had in his survey of the diamond counters. He was serenity itself as John Wingfield, Sr. burst out of the library, his face hard-set.

"I thought you were going this evening!" he exclaimed. "By what right do you come here?"

He placed himself directly in front of Prather, thus hiding Prather's figure, but not his face, which Jack could see was not in the least disturbed by the other's temper.

"Oh, no! The early morning train has the connections I want for Arizona," he answered casually, as if he were far from being in any hurry. "I was taking a walk, and happening to turn into Madison Avenue I found myself in front of the house. It occurred to me what a lot I had heard about that ancestor, and seeing a light in the library, and considering how late it was, I thought I might have a glimpse of him without inconveniencing any other member of the family. Do you mind?"

He put the question with an inflection that was at once engaging and confident.

"Mind!" gasped John Wingfield, Sr.

"I am sure you do not!" Prather returned. Now a certain deference and a certain pungency of satire ran together in his tone, the mixture being nicely and pleasurably controlled. "Is it in there, in the drawing-room?"

"And then what else? Where do you mean to end? I thought that--"

"Nothing else," Prather interrupted reassuringly. "Everything is settled, of course. This is sort of a farewell privilege."

"Yes, in there!" snapped John Wingfield, Sr. "It's the picture on the other side of the mantel. I will wait here--and be quick, quick, I tell you! I want you out of this house! I've done enough! I--"

"Thanks! It is very good-natured of you!"

John Prather passed leisurely into the drawing-room and John Wingfield, Sr. stood guard by the door, his hand gripping the heavy portieres for support, while his gaze was steadily fixed at a point in the turn of the stairs just below where Jack was obscured in the shadow. His face was drawn and ashen against the deep red of the hangings, and torment and fear and defiance, now one and then the other, were in ascendancy over the features which Jack had always associated with composed and unchanging mastery until he had seen them illumined with affection only an hour before. And the father had said that he had never met or heard of John Prather! The father had said so quietly, decidedly, without hesitation! This one thought kept repeating itself to Jack's stunned brain as he leaned against the wall limp from a blow that admits of no aggressive return.

"The ancestor certainly must have been a snappy member of society in his time! It has been delightful to have a look at him," said John Prather, as he came out of the drawing-room.

He paused as he spoke. He was still smiling. The mole on his cheek was toward the stairway; and it seemed to heighten the satire of his smile. The faces of the young man and the old man were close together and they were standing in much the same attitude, giving an effect of likeness in more than physiognomy. That note of John Prather's voice that had sounded so familiar to Jack was a note in the father's voice when he was particularly suave.

"This is the end--that is the understanding--the end?" demanded John Wingfield, Sr.

"Oh, quite!" John Prather answered easily, moving toward the door. He did not offer his hand, nor did John Wingfield, Sr. offer to take it. But as he went out he said, his smile broadening: "I hope that Jack makes a success with the store, though he never could run it as well as I could. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" gasped John Wingfield, Sr.

He wheeled around distractedly and stood still, his head bowed, his fingers working nervously before his hands parted in a shrugging, outspread gesture of relief; then, his head rising, his body stiffening, once more his arbitrary self, he started up the stairs with the firm yet elastic step with which he mounted the flights of the store.

If Jack remained where he was they would meet. What purpose in questions

now? The answer to all might be as false as to one. He was no more in a mood to trust himself with a word to his father than he had been to trust himself with a word to John Prather. He dropped back into the darkness of the dining-room and sank into a chair. When a bedroom door upstairs had closed softly he was sequestered in silence with his thoughts.

His own father had lied to him! Lied blandly! Lied with eyes limpid with appeal! And the supreme commandment on which his mother had ever insisted was truth. The least infraction of it she would not forgive; it was the only thing for which she had ever punished him. He recalled the one occasion when she had seemed harsh and merciless, as she said:

"A lie fouls the mouth of the one who utters it, Jack. A lie may torture and kill. It may ruin a life. It is the weapon of the coward--and never be a coward, Jack, never be afraid!"

At the New England preparatory school which he had attended after he came home, a lie was the abomination on which the discipline of student comradeship laid a scourge. Out on the desert, where the trails run straight and the battle of life is waged straight against thirst and fatigue and distance, men spoke straight.

And nothing had been explained, after all! The phantom was back, definite of form and smiling in irony. For it had a face, now, the face of John Prather! How was he connected with the story of the mother? the father? the Doge?

Then, like a shaft of light across memory, came the recollection of a thing that had been so negligible to Jack at the time. It was Dr. Bennington's first question in Jack's living-room; a question so carelessly put and so dissociated from the object of his visit! Jack remembered Dr. Bennington's curious glance through his eyebrows as he asked him if he had met John Prather. And Dr. Bennington had brought Jack into the world! He knew the family history! The Jack that now rose from the chair was a Jack of action, driven by the scourge of John Prather's smile into obsession with the one idea which was crying: "I will know! I will know!"

Downstairs in the hall he learned over the telephone that Dr. Bennington had just gone out on a call. It would be possible to see him yet to-night! An hour later, as the doctor entered his reception-room he was startled by a pacing figure in the throes of impatience, who turned on him without formality in an outburst:

"Dr. Bennington, you asked me in Little Rivers if I had ever met John Prather. I have met him! Who is he? What is he to me?"

The doctor's suavity was thrown off its balance, but he did not lose his presence of mind. He was too old a hand at his profession, too capable, for that.

"I refuse to answer!" he said quickly and decisively.

"Then you do know!" Jack took a step toward the doctor. His weight was on the ball of his foot; his eyes had the fire of a command that was not to be resisted.

"Heavens! How like the ancestor!" the doctor exclaimed involuntarily.

"Then you do know! Who is he? What is he to me?"

It seemed as if the ceiling were about to crack. The doctor looked away to avoid the bore of Jack's unrelenting scrutiny. He took a turn up and down, rapidly, nervously, his fingers pressed in against the palms and the muscles of his forearms moving in the way of one who is trying to hold himself in control by an outward expression of force against inward rebellion.

"I dined with your father to-night!" he exclaimed. "I counseled him to tell you the truth! I said that if he did not want to tell it for its own sake, as policy it was the only thing to you! I--I--" he stopped, facing Jack with a sort of grisly defiance. "Jack, a doctor is a confessor of men! He keeps their secrets! Good-night!" And he strode through the office door, which he closed behind him sharply, in reminder that the interview was at an end.

As Jack went down the steps into the night, the face of John Prather, with a satirical turn to the lips, was preceding him. Now he walked madly up and down and back and forth across town to the river fronts, with panting energy of stride, as he fastened the leash of will on quivering nerves. When dawn came it was the dawn of the desert calling to a brain that had fought its way to a lucid purpose. It started him to the store in the fervor of a grateful mission, while a familiar greeting kept repeating itself in his ears on the way:

"You won't forget, Jack, about giving me a chance to come along if you ever go out West again, will you?"

The question was one in answer to a promise; a reminder from certain employees into whom he had fused his own spirit of enthusiasm about dry wastes yielding abundance.

"But you must work very hard," he had told them. "Not until you have callouses on your hands can you succeed or really know how to enjoy a desert sunrise or sunset. After that, you will be able to stand erect and look destiny in the face."

"No February slush!" Burleigh, the fitter, had said. "No depending on one man to hold your job!"

"Your own boss! You own some land and you just naturally get what you earn!" according to Joe Mathewson.

"And from what I can make out," observed one of the automobile van drivers whom Jack had accompanied on the suburban rounds, "it requires about as much brains as running an automobile to be what you'd call a first-class, a number one desert Rube, Jack!"

"Yes," Jack told him. "The process that makes the earth fruitful is not less complicated than a motor, simply because it is one of the earliest inventions. You mix in nature's carbureter light and moisture with the chemical elements of the soil."

"I'm on!" the chauffeur rejoined. "If a man works with a plow instead of a screwdriver, it doesn't follow that his mind is as vacant as a cow that stands stockstill in the middle of the road to show you that you can't fool her into thinking that radiators are good to eat."

In explaining the labor and pains of orange-growing, which ended only with the careful picking and packing, Jack would talk as earnestly as his father would about the tedious detail which went into the purchase and sale of the articles in any department of the store. He might not be able to choose the best expert for the ribbon counter, but he had a certain confidence that he could tell the man or the woman who would make good in Little Rivers. No manager was more thorough in his observation of clerks for promotion than Jack in observing would-be ranchers. He had given his promise to one after another of a test list of disciples; and at times he had been surprised to find how serious both he and the disciples were over a matter that existed entirely on the hypothesis that he was not going to stay permanently in New York.

This morning he was at the store for the last time, arriving even before the delivery division, to circulate the news that he was returning to Little Rivers. Trouble was brewing out there, he explained, but they could depend on him. He would make a place for them and send word when he was ready; and all whom he had marked as faithful were eager to go. Thus he had builded unwittingly for another future of responsibilities when he had paused in the midst of the store's responsibilities to tell stories of how a desert ranch is run.

But one disciple did not even want to wait on the message. It was Peter Mortimer, whom Jack caught on his way to the elevator at eight, his usual hour, to make sure of having the letters opened and systematically arranged when his employer should appear.

"So you are going, Jack! And--and, Jack, you know?" asked Peter significantly.

"Yes, Peter. And I see that you know."

"I do, but my word is given not to tell."

Through that night's march Jack had guessed enough. He had guessed his fill of chill misery, which now took the place of the hunger of inquiry. The full truth was speeding out to the desert. It was with John Prather.

"Then I will not press you, Peter," he said. "But, Peter, just one question, if you care to answer; was it--was it this thing that drove my mother into exile?"

"Yes, Jack."

Then a moment's silence, with Peter's eyes full of sympathy and Jack's dull with pain.

"And, Jack," Peter went on, "well, I've been so long at it that suddenly, now you're going, I feel choked up, as if I were about to overflow with anarchy. Jack, I'm going to give notice that I will retire as soon as there is somebody to take my place. I want to rest and not have to keep trying to remember if I have forgotten anything. I've saved up a little money and whatever happens out there, why, there'll be some place I can buy where I can grow roses and salads, as you say, if nothing more profitable, won't there?"

"Yes, Peter. I know other fertile valleys besides that of Little Rivers, though none that is its equal. I shall have a garden in one of them and you shall have a garden next to mine."

"Then I feel fixed comfortable for life!" said Peter, with a perfectly wonderful smile enlivening the wrinkles of his old face, which made Jack think once more that life was worth living.

Later in the morning, after he had bought tickets for Little Rivers, Jack returned to the house. When he stood devoutly before the portrait, whose "I give! I give!" he now understood in new depths, he thought:

"I know that you would not want to remain here another hour. You would want to go with me."

And before the portrait on the other side of the mantel he thought, challengingly and affectionately:

"And you? You were an old devil, no doubt, but you would not lie! No, you would not lie to the Admiralty or to Elizabeth even to save your head! Yes, you would want to go with me, too!"

Tenderly he assisted the butler to pack the portraits, which were put in a cab. When Jack departed in their company, this note lay on the desk in the library, awaiting John Wingfield, Sr.'s return that evening:

"Father:

"The wire to Jim Galway which I enclose tells its own story. It was written after our talk. When I was going out to send it I saw John Prather and you in the hall. You said that you knew nothing of him. I overheard what passed between you and him. So I am going back to Little Rivers. The only hope for me now is out there.

"I am taking the portrait of my mother, because it is mine. I am taking the portrait of the ancestor, because I cannot help it any more than he could help taking a Spanish galleon. That is all I ask or ever could accept in the way of an inheritance.

"Jack."

XXXIV

"JOHN WINGFIELD, YOU--"

John Wingfield, Sr. had often made the boast that he never worried; that he never took his business to bed with him. When his head touched the pillow there was oblivion until he awoke refreshed to greet the problems left over from yesterday. Such a mind must be a reliably co-ordinated piece of machinery, with a pendulum in place of a heart. It is overawing to average mortals who have not the temerity to say "Nonsense!" to great egos. Yet the best adjusted clocks may have a lapse in a powerful magnetic storm, and in an earthquake they might even be tipped off the shelf, with their metal parts rendered quite as helpless by the fall as those of a human organism subject to the constitutional weaknesses of the flesh.

It was also John Wingfield, Sr.'s boast to himself that he had never been

beaten, which average mortals with the temerity to say "Nonsense!"--that most equilibratory of words--might have diagnosed as a bad case of self-esteem finding a way to forget the resented incidental reverses of success. Yet, even average mortals noted when John Wingfield, Sr. arrived late at the store the morning after Jack's departure for the West that he had not slept well. His haggardness suggested that for once the pushbutton to the switch of oblivion had failed him. The smile of satisfied power was lacking. In the words of the elevator boy, impersonal observer and swinger of doors, "I never seen the old man like that before!"

But the upward flight through the streets of his city, if it did not bring back the smile, brought back the old pride of ownership and domination. He still had a kingdom; he was still king. Resentment rose against the cause of the miserable twelve hours which had thrown the machinery of his being out of order. He passed the word to himself that he should sleep to-night and that from this moment, henceforth things would be the same as they had been before Jack came home. Yes, there was just one reality for him. It was enthroned in his office. This morning was to be like any other business morning; like thousands of mornings to come in the many years of activity that stretched ahead of him.

"A little late," he said, explaining his tardiness to his secretary; a superfluity of words in which he would not ordinarily have indulged. "I had some things to attend to on the outside."

With customary quiet attentiveness, Mortimer went through the mail with his employer, who was frequently reassuring himself that his mind was as clear, his answers as sure, and his interest as concentrated as usual. This task finished, Mortimer, with his bundle of letters and notes in hand, instead of going out of the room when he had passed around the desk, turned and faced the man whom he had served for thirty years.

"Mr. Wingfield--"

"Well, Peter?"

John Wingfield, Sr. looked up sharply, struck by Mortimer's tone, which seemed to come from another man. In Mortimer's eye was a placid, confident light and his stoop was less marked.

"Mr. Wingfield, I am getting on in years, now," he said, "and I have concluded to retire as soon as you have someone for my place; the sooner, sir, the more agreeable to me."

"What! What put this idea into your head?" John Wingfield, Sr. snapped. Often of late he had thought that it was time he got a younger man in Peter's place. But he did not like the initiative to come from Peter; not on this particular morning.

"Why, just the notion that I should like to rest. Yes, rest and play a little, and grow roses and salads," said the old secretary, respectfully.

"Roses and salads! What in--where are you going to grow them?"

There was something so serene about Peter that his highly imperious, poised employer found it impertinent, not to say maddening. Peter had a look of the freedom of desert distances in his eyes already. A lieutenant was actually radiating happiness in that neutral-toned sanctum of power,

particularly this morning.

"I am going out to Little Rivers, or to some place that Jack finds for me, where I am to have a garden and work--or maybe I better call it potter around--out of doors in January and February, just like it was June."

Peter spoke very genially, as if he were trying to win a disciple on his own account.

"With Jack! Oh!" gasped John Wingfield, Sr. He struck his closed fist into the palm of his hand in his favorite gesture of anger, the antithesis of the crisp rubbing of the palms, which he so rarely used of late years. Rage was contrary to the rules of longevity, exciting the heart and exerting pressure on the artery walls.

"Yes, sir," answered Peter, pleasantly.

"Well--yes--well, Jack has decided to go back!" Then there rose strongly in John Wingfield, Sr.'s mind a suspicion that had been faintly signaled to his keen observation of everything that went on in the store. "Are any other employees going?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir, I think there are; not immediately, but as soon as he finds a place for them."

"How many?"

"I don't think it is any secret. About fifty, sir."

"Name some of them!"

"Joe Mathewson, that big fellow who drives a warehouse truck, and Burleigh;" and Peter went on with those of the test proof list whom he knew.

Every one of them had high standing. Every one represented a value. While at first John Wingfield, Sr. had decided savagely that Mortimer should remain at his pleasure, now his sense of outraged egoism took an opposite turn. He could get on without Mortimer; he could get on if every employee in the store walked out. There were more where they came from in a city of five millions population; and no one in the world knew so well as he how to train them.

"Very good, Peter!" he said rigidly, as if he were making a declaration of war. "Fix up your papers and leave as soon as you please. I will have one of the clerks take your place."

"Thank you. That is very kind, Mr. Wingfield!" Mortimer returned, so politely, even exultantly, that his aspect seemed treasonable.

John Wingfield, Sr. tried to concentrate his attention on some long and important letters that had been left on his desk for further consideration; but his mind refused to stick to the lines of typewriting.

"This one is a little complicated," he thought, "I will lay it aside."

He tried the second and the third letters, with no better results. A tanned face and a pair of broad shoulders kept appearing between him and

the paper. Again he was thinking of Jack, as he had all night, to the exclusion of everything else. Unquestionably, this son had a lot of magnetic force in him; he had command of men. Why, he had won fifty of the best employees out of sheer sentiment to follow him out to the desert, when they had no idea what they were in for!

His gaze fell and rested for some time on the bunch of roses on his desk. Every morning there had been a fresh bunch, in keeping with the custom that Jack had established. The father had become so used to their presence that he was unconscious of it. For all the pleasure he got out of them, they might as well have been in the cornucopia vase in the limousine. His hand went out spasmodically toward the roses, as if he would crush them; crush this symbol of the thing drawn from the mother that had invaded the calm autocracy of his existence. The velvety richness of the petals leaning toward him above the drooping grace of their stems made him pause in realization of the absurdity of his anger. A feeling to which he had been a stranger swept over him. It was like a breaking instinct of dependableness; and then he called up Dr. Bennington.

"Well, he has gone!" he told the doctor, desperately.

"You did not tell him the truth!" came the answer; and he noted that the doctor's voice was without its usual suavity. It was as matter-of-fact to the man of millions as if it had been advising an operation in a dispensary case.

"No, not exactly," John Wingfield, Sr. confessed.

"I told you what his nature was; how it had drawn on the temperament of his mother. I told you that with candor, with a decently human humility appealing to his affections, everything was possible. And remember, he is strong, stronger than you, John Wingfield! There's a process of fate in him! John Wingfield, you--" The sentence ended abruptly, as if the doctor had dropped the receiver on the hooks with a crash.

Phantoms were closing in around John Wingfield, Sr.... His memory ranged back over the days of ardent youth, in the full tide of growing success, when to want a thing, human or material, meant to have it.... And in his time he had told a good many lies. The right lie, big and daring, at the right moment had won more than one victory. With John Prather out of the way, he had decided on an outright falsehood to his son. Why had he not compromised with Dr. Bennington's advice and tried part falsehood and part contrition? But no matter, no matter. He would go on; he was made of steel.

Again the tanned face and broad shoulders stood between him and the page. Jack was strong; yes, strong; and he was worth having. All the old desire of possession reappeared, in company with his hatred of defeat. He was thinking of the bare spot on the wall in the drawing-room in place of the Velasquez. There would be an end of his saying: "The boy is the spit of the ancestor and just as good a fighter, too; only his abilities are turned into other channels more in keeping with the spirit of the age!" An end of: "Fine son you have there!" from men at the club who had given him only a passing nod in the old days. For he was not displeased that the boy was liked, where he himself was not. The men whom he admired were those who had faced him with "No!" across the library desk; who had got the better of him, even if he did not admit it to himself. And the strength of his son, baffling to his cosmos, had won his admiration. No,

he would not lose Jack's strength without an effort; he wanted it for his own. Perhaps something else, too, there in the loneliness of the office in the face of that bunch of roses was pulling him: the thrill that he had felt when he saw the moisture in Jack's eyes and felt the warmth of his grasp before Jack left the library.

And Jack and John Prather were speeding West to the same destination! They would meet! What then? There was no use of trying to work in an office on Broadway when the forces which he had brought into being over twenty years ago were in danger of being unloosed out on the desert, with Jack riding free and the fingers of the ancestor-devil on the reins. John Wingfield, Sr. called in the general manager.

"You are in charge until I return," he said; and a few hours later he was in a private car, bound for Little Rivers.

PART III

HE FINDS HIS PLACE IN LIFE

XXXV

BACK TO LITTLE RIVERS

As with the gentle touch of a familiar hand, the ozone of high altitudes gradually and sweetly awakened Jack. The engine was puffing on an upgrade; the car creaked and leaned in taking a curve. Raising the shade of his berth he looked out on spectral ranges that seemed marching and tumbling through dim distances. With pillows doubled under his head he lay back, filling sight and mind with the indistinctness and spacious mystery of the desert at night; recalling his thoughts with his last view of it over two months ago in the morning hours after leaving El Paso and seeing his future with it now, where then he had seen his future with the store.

"Think of old Burleigh raising oranges! I am sure that the trees will be well trimmed," he whispered. "Think of Mamie Devore in the thick of the great jelly competition, while the weight of Joe Mathewson's shoulders starts a spade into the soil as if it were going right to the centre of the earth. Why, Joe is likely to get us into international difficulties by poking the ribs of a Chinese ancestor! Yes--if we don't lose our Little Rivers; and we must not lose it!"

The silvery face of the moon grew fainter with the coming of a ruddier light; the shadows of the mountains were being etched definitely on the plateaus that stretched out like vast floors under the developing glow of sunrise; and the full splendor of day had come, with its majestic spread of vision.

"When Joe sees that he will feel so strong he will want to get out and carry the Pullman," Jack thought. "But Mamie will not let him for fear that he will overdo!"

How slow the train seemed to travel! It was a snail compared to Jack's eagerness to arrive. He was inclined to think that P.D., Wrath of God, and Jag Ear were faster than through expresses. He kept inquiring of the conductor if they were on time, and the conductor kept repeating that they were. How near that flash of steel at a bend around a tongue of chaotic rock, stretching out into the desert sea, with its command to man to tunnel or accept a winding path for his iron horse! How long in coming to it in that rare air, with its deceit of distances! Landmark after landmark of peak or bold ridge took the angle of some recollected view of his five years' wanderings. It was already noon when he saw Galeria from the far end of the long basin that he had crossed, with the V as the compass of his bearings, on the ride that brought him to the top to meet Mary and Pete Leddy.

Then the V was lost while the train wound around the range that formed one side of the basin's rim. The blaze of midday had passed before it entered the reaches of the best valley yet in the judgment of a connoisseur in valleys; and under the Eternal Painter's canopy a spot of green quivered in the heat-rays of the horizon. His Majesty was in a dreamy mood. He was playing in delicate variations, tranquil and enchanting, of effects in gold and silver, now gossamery thin, now thick and rich.

"What is this thing crawling along on two silken threads and so afraid of the hills?" he was asking, sleepily. "Eh? No! Bring the easel to me, if you want a painting. I am not going to rise from my easy couch. There! Fix that cushion so! I am a leisurely, lordly aristocrat. Palette? No, I will just shake my soft beard of fine mist back and forth across the sky, a spectrum for the sunrays. So! so! I see that this worm is a railroad train. Let it curl up in the shadow of a gorge and take a nap. I will wake it up by and by when I seize my brush and start a riot in the heavens that will make its rows of window-glass eyes stare."

"I am on this train and in a hurry!" Jack objected.

"Do I hear the faint echo of a human ego down there on the earth?" demanded the Eternal Painter. "Who are you? One of the art critics?"

"One of Your Majesty's loving subjects, who has been away in a foreign kingdom and returns to your allegiance," Jack answered.

"So be it. I shall know if what you say is true when I gaze into your eyes at sunset."

"I am bringing you a Velasquez!" Jack added.

"Good! Put him where he can have a view out of the window of his first teacher at work in the studio of the universe."

The train crept on toward the hour of the Eternal Painter's riot and toward Little Rivers, while the patch of green was softly, impalpably growing, growing, until the crisscross breaks of the streets developed and Jack could identify the Doge's and other bungalows. He was on the platform of the car before the brakes ground on the wheels, leaning out to see a crowd at the station, which a minute later became a prospect of familiar, kindly, beaming faces. There was a roar of "Hello, Jack!" in the heavy voices of men and the treble of children. Then he did not see the faces at all for a second; he saw only mist.

"Not tanned, Jack, but you'll brown up soon!"

"Gosh! But we've been lonesome without you!"

"Cure any case of sore eyes on record!"

Jack was too full of the glory of this unaffected welcome in answer to his telegram that he was coming to find words at first; but as he fairly dropped off the steps into the arms of Jim Galway and Dr. Patterson he shouted in a shaking voice:

"Hello, everybody! Hello, Little Rivers!"

He noted, while all were trying to grasp his hands at once, that the men had their six-shooters. A half-dozen were struggling to get his suit case. Not one of his friends was missing except the Doge and Mary.

"Let the patient have a little air!" protested Dr. Patterson, as some started in to shake hands a second time.

"Fellow-citizens, if there's anything in the direct primary I feel sure of the nomination!" said Jack drily.

"You're already elected!" shouted Bob Worthier.

Around at the other side of the station Jack found Firio waiting his turn in patient isolation, with P.D., Wrath of God, and Jag Ear.

"_Si! si_!" called Firio triumphantly to all the sceptics who had told him that Jack would not return.

Jack took the little Indian by the shoulders and rocked him back and forth in delight, while Firio's eyes were burning coals of jubilation.

"You knew!" Jack exclaimed. "You were right! I have come back!"

"_Si, si_! I know!" repeated Firio.

"No stopping him from bringing the whole cavalcade to the station, either," said Jim Galway. "And he wouldn't join the rest of us out in front of the station. He was going to be his own reception committee and hold an overflow meeting all by himself!"

There was no disguising the fact that the equine trio of veterans remembered Jack. With P.D. and Jag Ear the demonstration was unrestrained; but however exultant Wrath of God might be in secret, he was of no mind to compromise his reputation for lugubriousness by any public display of emotional weakness.

"Wrath of God, I believe you were a cross-eyed Cromwellian soldier in your previous incarnation!" said Jack; "and as it is hard for a horse to be crosseyed, you could not retain the characteristic. Think of that! Wouldn't a cross-eyed Cromwellian soldier strike fear to the heart of any loyalist? And Jag Ear, you're getting fat!"

"I keep his hoofs hard. When he fat he eat less on trail!" explained Firio, becoming almost voluble. "All ready for trail!" he hinted.

"Not now, Firio," said Jack. "And, Firio, there's a package at the station, a big, flat case. It came by express on the same train with me--the most precious package in the world. See that it is taken to the house."

"Si! You ride?" asked Firio, offering P.D.'s reins.

"No, we'll all walk."

The procession had started toward the town when Jack felt something soft poking him in the small of the back and looked around to find that the cause was P.D.'s muzzle. Wrath of God and Jag Ear might go with Firio, but P.D. proposed to follow Jack.

"And after I have ridden you thousands of miles and you've heard all my songs over and over! Well, well, P.D., you are a subtle flatterer! Come along!" Then he turned to Jim Galway: "Has John Prather arrived?"

"Yes, last night."

"He is here now?" Jack put in quickly.

"No; he pulled out at dawn on his way to Agua Fria."

"Oh!" Jack was plainly disappointed. "He has the grant for the water rights?"

"Yes," said Jim, "though he hasn't made the fact public. He does everything in his smooth, quiet fashion, with a long head, and I suppose he hasn't things just right yet to spring his surprise. But there is no disputing the fact--he has us!"

One man henceforth was in control of the water. His power over the desert community would be equivalent to control of the rains in a humid locality.

"You see," Jim continued, "old man Lefferts' partners had really never sold out to him; so his transfer to the Doge wasn't legal. He turned his papers over to Prather, giving Prather full power to act for him in securing the partners' surrender of their claims and straighten out everything with the Territory and get a bonafide concession. That is as I understand it, for the whole business has been done in an underhand way. Prather represented to the Doge that he was acting entirely in the interests of the community and his only charge would be the costs. The Doge quite believed in Prather's single-mindedness and public spirit. Well, with the use of money and all the influences he could command, including the kind that Pete Leddy exercises, he got the concession and in his name. It was very smart work. I suppose it was due to the crafty way he could direct the Doge to do his wishes that the Doge happened to be off the scene at the critical stage of the negotiations. When he went to New York all that remained was for him to obtain the capital for his scheme. Lefferts and his partners had the underlying rights and the Doge the later rights, thanks to his improvements, and Prather has them both. Well, Leddy and his crowd have been taking up plots right and left; that's their share in the exploitation. They're here, waiting for the announcement to be made and--well, the water users' association is still in charge; but it won't be when Prather says the word."

"And you have no plans?" Jack asked.

"None."

"And the Doge?"

"None. What can the old man do? Though nobody exactly blames him, a good many aren't of a mind to consult him at all. The crisis has passed beyond him. Three or four men, good men, too, were inclined to have it out with John Prather; but that would have precipitated a general fight with Leddy's gang. The conservatives got the hot-heads to wait till you came. You see, the trouble with every suggestion is that pretty much everybody is against it except the fellow who made it. The more we have talked, the more we have drifted back to you. It's a case of all we've got in the world and standing together, and we are ready to get behind you and take orders, Jack."

"Yes, ready to fight at the drop of the hat, seh, or to sit still on our doorsteps with our tongues in our cheeks and doing the wives' mending, as you say!" declared Bob Worther. "It's right up to you!"

"You are all of the same opinion?" asked Jack.

They were, with one voice, which was not vociferous. For theirs was that significantly quiet mood of an American crowd when easy-going good nature turns to steel. Their partisanship in pioneerdom had not been with six-shooters, but with the ethics of the Doge; and such men when aroused do not precede action with threats.

"All right!" said Jack.

There was a rustle and an exchange of satisfied glances and a chorus of approval like an indrawing of breath.

"First, I will see the Doge," Jack added; "and then I shall go to the house."

Galway, Dr. Patterson, Worther, and three or four others went on with him toward the Ewold bungalow. They were halted on the way by Pete Leddy, Ropey Smith, and a dozen followers, who appeared from a side street and stopped across Jack's path, every one of them with a certain slouching aggressiveness and staring hard at him. Pete and Ropey still kept faith with their pledge to Jack in the arroyo. They were without guns, but their companions were armed in defiance of the local ordinance which had been established for Jack's protection.

"Howdy do, Leddy?" said Jack, as amiably as if there had never been anything but the pleasantest of relations between them.

"Getting polite, eh! Where's your pretty whistle?" Leddy answered.

"I put it in storage in New York," Jack said laughing; then, with a sudden change to seriousness: "Leddy, is it true that you and John Prather have got the water rights to this town?"

"None of your d---d business!" Leddy rapped out. "The only business I've got with you has been waiting for some time, and you can have it your way out in the arroyo where we had it before, right now!"

"As I said, Pete, I put the whistle in storage and I have already

apologized for the way I used it," returned Jack. "I can't accommodate you in the _arroyo_ again. I have other things to attend to."

"Then the first time you get outside the limits of this town you will have to play my way--a man's way!"

"I hope not, Pete!"

"Naturally you hope so, for you know I will get you, you--"

"Careful!" Jack interrupted. "You'd better leave that out until we are both armed. Or, if you will not, why, we both have weapons that nature gave us. Do you prefer that way?" and Jack's weight had shifted to the ball of his foot.

Plainly this was not to Pete's taste.

"I don't want to bruise you. I mean to make a clean hole through you!" he answered.

"That is both courteous and merciful; and you are very insistent, Leddy," Jack returned, and walked on.

"Just as sweet as honey, just as cool as ice, and just as sunny as June!" whispered Bob Worth to the man next him.

Again Jack was before the opening in the Ewold hedge, with its glimpse of the spacious living-room. The big ivory paper-cutter lay in its accustomed place on the broad top of the Florentine table. In line with it on the wall was a photograph of Abbey's mural in the Pennsylvania capitol and through the open window a photograph of a Puvis de Chavannes was visible. Evidently the Doge had already hung some of the reproductions of masterpieces which he had brought from New York. But no one was on the porch or in the living-room; the house was silent. As Jack started across the cement bridge he was halted by a laugh from his companions. He found that P.D. was taking no risks of losing his master again; he was going right on into the Doge's, too. Jim took charge of him, receiving in return a glance from the pony that positively reeked of malice.

Again Jack was on his way around the Doge's bungalow on the journey he had made so many times in the growing ardor of the love that had mastered his senses. The quiet of the garden seemed a part of the pervasive stillness that stretched away to the pass from the broad path of the palms under the blazonry of the sun. As he proceeded he heard the crunching of gravel under a heavy tread. The Doge was pacing back and forth in the cross path, fighting despair with the forced vigor of his steps, while Mary was seated watching him. As the Doge wheeled to face Jack at the sound of his approach, it was not in surprise, but rather in preparedness for the expected appearance of another character in a drama. This was also Mary's attitude. They had heard of his coming and they received his call with a trace of fatalistic curiosity. The Doge suddenly dropped on a bench, as if overcome by the weariness and depression of spirits that he had been defying; but there was something unyielding and indomitable in Mary's aspect.

"Well, Sir Chaps, welcome!" said the Doge. "We still have a seat in the shade for you. Will you sit down?"

But Jack remained standing, as if what he had to say would be soon said.

"I have come back and come for good," he began. "Yes, I have come back to take all the blue ribbons at ranching," he added, with a touch of garden nonsense that came like a second thought to soften the abruptness of his announcement.

"For good! For good! You!" The Doge stared at Jack in incomprehension.

"Yes, my future is out here, now."

"You give up the store--the millions--your inheritance!" cried the Doge, still amazed and sceptical as he sounded the preposterousness of this idea to worldly credulity.

"Quite!"

There was no mistaking the firmness of the word. "To make your fortune, your life, out here?"

The Doge's voice was throbbing with the wonder of the thing.

"Yes!"

"Why? Why? I feel that I have a right to ask why!" demanded the Doge, in all the majesty of the moment when he faced John Wingfield, Sr. in the drawing-room.

"Because of a lie and what it concealed. Because of reasons that may not be so vague to you as they are to me."

"A lie! Yes, a lie that came home!" the Doge repeated, while he passed his hand back and forth over his eyes. The hand was trembling. Indeed, his whole body was trembling, while he sought for self-control and to collect his thoughts for what he had to say to that still figure awaiting his words. When he looked up it was with an expression wholly new to Jack. Its candor was not that of transparent mental processes in serene philosophy or forensic display, but that of a man who was about to lay bare things of the past which he had kept secret.

"Sir Chaps, I am going to give you my story, however weak and blameworthy it makes me appear," he said. "Sir Chaps, you saw me in anger in the Wingfield drawing-room, further baffling you with a mystery which must have begun for you the night that you came to Little Rivers when we exchanged a look in which I saw that you knew that I recognized you. I tried to talk as if you were a welcome stranger, when I was holding in my rancor. There was no other face in the world that I would not rather have seen in this community than yours!

"How glad I was to hear that you were leaving by the morning train! How I counted the days of your convalescence after you were wounded! How glad I was at the news that you were to go as soon as you were well! With what a revelry of suggestion I planned to speed your parting! How demoralized I was when you announced that you were going to stay! How amazed at your seriousness about ranching--but how distrustful! Yet what joy in your companionship! At times I wanted to get my arms around you and hug you as a scarred old grizzly bear would hug a cub. And, first and last, your success with everybody here! Your cool hand in the duel! That iron in your will which would triumph at any cost when you broke Nogales's arm!

For some reason you had chosen to stop, in the play period of youth, on the way to the inheritance to overcome some obstacle that it pleased you to overcome and to amuse yourself a while in Little Rivers--you with your steadiness in a fight and your airy, smiling confidence in yourself!"

"I--I did not know that I was like that!" said Jack, in hurt, groping surprise. "Was I truly?"

The Doge nodded.

"As I saw you," he said.

Jack looked at Mary, frankly and calmly.

"Was I truly?" he asked her.

"As I saw you!" she repeated, as an impersonal, honest witness.

"Then I must have been!" he said, with conviction. "But I hope that I shall not be in the future." And he smiled at Mary wistfully. But her gaze was bent on the ground.

"And you want it all--all the story from me?" the Doge asked, hesitating.

"All!" Jack answered.

"It strikes hard at your father."

"The truth must strike where it will, now!"

"Then, your face, so like your father's, stood for the wreck of two lives to me, and for recollections in my own career that tinged my view of you, Jack. You were one newcomer to Little Rivers to whom I could not wholly apply the desert rule of oblivion to the past and judgment of every man solely by his conduct in this community. No! It was out of the question that I could ever look at you without thinking who you were.

"You know, of course, that your father and I spent our boyhood in Burbridge. Once I found that he had told me an untruth and we had our difference out, as boys will; and, as I was in the right, he confessed the lie before I let him up. That defeat was a hurt to his egoism that he could not forget. He was that way, John Wingfield, in his egoism. It was like flint, and his ambition and energy were without bounds. I remember he would say when teased that some day he should have more money than all the town together, and when he had money no one would dare to tease him. He had a remarkable gift of ingratiation with anyone who could be of service to him. My uncle, who was the head of the family, was fond of him; he saw the possibilities of success in this smart youngster in a New England village. It was the Ewold money that gave John Wingfield his start. With it he bought the store in which he began as a clerk. He lost a good part of the Ewold fortune later in one of his enterprises that did not turn out well. But all this is trifling beside what is to come.

"He went on to his great commercial career. I, poor fool, was an egoist, too. I tried to paint. I had taste, but no talent. In outbursts of despair my critical discrimination consigned my own work to the rubbish heap. I tried to write books, only to find that all I had was a head stuffed with learning, mixed with the philosophy that is death to the concentrated application that means positive accomplishment. But I could

not create. I was by nature only a drinker at the fountain; only a student, the pitiful student who could read his Caesar at eight, learn a language without half trying, but with no ability to make my knowledge of service; with no masterful purpose of my own--a failure!"

"No one is a failure who spreads kindness and culture as he goes through life," Jack interrupted, earnestly; "who gives of himself unstintedly as you have; who teaches people to bring a tribute of flowers to a convalescent! Why, to found a town and make the desert bloom--that is better than to add another book to the weight of library shelves or to get a picture on the line!"

"Thank you, Jack!" said the Doge, with a flash of his happy manner of old, while there was the play of fleeting sunshine over the hills and valleys of his features. "I won't call it persiflage. I am too selfish, too greedy of a little cheer to call it persiflage. I like the illusion you suggest."

He was silent for a while, and when he spoke again it was with the tragic simplicity of one near his climax.

"Your father and I loved the same girl---your mother. It seemed that in every sympathy of mind and heart she and I were meant to travel the long highway together. But your father won her with his gift for ingratiation with the object of his desire, which amounts to a kind of genius. He won her with a lie and put me in a position that seemed to prove that the lie was truth. She accepted him in reaction; in an impulse of heart-break that followed what she believed to be a revelation of my true character as something far worse than that of idler. I married the woman whom he had made the object of his well-managed calumny. My wife knew where my heart was and why I had married her. It is from her that Mary gets her dark hair and the brown of her cheeks which make her appear so at home on the desert. Soon after Mary's birth she chose to live apart from me--but I will not speak further of her. She is long ago dead. I knew that your mother had left your father. I saw her a few times in Europe. But she never gave the reason for the separation. She would talk nothing of the past, and with the years heavy on our shoulders and the memory of what we had been to each other hovering close, words came with difficulty and every one was painful. Her whole life was bound up in you, as mine was in Mary. It was you that kept her from being a bitter cynic; you that kept her alive.

"Some of the Ewold money that John Wingfield lost was mine. You see how he kept on winning; how all the threads of his weaving closed in around me. I came to the desert to give Mary life with the fragments of my fortune; and here I hope that, as you say, I have done something worthier than live the life of a wandering, leisurely student who had lapsed into the observer for want of the capacity by nature or training to do anything else.

"But sometimes I did long for the centres of civilization; to touch elbows with their activities; to feel the flow of the current of humanity in great streets. Not that I wanted to give up Little Rivers, but I wanted to go forth to fill the mind with argosies which I could enjoy here at my leisure. And Mary was young. The longing that she concealed must be far more powerful than mine. I saw the supreme selfishness of shutting her up on the desert, without any glimpse of the outer world. I sensed the call that sent her on her lonely rides to the pass. I feared that your coming had increased her restlessness.

"But I wander! That is my fault, as you know, Sir Chaps. Well, we come to the end of the weaving; to the finality of John Wingfield's victory. Little Rivers was getting out of hand. I could plan a ranch, but I had not a business head. I had neither the gift nor the experience to deal with lawyers and land-grabbers. I knew that with the increase of population and development our position was exciting the cupidity of those who find quicker profit in annexing what others have built than in building on their own account. I knew that we ought to have a great dam; that there was water to irrigate ten times the present irrigated area.

"Then came John Prather. I saw in him the judgment, energy, and ability for organization of a real man of affairs. He was young, self-made, engaging and convincing of manner. He liked our life and ideals in Little Rivers; he wanted to share our future. In his resemblance to you I saw nothing but a coincidence that I passed over lightly. He knew how to handle the difficult situation that arose with the reappearance of old man Lefferts' partners. He would get the water rights legalized beyond dispute and turn them over to the water users' association; he would bring in capital for the dam; the value of our property would be enhanced; Little Rivers would become a city in her own right, while I was growing old delectably in the pride of founder. So he pictured it and so I dreamed. I was so sure of the future that I dared the expense of a trip to New York.

"And always to me, when I looked at you and when I thought of you, you were the son of John Wingfield; you incarnated the inheritance of his strength. But when, from the drawing-room, I saw your father, whom I had not seen for fifteen years, then--well, the thing came to me in a burning second, the while I glimpsed his face before he saw mine. He was smiling as if pleased with himself and his power; he was rubbing the palms of his hands together; and I saw that it was John Prather who was like John Wingfield in manner, pose, and feature. You were like the fighting man, your ancestor, and your airy confidence was his. And I, witless and unperceiving, had been won by the same methods of ingratiation with which John Wingfield had won the assistance of the Ewold fortune for the first step of his career; with which he had won Alice Jamison and kept me unaware of his plan while he was lying to her.

"Finally, let us say, in all charity, that your father is what he is because of what is born in him and for the same reason that the snowball gathers size as it rolls; and I am what I am for the same reason that the wind scatter the sands of the desert--a man full of books and tangent inconsequence of ideas, without sense; a simpleton who knows a painting but does not know men; a garrulous, philosophizing, blind, old simpleton, whose pompous incompetency has betrayed a trust! Through me, men and women came here to settle and make a home! Through me they lose--to my shame!"

The Doge buried his face in his hands and drew a deep breath more pitiful than a sob, which, as it went free of the lungs, seemed to leave an empty ruin of what had once been a splendid edifice. He was in striking contrast to Mary, who, throughout the story fondly regarding him, had remained as straight as a young pine. Now, with her rigidity suddenly become so pliant that it was a fluid thing mixed of indignation, fearlessness, and compelling sympathy, she sprang to his side. She knew the touchstone to her father's emotion. He did not want his cheek patted in that moment of agony. He wanted a stimulant; some justification for living.

"There is no shame in believing in those who speak fairly! There is honor, the honor of faith in mankind!" she cried penetratingly. "There is no shame in being the victim of lies!"

"No! No shame!" the Doge cried, rising unsteadily to his feet under the whip.

"And we are not afraid for the future!" she continued. "And the other men and women in Little Rivers are not afraid for the future!"

"No, not afraid under this sun, in this air. Afraid!"

An unconquerable flame had come into his eyes in answer to that in Mary's.

"The others have asked me to act for them, and I think I may yet save our rights," said Jack. "Will you also trust me?"

"Will I trust you, Jack? Trust you who gave up your inheritance?" exclaimed the Doge. "I would trust you on a mission to the stars or to lead a regiment; and the wish of the others is mine."

Jack had turned to go, but he looked back at Mary.

"And you, Mary? I have your good wishes?"

He could not resist that question; and though it was clear that nothing could stay him--as clear as it had been in the _arroyo_ that he would keep his word and face Leddy--he was hanging on her word and he was seeing her eyes moist, with a bright fire like that of sunshine on still water. She was swaying slightly as a young pine might in a wind. Her eyes darkened as with fear, then her cheeks went crimson with the stir of her blood; and suddenly, her eyes were sparkling in their moisture like water when it ripples under sunshine.

"Yes, Jack," she said quietly, with the tense eagerness of a good cause that sends a man away to the wars.

"That is everything!" he answered.

So it was! Everything that he could ask now, with his story and hers so fresh in mind! He started up the path, but stopped at the turn to look back and wave his hand to the two figures in a confident gesture.

"Luck with you, Sir Chaps!" called the Doge, with all the far-carrying force of his oldtime sonorousness.

"Luck! luck!" Mary called, on her part; and her voice had a flute note that seemed to go singing on its own ether waves through the tender green foliage, through all the gardens of Little Rivers, and even away to the pass.

"Mary! Mary!" he answered, with a ring of cheeriness. "Luck for me will always come at your command!"

A moment later Galway and the others saw him smiling with a hope that ran as high as his purpose, as he passed through the gateway of the hedge.

"It will all be right!" he told them.

With P.D. keeping his muzzle close to the middle of Jack's back, the party started toward his house, which took them almost the length of the main street.

"Prather went by the range trail, of course?" Jack asked Galway.

"No, straight out across the desert," said Galway.

"Straight out across the desert!" exclaimed Jack, mystified.

For one had a choice of two routes to Agua Fria, which was well over the border in Mexico. Not a drop of water was to be had on the way across the trackless plateau, but halfway on the range trail was a camping-place, Las Cascadas, where a spring which spouted in a tiny cascade welcomed the traveller. Under irrigation, most of the land for the whole stretch between the two towns would be fertile. There was said to be a big underground run at Agua Fria that could be pumped at little expense.

"All I can make out of Prather's taking a straight line, which really is slower, as you know, on account of the heavy sand in places, is to look over the soil," said Galway. "He may be preparing to get a concession in Mexico at the same time as on this side, so as to secure control of the whole valley. It means railroads, factories, new towns, millions—but you and I have talked all this before in our dreams."

"Who was with him?" Jack asked.

"Pedro Nogales. He seems to have taken quite a fancy to Pedro and Pedro is acting as guide. Leddy recommended him, I suppose."

"No one else?"

"No."

"Good!" said Jack.

As they turned into the side street where the front of Jack's bungalow was visible, Jim Galway observed that they had seen nothing of Leddy or any of his followers.

"Maybe he's gone to join Prather," said Bob Worther.

But Jack paid no attention to the remark. He was preoccupied with the first sight of his ranch in over two months.

"It will be all right!" he called out to the crowd in his yard; for the others who had met him at the station were waiting for him there. "Bob, those umbrella-trees could shade a thin, short man now, even if he didn't hug the trunk! Firio has done well, hasn't he?" he concluded, after he had walked through the garden and surveyed the fields and orchards in fond comparison as to progress.

"The best I ever knew an Indian to do!" said Jim Galway.

"And everything kept right on growing while I was away! That's the joy of planting things. They are growing for somebody, if not for you!"

Inside the house he found Firio, with the help of some of the ranchers, taking the pictures out of their cases. Firio surveyed the buccaneer for some time, squinting his eyes and finally opening them saucer-wide in approval.

"You!" he said to Jack. And of the Sargent, after equally deliberate observation, he said: "A lady!"

That seemed about all there was to say and expressed the thought of the onlookers.

"And, Firio, now it's the trail!" said Jack.

"_Si, si_!" said Firio, ever so softly. "We take rifles?"

"Yes. Food for a week and two-days' water."

It pleased Jack to hang the portraits while Firio was putting on Jag Ear's pack; and he made it a ceremony in which his silence was uninterrupted by the comments of the ranchers. They stood in wondering awe before John Wingfield, Knight, hung where he could watch the Eternal Painter at his sunset displays and looking at the "Portrait of a Lady" across the breadth of the living-room, whose neutral tones made a perfect setting for their dominant genius.

"I believe they are at home," said Jack, with a fond look from one to the other, when Firio came to say that everything was ready.

"Senor Jack," whispered Firio insinuatingly, "for the trail you wear the grand, glad trail clothes and the big spurs. I keep them shiny--the big spurs!" He was speaking with the authority of an expert in trail fashions, who would consider Jack in very bad form if he refused.

"Why, yes, Firio, yes; it is so long since we have been on the trail!" And he went into the bedroom to make the change.

"I've never seen him quite so dumb quiet!" said Worther.

Jack certainly had been quiet, ominously quiet and self-contained. When he came out of the bedroom he was without the jaunty freedom of manner that Little Rivers always associated with his full regalia. In place of the dreamy distances in his eyes on such occasions were a sad preoccupation and determination. When they went outside to Firio and the waiting ponies, the Eternal Painter was in his evening orgy of splendor. But even Jack did not look up at the sky this time as he walked along in silence with his fellow-citizens to the point where the farthest furrow of his ranch had been drawn across the virgin desert. His foot was already in the stirrup when Jim Galway spoke the thought of all:

"Jack, there's only two of you, and if it happened that you met Leddy--"

"It is Prather that I want to see," Jack answered.

"But Leddy's whole gang! We don't know what your plans are, but if there's going to be a mix-up, why, we've got to be with you!"

"No!" said Jack, decidedly. "Remember, Jim, you were to trust me. This is a mission that requires only two; it is between Prather and me. We are

going to get acquainted for the first time."

Already Firio, riding Wrath of God, had started, and the bells of Jag Ear were jingling, while the rifles, their bores so clean from Firio's care, danced with the gleams of sunset in their movement with the burro's jogging trot. Jack sprang into the saddle, his face lighting as the foot came home in the stirrup.

"It will be all right!" he called back.

P.D. in the freshness of his long holiday, feeling a familiar pressure of a leg, hastened to overtake his companions; and the group of Little Riversites watched a chubby horseman and a tall, gaunt horseman, bathed in gold, riding away on a hazy sea of gold, with Jag Ear's bells growing fainter and fainter, until the moving specks were lost in the darkness.

XXXVI

AROUND THE WATER-HOLE

Easy traveller had turned speedy traveller, on a schedule. Never had he and Firio ridden so fast as in pursuit of John Prather, who had eight hours' start of them on a two-days' journey. Jag Ear had to trot all the time to keep up. Ounce by ounce he was drawing on his sinking fund of fat in a constitutional crisis.

"I keep his hoofs good. I keep his wind good. All right!" said Firio.

It was after midnight before the steady jingle of Jag Ear's orchestra had any intermission. An hour for food and rest and the little party was off again in the delicious cool of the night, toward a curtain pricked with stars which seemed to be drawn down over the edge of the world.

"What sort of horses had Prather and Nogales?" Jack asked. He must reach the water-hole as soon as Prather; for it was not unlikely that Prather might have fresh mounts waiting there to take him on to the nearest railroad station in Mexico.

"Look good, but bad. Nogales no know horses!" Firio answered.

"And they rode in the heat of the day!" said Jack, confidently.

"_Si_! And we ride P.D. and Wrath of God!"

There were no sign-posts on this highway of desert space except the many-armed giant cacti, in their furrowed armor set with clusters of needles, like tawny auroras gleaming faintly; no trail on the hard earth under foot, mottled with bunches of sagebrush and sprays of low-lying cacti, all as still as the figures of an inlaid flooring in the violet sheen, with an occasional quick, irregular, shadowy movement when a frightened lizard or a gopher beat a precipitate retreat from the invading thud of hoofs in this sanctuary of dust-dry life. And the course of the hoofs was set midway between the looming masses of the mountain walls of the valley.

Firio listened for songs from Senor Jack; he waited for stories from Senor Jack; but none came. He, the untalkative one of the pair, the living embodiment of a silent and happy companionship back and forth from Colorado to Chihuahua, liked to hear talk. Without it he was lonesome. If, by the criterion of a school examination, he never understood more than half of what Jack said, yet, in the measure of spirit, he understood everything.

Now Jack was going mile after mile with nothing except occasional urging words to P.D. His close-cut hair well brushed back from his forehead revealed the sweep of his brow, lengthening his profile and adding to the effect of his leanness. The moonlight on his face, which had lost its tan, gave him an aspect of subdued and patient serenity in keeping with the surroundings. You would have said that he could ride on forever without tiring, and that he could go over a precipice now without even seeing any danger sign. He had never been like this in all Firio's memory. The silence became unsupportable for once to Indian taciturnity. If Jack would not talk Firio would. Yes, he would ask a question, just to hear the sound of a voice.

"We go to fight?"

"No, Firio."

"Not to fight Prather?"

"No."

"To fight Leddy?"

"I hope not."

"Why we go? Why so--why so--" he had not the language to express the strange, brooding inquiry of his mind.

"I go to save Little Rivers."

"_Si_!" said Firio, but as if this did not answer his question.

"I go to get the end of a story, Firio--my story!" continued Jack. "I have travelled long for the story and now I shall have it all from John Prather."

"_Si, si_!" said Firio, as if all the knowledge in the world had flashed into his head quicker than the hand of legerdemain could run the leaves of a pack of cards through its fingers. "And then?"

At last Firio had won a smile from the untanned face which could not be the same to him until it was tanned.

"Then I shall plant seeds and keep the ground around them soft and the weeds out of it; and I shall wear my heart on my sleeve and lay a siege--a siege in the open, without parallels or mines! A siege in the open!"

Firio did not understand much about parallels or mines or, for that matter, about sieges; but he could see the smile fading from Jack's lips and could comprehend that the future of which Jack was speaking was very far from another prospect, which was immediate and vivid in his mind.

"But you must fight Leddy! _Si, si_! You must fight Leddy first!"

"Then I must, I suppose," said Jack, absently. "All things in their turn and time."

"_Si_!" answered Firio. All things in their turn and time! This desert truth was bred in him through his ancestry, no less than in the Eternal Painter himself.

Again the silence of the morning darkness, with all the stars twinkling more faintly and some slipping from their places in the curtain into the deeper recesses of the broad band of night on the surface of the rolling ball. The plodding hoofs kept up their regular beat of the march of their little world of action in the presence of the Infinite; plodding, plodding on into the dawn which sent the last of the stars in flight, while the curtain melted away before blue distances swimming with light. Still bareheaded, Jack looked into the face of the sun which heaved above an irregular roof of rocks. It blazed into the range on the other side of the valley. It slaked its thirst with the slight fall of dew as a great, red tongue would lick up crumbs. Sun and sky, cactus and sagebrush, rock and dry earth and sand, that was all. Nowhere in that stretch of basin that seemed without end was there a sign of any other horseman or of human life.

But at length, as they rode, their eyes saw what only eyes used to desert reaches could see, that the speck in the distance was not a cactus or even two or three cacti in line, but something alive and moving. Perceptibly they were gaining on it, while it developed into two riders and a pack animal in single file. Now Jack and Firio were coming into a region of more stunted vegetation, and soon the two figures emerged into a stretch of gray carpet on which they were as clearly silhouetted as a white sail on a green sea.

"Very thick sand there--five or six miles of it. It make this the long way," said Firio. "They call it the apron of hell to fools who ride at noon."

"And beyond that how many miles to the water-hole?"

"Five or six."

But Firio knew a way around where the going was good. It made a difference of two or three miles in distance against them, but two or three times that in their favor in time and the strength taken out of their ponies.

"How long will Prather be in getting through the sand?" Jack asked.

Firio squinted at the objects of their pursuit for a while, as if he wanted to be exact.

"Almost as many hours as miles," he said.

Near the zenith now, the sun was a bulging furnace eye, piercing through shirts into the flesh and sucking the very moisture of the veins. A single catspaw was all that the Eternal Painter had to offer over that basin shut in between the long, jagged teeth of the ranges biting into the steel-blue of the sky. The savage, merciless hours of the desert day

approached; the hours of reckoning for unknowing and unprepared travellers.

Jag Ear's bells had a faint plaintiveness at intervals and again their jingling was rapid and hysterical, as he tried to make up the distance lost through a lapse in effort. He had ceased altogether to wiggle the sliver of ear--the baton with which he conducted his orchestra--because this was clearly a waste of energy. P.D.'s steps still retained their dogged persistence, but their regular beat was slower, like that of a clock that needs winding. His head hung low. Wrath of God was no more and no less melancholy than when he was rustivating in Jack's yard. It seemed as if his sad visage, so reliably and grandly sad, might still be marching on toward the indeterminate line of the horizon when his legs were worn off his body.

"Firio, you brown son of the sun," said Jack, with a sudden display of his old-time trail imagery, "you prolix, garrulous Firio, you knew! You had the great equine trio ready, and look at the miles they have done since sunset to prove it! You, P.D., favorite trooper of our household cavalry! You, Wrath of God, don't be afraid to make an inward smile, for your face will never tell on you! You, Jag Ear, beat a tattoo with the fragment of the gothic glory of burrohood, for we rest, to go on all the faster when the heat of the day is past!"

While Prather and Nogales were riding over hell's apron, their pursuers had saddles off hot, moist backs, over which knowing hands were run to find no sores. After they had eaten, P.D. and Wrath of God and Jag Ear stood in drooping relaxation which would make the most of every moment of respite. Jack and Firio, with a blanket fastened to the rifles as standards, made a patch of shade in which they lay down.

"Have a nap, Firio," said Jack. "I will wake you when it is time to start."

"And you--you no sleep?" asked Firio.

"I could not sleep to-day," Jack answered. "I don't feel as if I could sleep until I've seen Prather and heard his story--my story--Firio!" And he lay with eyes half closed, staring at the steel blue overhead.

It was well after midday when they mounted for the remainder of the journey. The Eternal Painter was shaking out the silvery cloud-mist of his beard across a background that had a softer, kindlier, deeper blue. The shadows of the ponies and their riders and Jag Ear and his pack no longer lay under their bellies heavily, but were stretched out to one side by the angle of the sun, in cheerful, jogging fraternity. Prather and Nogales had again become only a speck.

"Do you think that they are out of the sand?" asked Jack.

"Very near," Firio answered.

"Their ponies had a whole night's rest--we must not forget that," said Jack; "and they must be in a hurry, for certainly Nogales had sense enough to rest over noon."

"_Quien sabe_!" answered Firio. "But we catch them--_si, si_!"

Leading the way, Firio turned toward the eastern range until he came to a

narrow tongue of shale almost as hard to the hoofs as asphalt, that ran like a shoal across that sea of sand. Rest had given the great equine trio renewed life. P.D., reduced in rank to second place, could not think of allowing more than a foot between his muzzle and the tail of Wrath of God, who was bound to make up the time he had lost in pursuit of the horizon. Another hypothesis of Jack's as to the cause of Wrath of God's melancholy was that solemn Covenanter's inability to get any nearer to the edge of the earth. Once he could poke his nose through the blue curtain and see what was on the other side, the satisfaction of his eternal curiosity might have made him a rollicking comedian. As for Jag Ear, his baton was once more conducting his orchestra in spirited tempo. He, who was nearest of all three in heart to Firio, might well have been saying to himself: "I knew! I knew we were not going through the sand! Firio and I knew!"

So rapidly were they gaining that, when past the sand and they turned back westward, it was only a question of half an hour or so to come up with Prather and Nogales. Nogales had been riding ahead; but now Prather, after gazing over his shoulder for some time at his pursuers, took the lead. He was urging his horse as if he would avoid being overtaken. Evidently Nogales did not share that desire, for he let Prather go on alone. But Prather's horse was too tired after its effort in the sand and he halted and waited until Nogales, at a slow walk, closed up the gap between them, when they proceeded at their old, weary gait.

As Jack and Firio came within hailing distance, both Prather and Nogales glanced at them sharply; but no word was spoken on either side. The absence of any call between these isolated voyagers of the desert sea was strangely unlike the average desert meeting. Prather and Nogales did not look back again, not even when Jack and Firio were very near. A neigh by P.D., a break into a trot by him and Wrath of God, and Firio was saying to Nogales:

"You went right through the sand!"

"_Si_!" answered Pedro, with a grin.

Still Prather did not so much as turn his head to get a glimpse of Jack, nor did he offer any sign of knowledge of Jack's presence when Jack reined alongside him so close that their stirrup leathers were brushing. Prather was gazing at the desert exactly in front of him, the reins hanging loose, almost out of hand. His horse was about spent, if not on the point of foundering. Jack was so near the mole on the cheek of the peculiar paleness that never tans that by half extending his arm he might have touched it. After all, it was only a raised patch of blue, a blemish removable by the slightest surgical operation which its owner must have preferred to retain.

Firio and Nogales, also riding side by side, were also silent. There was no sound except Jag Ear's bells, now sunk to a faint tinkle in keeping with the slow progress of Prather's beaten horse. Looking at Prather's hands, Jack was thinking of another pair of hands amazingly like them. In the uncanniness of its proximity he was imagining how the profile would look without the birthmark, and he found himself grateful for the silence, which spoke so powerfully to him, in the time that it provided for bringing his faculties under control.

"How do you do?" he said at last, pleasantly.

Probably the silence had been equally welcome to Prather in charting his own course in the now unavoidable interview. He looked around slowly, and he was smiling with a trace of the satire that Jack had seen in the elevator, but smiling watchfully in a way that covers the apprehension of a keen glance. And he saw features that were calm and eyes that were still as the sky.

"How do you do?" he answered; and paused as one who is about to slip a point of steel home into a scabbard. "How do you do, brother?" he added, as if uttering a shibboleth that could protect him from any physical violence.

"Brother! Brother! Yes!" repeated Jack, with dry lips.

This shaping of conviction into fact so nakedly, so coolly, made all the desert and the sky swim before him in kaleidoscopic patches of blue and gray, shot with zigzag flashes. He half reeled in the saddle; his hands gripped the pommel to hold himself in place. It was as if a long strain of nervous tension had come to an end with a crack. Prather's smile took a turn of deeper satisfaction. It was like John Wingfield, Sr.'s after Jack had left the library.

"This is the first time we have ever met to speak," said Prather, easily.

"Yes!" assented Jack, the gray settling back into desert and the blue into sky and the zigzag flashes becoming only the brilliance of late afternoon sunshine.

"Certainly it is time that we got acquainted, brother," said Prather.

"It is!" agreed Jack. "It is time that I knew your story!"

"Which you have hardly heard from your--I mean, our father!" The pause between the "your" and the "our" was made with an appreciative significance. "Well, you see, I was the brother who had the mole on his cheek!"

"Yes--pitifully yes!" said Jack, with a kind of horror at the expression of this face in his father's likeness, no less than at the words.

"Why, no! I've often thought of you rather pitifully!" said Prather.

"You well might!" Jack answered, feelingly. "We may well share a common pity for each other."

There was no sign that John Prather subscribed to the sentiment except in a certain quizzical turn of his lips, as he looked away.

"Yes, the story has been kept from me. I have come for it!" said Jack.

"That is raking out the skeletons. But why not rake out our skeletons together, you and I?" said Prather.

It was clear that he enjoyed the prospect as an opportunity for retributive enlightenment.

"To begin with, I have the rights of primogeniture in my favor," he said. "I was born a day before you were, in the same city of New York. My mother's name was not down in the telephone list as Mrs. Wingfield,

however--I look at it all philosophically, you understand--and it was just that which made the difference between you and me, outside of the difference of our natures. But I am proud of my birth on both sides, in my own way. My mother was won without marriage and she was true to father. A woman of real ability, my mother! She was well suited to be John Wingfield's wife; better, I think, in the practical world of materialism than your mother. By a peculiar coincidence, unknown to father, my mother called in Dr. Bennington. So you and I have a further bond, in that the same doctor brought us into the world."

"And my mother must have known this!" Jack exclaimed, in racking horror.

At last the cause of her exile was clear in all its grisly monstrosity; the source of the pain in her eyes in the portrait had been traced home. Again he saw her white and trembling when she returned to the house in Versailles to find a visitor there; and now he realized the fulness of her relief when the frail boy said that he did not like his father. Her travels had spoken the restlessness of flight in search of oblivion to the very fact of his paternity. The "I give! I give!" of the portrait was the giving of the infinity of her fine, sensitive being to him to make him all hers. His feeling which had held him on the desert when he should have gone home, that feeling of literal revulsion toward his inheritance, was a thing born in him which had grown under her caresses and her training. She had been living solely for him to that last moment when the book dropped out of her hand; and the incarnation of that which had killed her was riding beside him now in the flesh. He felt a weaving of his muscles, a tightening of his nerves, as if waiting on the spark of will, and all the strength that he had built in the name of the store was madly tempted. But no! John Prather was not to blame, any more than himself. He would listen to John Prather, as justice listens to evidence, and endure his stare to the end.

"Yes, your mother knew," continued Prather. "My mother made a point of having her know. That was part of my mother's own bitterness. That was her teaching to me from the first. She had no illusions. She knew the advantages and the disadvantages of her position. She was and is one of the few persons in the world of whom my father is a little afraid."

"Then she still lives?" asked Jack sharply.

"Yes, she is in California," Prather returned. "She often referred to the mole on my cheek as the symbol of my handicap in the world of convention. 'But for the mole, Jack, you would have the store,' she often said. It delighted her that I had my father's face. As I grew older the resemblance became more marked. I could see that I pleased my father with my practical ideas of life, which I developed when quite young. He saw to it that my mother and I lived well and that I went to a good school. From my books I drew the same lesson as from my peculiar inheritance; the lesson that my mother was always inculcating. 'A bank account,' she would repeat, 'will erase even a mole patch on the cheek. It is the supreme power that will carry you anywhere, Jack. You must make money!'

"When father came to see her he would talk with a candor with which I am sure he never talked to your mother. He would tell of his successes, revealing the strategy and system by which they were won, finding her both understanding and sympathetic. I became a little blade that delighted to get sharp against his big blade by asking him questions. He did not want me about the store, and this was one of the things in which my mother humored him. She knew just when to humor and just when to

threaten the play of the strong card which she always held.

"All the while her ambition was laying its plans. It was that I should have the Wingfield store one day, myself. Out of school hours I would range the other department stores. You see, I had not only inherited my father's face more strikingly than you had, but also his talents. I spent the summer vacations of my fourteenth and fifteenth years in a store. I won the attention of my superiors and promise of promotion. I foresaw the day when I should so prove my ability that father would take me into his own store, and then, gradually, I would make my place, secure, while you were idling about Europe. And in those days you were frail and I was vigorous.

"There was no mistaking that father's sense of convention was the one thing that stood between him and my desire. He feared the world's opinion if the truth became known, and deep down in heart he could never get over the pride of having married into your mother's family. You had very good blood on the maternal side, as they say, while my mother had begun in the cloak department and was self-made, like father. Again, I was so truly his son in every instinct that he may have been a little jealous of me. Father does not like to think that any other man was ever quite as great as he is. I confess that is the way I feel, too. That is what life is, after all--it is yourself. Yes, I saw the store as mine--surely mine, with time!"

Prather's reins lay across the pommel of the saddle drawn taut by the drooping head of his horse, which was barely dragging one foot after another. He gave Jack a glance of flashing resentment and then, in his first impulse of real emotion, made a fist of one hand and drove it angrily into the palm of the other before continuing.

"Then father went to Europe to bring you home. He had decided for the son of convention, the son of blood! Though self-made, he was for family as against talent. Besides, it was a victory for him. At last you were his. After your return there was a scene between mother and him, a cool, bitter argument. He defied her to play her last card. He said that you knew the truth and that she could at best only make a row. And he wanted us out of New York; the place for me was a new country. He would make us a handsome allowance. So my mother agreed to his terms and we went to the Pacific coast. There I was to enter one of the colleges. My mother wanted me to have a college education, you see. The last meeting between father and me was very interesting, blade playing on blade. He really hated to let me go, for by this time he knew how hopeless you were. He embraced me and said that I would get on, anyway. I told him that the only trouble was that while I was the real son, I had a mole on my cheek.

"The West was best. There we could claim the favor of convention, Mrs. Prather and her son. I matriculated at Stanford, but I saw nothing in it for me. It was all dream stuff. Greek and Latin don't help in building a fortune. They handicap you with the loss of time it takes to learn them, at least; and I meant to be worth a million before I was thirty. Now I know that I shall be worth two or three or four millions at thirty, if all goes as I plan. So I cut college and broke for Goldfield. I ran a store and was a secret partner in a saloon that paid better than the store. I was in the game morning, noon, and night; it beat marching to class to recite Horace and fiddle with the binomial theorem, as it must for every man who counts for something in the world."

Throughout, Prather's tone, except for the one moment of anger, had been

that of an even recital of facts by one who does not allow himself to consider anything but facts in the judgment of his position. At times he gave Jack covert glances out of the tail of his eye and saw Jack's face white and drawn and his head lowered. Now Prather became the victim--so he would have put it, no doubt--of another outburst of feeling.

"But it was not like having the store!" he said. "No, my heart was in the store; and that morning when you saw me looking down from the gallery I was permitting myself to dream. I was thinking of what had come to you, the fairy prince of good fortune, who had no talent for your inheritance, and of what I might have done with it. I was thinking how I could win men to work for me"--and there he was smiling with the father's charm--"and of the millions to come if I could begin to build on the foundation that father had laid. I saw branches in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia--a great chain of stores all co-ordinated under my directing hand--I the master!"

He rubbed the palms of his hands together as he had over the scintillation of the jewelry counters. Though Jack had not looked around, his ear recognized that crisp sound of exultant power.

"Yes," Jack murmured thoughtfully, as if inviting Prather to go on with anything further he might have to say.

"All mine--mine!" Prather concluded, in a sort of hypnosis with his own picture.

Jack still stared at the earth, his profile limned in gold and the side of his face toward Prather in shadow. They were nearing the clump of cotton-woods around the water-hole at the base of a tongue of the range which ran out into the desert, and Firio rode up to whisper in Spanish:

"Senor Jack, see there! Horsemen!"

Jack raised his head with a returning sense of his surroundings to see some mounted men, eight in all he counted, riding along the range trail a half mile nearer the water-hole than themselves. Their horses had the gait of exhaustion after a long, hard ride.

"You know who it is?" Firio whispered.

"Yes," Jack answered. "They had the better trail and have outridden us. All right, Firio!"

"Leddy--Pete Leddy and some of his men!" exclaimed Prather, shading his eyes to watch the file of figures now passing under the cotton-woods. It seemed to relieve him. "I suppose he came on my account," he added, nodding to Nogales.

"Yes," said Nogales, with a grin. He always either grinned or his face had a half savage impassiveness.

"I wonder if Leddy thought I was in danger," and Prather gave Jack a knowing glance of satisfaction. "We shall all camp together," he added, smiling.

Jack did not answer for a moment. He was intent on the cotton-woods. Leddy and his companions appeared on the other side, the figures of riders and horses bathed in the sunset glow. Then they disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them up.

"They are going on! They are not going to stop!" said Prather apprehensively.

"There is a basin beyond the water-hole and the seepage makes a little pasture," Jack explained. "You will see them back in a moment."

"Oh, yes!" said Prather, with a thrill in his voice; and again the palms of his hands were making that refrain of delight. "But I have told my story," he resumed. "Now may I ask you a question? Why have you come back?"

Jack looked around frankly and dispassionately.

"To save Little Rivers from you! I understand that you have secured the water rights."

"Well, then, I have!" declared Prather, confidently, "and I mean to have the rights for the whole valley!" and he struck his fist into his palm. "You see," he went on, with another flash of satire, "it is not exactly fair that you should have the store and Little Rivers, too. I had heard of the possibilities here from my friend Leddy, who was also at Goldfield. A useful man in his place! He got his sixth notch there. When I came and looked around and saw that here was the opportunity I wanted, I wired father that in any fair division of territory everything west of the Mississippi belonged to me"--he was showing some bravado in his sense of security now, when he saw that Leddy and his men were returning through the cotton-woods to the water-hole--"and I should like to have you out of my way. I told him you were the picture of health, even if you didn't have anything in your head, and if you were ever going to learn the business it was time that you began. But father is always careful. Naturally he wanted to check off my report with another's; for he didn't want you back if you were ill. So he sent Dr. Bennington out to get professional confirmation of my statement."

"And you told Jasper Ewold that you wanted the rights only to turn them over to the water users' association and then bring in capital to build a dam, with everybody sharing alike in the prosperity that was to come."

"Yes, and Jasper Ewold was so simple! Well, what I told him was strategy--strategy of which I think father would approve. When you have a big object in view the end must justify the means. Look at the situation! Two hundred thousand acres of land waiting on water to be the most fertile in the world! Why, when I rode up the valley the first time and saw what could be done, I was amazed to think that such an opportunity should be lying around loose. Little Rivers was so out of the way that other promoters had overlooked it, and everybody had sort of taken it for granted that Jasper Ewold and his water users' association really had legal possession. It was my chance. I thought big. That dam should be mine. I had the money I had made in Goldfield, but it was not enough for my purpose.

"Where should I turn for outside capital that would not demand a majority interest in the project? I concluded that it was time father did something for me in return for giving up the store. Besides this call of justice I had another influence with him. I was sure that when he told my mother that you knew the truth he was making a statement that suited his purpose. I was sure that you knew nothing of my story and that father did not want you to know it. I was ready to tell if he did

not meet my demands.

"Well, you know how he can talk when he wants to gain a point. I fancy that I talked as well as father when I showed him how that dam would pay for itself in five years in tolls and twenty per cent on the capital after that; when I showed him how a population ten times that of his store would have to take their water from me; when I showed him all the side issues of profit from town sites and the increase of values of the big holdings which Leddy's men would take up for me. You ought to have seen his eyes glow. He could not withstand his pride in me. 'You have the gift, the one gift!' he said. I told him yes, it was in the blood; and I struck while the iron was hot. I got an outright sum from him; and he could not resist a chance to share all that profit when capital was to be had in New York for three or four per cent. He went in as silent partner, as I was in the saloon at Goldfield; as a partner with a minority interest."

John Prather paused to laugh to himself over his victory, while the movement of palm on palm was rapid and prolonged.

"Our arrangement amounted to the commercial division of territory for the family, which I had suggested," he went on with appreciative irony. "You and he were to have the east side of the Mississippi and I was to have the west, and you were never to know my story. Publicly, father and I were strangers and quits, and we came to this agreement in the room of a down-town hotel.

"The day before I started West I simply had to have a look through the store--the store that I loved and that I had to lose. Yes, the store is far more to my taste than this rough western life. Naturally, as my existence was to be kept a secret from you, when you followed me to the elevator and tried to get acquainted I couldn't have it."

"But as the elevator descended you pointed to the mole," said Jack.

"Did I? I suppose that was an involuntary, instinctive pleasantry. The previous evening father and I had had a farewell visit together. We went into the country."

"The night after the scene in the drawing-room!" Jack thought.

"I knew that father was worried because he had to make an effort to show that he was not. Usually he can cover his worries perfectly. He said that he might have a fight in order to keep you and that he very much wanted you to stay. But he did not succeed," concluded Prather, fist driving into palm. "You came on the express after me."

"Because, fortunately, you went to the house to have a look at the ancestor!"

"Yes," said Prather. "But I did not see you."

"However, I saw you from the landing and overheard what passed between you and father!"

"No matter!" cried Prather harshly. "I am prepared for you!" He looked toward the water-hole significantly. "And the concession is mine! The dam will be mine!"

"The dam could be built and all the valley might bloom without so much power passing into the hands of one man," said Jack.

P.D. scenting the pasturage and feeling the pangs of thirst was starting forward at a smarter pace; but Jack held him back to the snail's crawl of Prather's pony.

"Who would do it? Jasper Ewold? Jim Galway?" Prather demanded. "What these men need is a leader. They don't realize what I am doing for them. Do they think I want to put in ten years out here for nothing? For every dollar that they make for me they are going to make one for themselves. That's the rule of prosperity. I am not robbing them. I am taking only my fair share in return for creative business genius. The fellows in Little Rivers who sulk and don't get on will have only themselves to thank."

"But they lose their independence," Jack was arguing quietly, as if he would thrash out the subject. "There are other things than money in this world."

"There's nothing much money won't do!" said Prather.

"It will not give one self-respect or courage or moral fibre; it will not bring the gift of poetry, music, or painting; or turn a lie into truth; or bring back virtue to a woman who has been defiled; or make the courage to face death calmly."

"It will do all I want!" Prather answered. "Father not having been true to his agreement by keeping you in New York, why should I keep his secret? He breaks faith; I break faith. It seems to me as if there were no escaping the penalty of my birth. I no sooner arrive than I find the whole town knows of your return; and not only that, but a wire comes from father saying that we had better not meet until he comes."

"Until he comes! Yes, go on!"

"Well, as you say, you are here to save Little Rivers and that meant an interview with me, and--well," again the palms in their crisp movement, "before I started out I told Pete Leddy that if you came after me I should look to him for protection, and it seems he is on time."

"Yes," said Jack, without looking at Prather. All the while he had kept watch on the water-hole, and he received Prather's announcement stoically as a confirmation of his suspicions.

"So, if you will take my advice, brother, the best thing for you to do is to ride back before we reach the water-hole, unless you prefer Leddy's company. This time he will fight you in his way."

"My horse is tired and there is neither water nor feed for him except there." Jack stated this quietly and stubbornly, as he nodded toward the cotton-woods. Then he looked around to Prather. Suddenly Prather found himself looking at a face that seemed to have only the form of that face by the side of which he had been riding. It was as if another man had taken Jack's place in the saddle. The ancestor was rising in Jack. Prather saw an electric spark in Jack's eyes, the spark of the high voltage that made his muscles weave and a flutter come in his cheeks. "No, I am not going back until I have recovered the rights that you have taken from Little Rivers!" he said.

Prather in sudden confusion realized that he had let his feelings go too soon. They were not yet at the water-hole, and he was within easy reach of that hand working on the reins in a way that promised an outburst.

"You think of physical violence against me--your own flesh and blood!" he said defensively.

He saw Jack shudder in reaction and knew that he was safe for the moment. When Jack looked away at the water-hole Prather's fingers slipped to his own six-shooter and rested there, twitching nervously; and in the rear Firio was watching both him and Nogales shrewdly.

From any outward sign now, Jack might have been starting on another journey with quiet eagerness; a journey that might end at a precipice a few yards ahead or at the other side of the world. Of this alone you could be sure from the resoluteness of his features, that he was going straight on; while Firio, in the telepathy of desert companionship, understood that he was missing no developing detail within the narrow range of vision in front of P.D.'s nose. Trusting all to Jack, Firio was on wires, ready for a spring in any direction.

They were coming to the edge of a depression of an old watercourse that wound around past the cotton-woods to the ridge itself and included the basin where Leddy and his followers had tethered their horses. But this part of it was dry sand. The standing figures around the water-hole had sunk down. Jack could see them as lumps in a row. A blade of flame from the setting sun fell on them, revealing the glint of rifle barrels.

"Firio! Quick--down! P.D., down!" Jack called, dismounting with a leap; and as though in answer to his warning came the singing of bullets about their ears.

P.D. had been trained to sink on all fours at a word and he and Jack together dropped into the cover of the _arroyo_, below the desert line. When he looked around Firio was at his side, still holding the reins of Wrath of God. But Wrath of God's sturdy, plodding nature had little facility in learning tricks. A tiny stream of blood was flowing down his forehead and he lay still. At last, all in loyal service, he had reached the horizon. His bony, homely, good old face seemed singularly peaceful, as if satisfied with the reward at his journey's end. Jag Ear was standing beside P.D. and Prather's burro next to him, both unharmed. Nogales's horse had also been killed, but its rider was safe. Prather was crawling down the side of the _arroyo_ on his belly, digging his hands into the dirt, his face white and contorted and his eyes shifting back and forth in ghastly incomprehension. His horse followed him and sank down in final surrender to exhaustion.

By common impulse, Jack and Firio seized the rifles from Jag Ear's pack, while Nogales, a spectator, squatted beside Prather.

"What--what does it mean?" Prather gasped, spasmodically. "I--I--was it Leddy that fired on us?"

"Yes," said Jack over his shoulder, as he and Firio started up the bank of the _arroyo_ facing the water-hole. "No doubt of it."

"It was you they wanted--not me--not me! I--I--"

"I don't know. At all events, I do not mean they shall rush us!" Jack

answered, as he and Firio hugged the slope with their rifles resting on top and only their heads showing above it.

"No! It couldn't be that they recognized me. They will let me by! They expect me!"

"Yes, you belong on their side!" Jack called back.

"I will send out a flag of truce!" said Prather, brightening with the thought. "You, Nogales, take my handkerchief and go and explain to Leddy!"

Nogales seemed agreeable to the suggestion. Indeed, he was very expeditious in starting. While Jack never took his eye off the sight of his barrel, Nogales walked across the gleaming interval between the two parties waving Prather's handkerchief. Leddy rose on his knee watchfully, rifle in hand, while he spoke with Nogales. Then Nogales started back with his head thrown up jubilantly, but stopped when he was within calling distance and sang out, truculently:

"Leddy get you both! He get everything!"

He turned on his heel and soon was another lump around the water-hole.

"That makes nine, Firio!" said Jack.

He smiled in relief to be rid of Nogales; smiled in happy confidence, as if he were truly the ancestor's child.

"_Si_!" answered Firio, as if he had just as soon there were a regiment against them. He was happy beyond words. He patted his rifle barrel; he spread out his big red bandanna beside his elbow and on it nicely arranged a couple of extra charges of cartridges.

Prather remained flat on the bottom of the _arroyo_, overwhelmed. It was some time before he could speak.

"I--I don't understand! It isn't possible!" he said finally.

"Everything is possible with Leddy. It seems that there can be peace between him and me in this valley in only one way," Jack answered.

"But me! I suppose he found out that I--" Prather stopped without finishing the sentence. "What am I to do?" he asked Jack in livid appeal.

"Why, it is three against nine, if you choose!" Jack answered. "You have a rifle, and it is for your life."

"My life!" Prather gasped, another wave of fear submerging him.

"Yes. We have no horses with which to make our escape and we should be winged as soon as we exposed ourselves. Leddy means that we shall die of thirst, or die fighting."

Through all this dialogue Jack had been speaking to the head that lay between his eye and a target. As Prather reached up a trembling hand to take his rifle from the back of his burro one of the lumps around the water-hole rose, possibly to change position. When it became the silhouette of a kneeling man, Jack fired and the figure plunged forward

like an automaton that had had its back broken.

"Eight!" whispered Firio.

"Duck!" Jack told him; for a response instantly came in a volley that kicked up the dust around their heads.

But Jack's rifle lay in limp hands.

"Eight!" he repeated, dazedly. "And I shot to kill--to kill!"

His face blanched with horror at the thing that he had done. It seemed as if the strength had been struck out of him. He appeared ready to let destiny overtake him rather than fire again. Then as in a flash, the ancestor in him reappeared and in his features was written that very process of fate which Dr. Bennington had said was in him. Again his hand was firm on the barrel and his eye riveted on the sight, as he drew himself up until he lay even with the bank of the _arroyo_.

The volley from the cotton-woods had swept over Prather's head at the instant that he had taken hold of his rifle. It dropped from his grasp. He burrowed in the sand under the pressure of that near and sinister rush of singing breaths.

"I can't! I can't!" he said helplessly.

He was leaden flesh, without the power to move. At his words Jack glanced back to see a dropped jaw and glassy, staring eyes.

"You are suffering!" exclaimed Jack. "Are you hit?"

"No!" Prather managed to say, and reached out for his rifle in clumsy desperation, as if he were feeling for it in the dark.

"Take your time!" said Jack encouragingly, as one would to a victim of stage fright. "There isn't any danger for the moment, while advantage of position is with us--the sun over our shoulders and in their faces."

The lumps around the water-hole grew smaller. Evidently, as a result of the lesson, they were creeping backward on their stomachs to a less exposed position. Two had quite disappeared, or else the brilliant play of light had melted them into the golden carpet of reflected sunshine on which they rested. Directly, Jack saw two figures creeping over the rim of the pasturage basin.

"So, that's it!" he said to Firio.

Firio nodded his understanding of Leddy's plan to take them in flank under cover of the _arroyo_.

"We shall have to respond in kind!" said Jack.

He left his hat where his head had been and began crawling along the side of the _arroyo_, but paused to call to Prather, who, now that no bullets were flying, was trying the mechanism of his rifle with a somewhat steadier hand:

"Prather, if you could manage to get up there beside Firio and join him in pouring out a magazine full at the right moment, it would help! If

not, put your hat up there beside mine. You can do that without exposing yourself."

Jack's tone was that of one who urges a tired man to take a few more steps, or an invalid without any appetite to try another sup of broth. It had no hint of irony.

"No matter," said Firio. "Leddy know he can't fight. Leddy know there is only two of us!" His tone was without satire, but its sting was sharper than satire; that of an Indian shrug over a negligible quantity. It started Prather on all fours laboriously toward him.

"I am going to the turn in the _arroyo_ that commands the next turn," Jack explained. "When I whistle you empty your magazines. Keep your heads down and fire fast, no matter if not accurately, so as to disturb their aim at me!"

"_Si_!" said Firio. "I know!" No one could deny that he was having a very good time making war in the company of Senor Jack. "Yes, Mister Prather," he added, when, after toiling painfully on his belly for the few feet he had to go, Prather lay with his stark face near Firio's; a face strangely like that of John Wingfield, Sr. when he saw Jasper Ewold from the drawing-room doorway. "For your life, Mister Prather! _Si_! Up a little more! Chin high as mine, so! Eye on sight, so!"

Prather obeyed in an abyssmal sort of shame which, for the time being, conquered his fear, though not his palsy; for his rifle barrel trembled on its rest.

Meanwhile, Jack had crept to the bend in the _arroyo_. He was listening. It would not do to show his head as a warning of his presence. Faintly he heard men moving in the sand, moving slowly and cautiously. At the moment he chose as the right one, with rifle cocked and finger on trigger, he gave his signal. Then he sprang to the top of the bank, fully exposed to the marksmen at the water-hole. For no half measure would do. He must have a full view of the bottom of the next bend. There he saw two crawling figures. He fired twice and dropped down with three or four stinging whispers in his ears and a second volley overhead as he was under cover. Again he sprang up over the bank in the temptation to see the result of his aim. One of the would-be flankers lay prostrate and still, face downward. The other was disappearing beyond the second bend.

"Seven, now!" he thought miserably, in comprehension of the whole business as ridicule in human savagery. "They won't trouble us again immediately. They will wait on darkness and thirst," he concluded; and called, as he turned back, to Firio: "It worked like a charm, O son of the sun! They could not fire at all straight with your bullets flying about their heads, disturbing their--" His speech ended at sight of Prather, half rolling, half tumbling down the slope, his hands over his face, while he uttered a prolonged moan.

"Bullet hit a rock under sand!" said Firio, as Jack hastened to assist Prather, who had come to a halt at the very bottom of the _arroyo_ and lay gasping on his side. Jack took hold of Prather's wrists to draw his hands away from the wound.

"My God! Out here, like a rat in a trap!" Prather groaned. "When I have all life before me! In sight of millions and power--a rat in a trap out on this damnable desert, as if I were of no more account than a rancher!"

"Let me see!" said Jack; for Prather was holding his hands tight against his face, as if he feared that all the blood in his body would pour out if he removed them. "Let me see! Maybe it is not so bad!"

Prather let his hands drop and the right one which was over the cheek with the mole was splashed red between the fingers. On the cheek was a raw spot, from which ran a slight trickle. The mole had gone. A splinter of rock, or perhaps a bullet, with its jacket split, ricocheting sidewise, had torn it clean from the flesh.

"Not at all dangerous!" said Jack.

"No?" exclaimed Prather, in utter relief.

"It will heal in a fortnight!"

A small medicine case was among the regular supplies that were always packed on that omnibus of a burro, Jag Ear. While Jack was bandaging the wound, Firio, who kept watch, had no news to report.

"Nothing matters! They will get us, anyway!" Prather moaned. The shock of being hit had quite finished any pretence at concealing his mortal fear of the outcome.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that! We already have them down to seven!" said Jack encouragingly, as he made a pillow of a blanket and bade Prather rest his head on it.

But he knew well that they were a seven who had learned wisdom from the fate of their comrades. From Nogales, Leddy must have heard of the loss of two horses. At best, but one of the beleaguered three had any means of escape. Leddy could well afford to curb his impatience as he camped comfortably by the water-hole, while his own horses grazed.

The sun was still above the western ridge in the effulgence of its adieu for the day. Jack was on his knee, with the broad, level glare full on him, looking at Prather, who was in the shadow; and his reflections were mixed with that pity which one feels toward another who is lame or blind or suffers for the want of any sense or faculty that is born to the average human being. For a man of true courage rarely sees a coward as anything but a man ailing; he is grateful for nature's kindness to himself. And the spark of John Wingfield, Knight, skipping generations before it settled on a descendant, had not chosen John Prather for its favor. The ancestor was all Jack's.

Prather, in his agony of mind, had moments of wondering envy as he watched Jack's changing expression. He could see that Jack, in entire detachment from his problem of fighting Leddy, was thinking soberly in the silence of the desert, unconscious in his absorption of the presence of any other human being. Suddenly his eyes opened wide in the luminousness of a happy discovery; his lips turned a smile of supreme satisfaction, and his face seemed to be giving back the light of the sun.

"It's all right!" he said. "Yes, everything is going to be all right!"

"How?" asked Prather wistfully, feeling the infection of the confident ring of Jack's tone.

"There is one horse left," said Jack. "He is in better condition than Leddy imagines. When darkness comes you can get away with him and by morning he will have brought you to water at Las Cascadas, halfway on the range trail. Then you will be quite safe."

"Yes! Yes!" Prather half rose, his breath coming fast, his eyes ravenous.

"And in return you will give Little Rivers back its water rights! Is that a bargain?" Jack asked.

"Give up my concession and all it means to me! Give it up absolutely--its millions!" objected Prather, in an uncontrollable impulse of greed.

"King Richard III, you remember," Jack declared, with a trace of his old humor breaking out over the new aspect of the situation, "said he would give his kingdom for a horse. He could not get the horse and he lost both his kingdom and his life. If he had been able to make the trade he might have saved his life and perhaps--who knows?--have won another kingdom."

"I will save my life!" Prather concluded; but under his breath he added bitterly: "And you get both the store and Little Rivers!" in the prehensile instinct which gains one thing only to covet another.

"You have the papers for the concession with you?" Jack asked.

"I--I--"

"Yes!" interposed Jack firmly.

"Yes!" Prather admitted.

"And you have pencil and paper to make some sort of transfer that will be the first legal step in undoing what you have done?"

"Yes."

While Prather was occupied with this, Jack found pencil and paper on his own account and by the light of the sun's last rays and in the happiness of one who has brought a story to a good end, he wrote to his father:

"John Prather will tell you how he and I met out on the desert before you came and of the long talk we had.

"You wanted a son who would go on building on the great foundation you had laid. You have one. He said that you wanted to give him the store. The reason why you might not give it to him no longer exists. The mole is gone. Of course there will be a scar where the mole was. I, too, shall have to carry a scar. But the means is in your power to go far toward erasing his, for his mother, Mrs. Prather, is still living.

"So everything is clear. Everything is coming out right. John Prather and I change places, as nature intended that we should. You need have no apprehensions on my account. Though I had not a cent in the world I could make my living out here--a very sweet thought, this, to me, with its promise of something real and practical and worth while, at which I can make good. I know that you are going to keep the bargain that Prather and I have made; and think of me as over the pass and very happy as I write this, in the confidence that at last all accounts have been balanced and we can both turn to a fresh page in the ledger. JACK."

When Jack, after he had received the transfer, gave the letter to Prather to read, Prather was transfixed with incredulity.

"You mean this?" he gasped blankly, as his surprise became articulate.

"Yes. You have quite the better of King Richard--you gain both the kingdom and the horse."

"The store, yes, the store--mine! Mine--the store!" said Prather, in a slow, passionate monotone, his fingers trembling with the very triumph of possession as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "The store, yes, the store!" he repeated, amazement mixed with exultation. "But--" his keen, practical mind was recovering its balance; he was on guard again. Between him and the realization of his inheritance lay the shadow of the fear of the miles in the night. "But--there is no trick?" he hazarded in suspicion.

"No!"

Jack spoke in such a way that it removed the last doubt for Prather, who kneaded his palms together in a kind of frenzy, oblivious of all except the moneyed prospect of the kingdom craved that had become a kingdom won.

"How long before I start?" he asked.

"As soon as the first darkness settles and before the moon rises."

"I shall need some food," Prather went on ingratiatingly. "And they say wounds bring on fever. Have you any water to drink on the way?"

"We will fix you up the best we can. I will divide what water remains between you and P.D. He shall have his share now and you can drink yours later."

The sun had set. The afterglow was fading, and in a few minutes, when the light was quite out of the heavens, Jack announced that it was time for Prather to start.

"How shall I know the direction?" Prather asked.

"Trust P.D. He will find it," said Jack. He held the stirrup for Prather to mount with the relief of freeing himself at last from the clinging touch of the phantoms. "You are perfectly safe. In two days you will be mounting the steps of a Pullman on your way to New York."

"And you? What--what are you going to do?" Prather inquired hectically, with a momentary qualm of shame.

"Why, if Firio and I are to have water to make coffee for breakfast we must take the water-hole!" Jack answered, as if this were a thing of minor importance beside seeing Prather safely on his way. "Be sure not to overwater P.D. after the night's ride, and don't overdo him on the final stretch, and turn him over to Galway when you arrive. Home, P.D.! Home!" he concluded, striking that good soldier with the flat of his hand on the buttocks. And P.D. trotted away into the night.

Jack listened to the hoof-beats on the soft earth dying away and then crept up beside Firio on the bank and gazed into the black wall in the

direction of the cotton-woods. A slight glow in the basin, which must be Leddy's camp-fire, was the only sign of life in the neighborhood. The silence was profound. He had not spoken a word to Firio. With one problem forever solved, he was absorbed in another.

"Leddy drinks, eats, waits!" whispered Firio. "If we try to go they hunt us down!"

"Yes," said Jack.

"And we not go, eh? We stay? We fight?"

"For water, Firio, yes! Two against seven!"

"_Si_!" Firio had no illusions about the situation. "_Si_!" he repeated stoically.

"And, Firio--" Jack's hand slipped with a quick, gripping caress onto Firio's shoulder. An inspiration had come to the mind of action, just as a line comes to a poet in a flash; as one must have come to the ancestor many times after he had gone into a tight place trusting to his wits and his blade to bring him out. "And, Firio, we are going to change our base, as the army men say--and change it before the moon rises. Jag Ear, we shall have to leave you behind," he added, when they had dropped back to the burro's side. "Just make yourself comfortable. Leddy surely wouldn't think of killing so valuable a member of the non-combatant class. We will come for you, by and by. It will be all right!"

He gave the sliver of ear an affectionate corkscrew twist before he and Firio, taking all their ammunition, crawled along the bottom of the _arroyo_ and up the ridge where they settled down comfortably behind a ledge commanding the water-hole at easy range.

"It's lucky we learned to shoot in the moonlight!" Jack whispered.

"_Si!"_ Firio answered, in perfect understanding.

XXXVII

THE END OF THE WEAVING

For over a week a private car had stood on a siding at Little Rivers. Every morning a porter polished the brasswork of the platform in heraldry of the luxury within. Occasionally a young man with a plaster over a wound on his cheek would walk up and down the road-bed on the far side of the car. Indeed, he had worn a path there. He never went into town, and any glances that he may have cast in that direction spoke his desire to be forever free of its sight. Not a train passed that he did not wish himself aboard and away. But as heir-apparent he had no thought of endangering his new kingdom by going before his father went. He meant to keep very close to the throne. He had become clingingly, determinedly filial. At times the gleam of the brasswork would exercise the same hypnosis over his senses as the scintillation of the jewelry counters of the store, and he would rub his hands crisply together.

John Wingfield, Sr. spent little time in the car. Morning and afternoon and evening he would go over to Dr. Patterson's with the question: "How is he?" which all Little Rivers was asking. The rules of longevity were in oblivion and the routine channels of a mind, so used to teeming detail, had become abysses as dark and void as the canyons of the range.

On the day of his arrival in Little Rivers he found a town peopled mostly by women and children. All of the men who could bear arms and get a horse had departed, and with them Mary. Thereby hangs a story all to the honor of little Ignacio. After Jack had ridden away with his insistent refusal of assistance, apprehension among the group that watched him disappear in the gathering darkness was allayed by reports of men who had been at the store, where they found the Leddyites hanging about as usual. True, no one had seen either Pete or Ropey Smith, but Lang said that they were upstairs playing poker, a favorite relaxation from the strain of their intellectual life.

But Ignacio learned from another Indian in Lang's service that Pete and seven of his best shots had started for Agua Fria about the same time as Jack, while the rest of the gang that had been left behind were making it their business to cover the leader's absence. Distrusting Ignacio, they locked him in a closet off the bar. In the early hours of the morning he succeeded in escaping with his news, which he carried first to Mary. She was not asleep when he rapped at her door. It had been a night of wakefulness for her, recalling the night after her meeting with Jack on the pass before the duel in the _arroyo_.

"I for Senor Don't Care, now! I for every devil in him! And they go to kill him!" was the incoherent way in which he began his announcement.

In an hour the alarm had travelled from house to house. While the gang slept at Lang's or in their tents, a solemn cavalcade set forth quietly into the night, with rifles slung over their shoulders or lying across the pommels of their saddles, bound to rescue Jack Wingfield. They had protested against Mary's going with all the old, familiar arguments that occur to the male at thought of a woman in physical danger.

"It is the least that any of us can do," she declared.

"But of what service will you be?" Dr. Patterson asked.

"No one can say yet," she replied. "And no one shall stop me!" She was driven by the same impulse that had sent her across the _arroyo_ in face of the ruffians on the bank to Jack's side after he was wounded. "My pony can keep up with the best of yours," she added.

Leddy had eight hours' start on a two-days' journey. It was not in horse-flesh to gain much on his fast and hardened ponies. There was little chance that Jack could hold out against such odds as he must face, even if he had escaped an ambush. So they rode in desperation and in silence, each too certain of what was in the minds of the others to make pretence of a hope that was not in the heart.

Their only stop for rest was at Las Cascadas in the hot hours of midday. Darkness had fallen when they overtook a solitary horseman coming from Agua Fria. John Prather drew rein well to one side of the trail. He had a moment, as they approached, in which to think out his explanation of his position.

"It's Prather, and riding P.D.!" Galway announced.

"Where is Jack Wingfield?" came the merciless question as in one voice from all.

"You are his friends! You have come to rescue him!" Prather cried.

He seemed overcome by his relief. At all events, the wildness of his exclamation in face of the force barring the trail was without affectation.

"There is time? There is hope?"

"Yes! yes!" gasped Prather, as the men began to surround him.

"Why are you here? Why on his horse?"

"Liddy turned on me, too! I was fighting at Wingfield's side! We got two of them before dark! Then I was wounded and couldn't see to shoot. And I came for help. And you will be in time! He's in a good position!"

"I think you are lying!" said Galway.

"He couldn't help it!" said Bob Worther.

"How--how would I have his horse if he weren't willing?" protested Prather, frantically.

"By stealing it, in keeping with your character!"

"Yes! On general principles we ought to--"

"I have a piece of rope!" called a voice from the rear.

"There isn't any tree. But we can drop him over the wall of a chasm!"

Spectral figures with set faces appallingly grim in the thin moonlight pressed close to Prather.

"My God! No!" he pleaded, throatily. "We fought together, I tell you! We drew lots to see which one should take the risk of riding through danger to save the other!"

"Lying again!"

"Here's the rope! All we've got to do is to slip a noose over his head!"

"It's a clean piece of rope, isn't it?" said the Doge, in his mellow voice. "I don't think it's worth while soiling a clean piece of rope. Come! Taking his life is no way to save Jack's. Come, we are losing time!"

"Right, Doge!" said the man with the rope. "But it is some satisfaction to give him a scare."

"And take care of P.D.!" called another.

"Yes, if you founder Jack's pony you'll hear from us a-plenty!"

This was their adieu to John Prather, who was left to pursue his way in safety to his kingdom, while they rode on, following a hard path at the base of the range. Those with the best horses took the lead, while the heavier men, including the Doge, whose weight was telling on their mounts, fell to the rear. Mary was at the head, between Dr. Patterson and Jim Galway.

The stars flickered out; the moon grew pale, and for a while the horsemen rode into a wall of blackness, conscious of progress only by the sound of hoof-beats which they were relentlessly urging forward. Then dawn flashed up over the chaos of rocks, pursuing night with the sweep of its broadening, translucent wings across the valley to the other range. The tops of the cotton-woods rose out of the sparkling sea, floating free of any visible support of trunks, and the rescuers saw that they were near the end of their journey.

There was a faint sound of a shot; then of another shot and another. After that, the radiant, baffling silence of daybreak on uninhabited wastes, when the very active glory of the spreading, intensifying light ought, one feels, to bring paeans of orchestral splendor. It set desperation in the hearts of the riders, which was communicated to weary ponies driven to a last effort of speed. And still no more shots. The silence spoke the end of some tragedy with the first streaks from the rising sun clearing a target to a waiting marksman's eye.

Around the cotton-woods was no sign of human movement; nothing but inanimate, dark spots which developed into prostrate human forms, in pantomimic expression of the story of that night's work done in the moonlight and finished with the first flush of morning. Two of the outstretched figures were lying head to head a few yards apart on either side of the water-hole. The one on the side toward the ridge was recognized as Jack, still as death. Another a short distance behind him, at the sound of hoof-beats looked up with face blanched despite its dark skin, the parched lips stretched over the teeth; but in Firio's eyes there was still fire, as he whispered, "All right!" before he sank back unconscious. A wound in his shoulder had been bandaged, but the wrist of his gun hand lay beside a fresh red spot on the earth.

Jack had a bullet hole in the upper left arm plugged with a bit of cotton; and a deep furrow across the temple, which was bleeding. His rigid fingers were still gripping his six-shooter. He lay partly on his side, facing Leddy, who had rolled over on his back dead.

Mary and Dr. Patterson dropped from their horses simultaneously. The doctor pressed his hand over Jack's heart, to find it still beating.

"Jack!" they whispered. "Jack!" they called aloud.

He roused slightly, lifting his weary eyelids and gazing at them as if they were uncertain shadows who wanted some kind of an explanation from him which he had not the strength to give.

"We must drink--blaze away, Leddy," he murmured. "I'm coming down after the stars go out--close--close as you like--we must drink!"

"No vital hit!" said the doctor; while Mary bringing water assisted him to bathe the wounds before he dressed them. "No, not from a bullet!" he added, after the dressing was finished and he had one hand on Jack's hot brow and the other on his pulse.

Then he attended to Firio, who was talking incoherently:

"Take water-hole--boil coffee in the morning--quail for dinner, Senor Jack--_si, si_!"

When they had moved Jack and Firio into the shadow of the cotton-woods and forced water down their throats, Firio revived enough to recognize those around him and to cry out an inquiry about Jack; but Jack himself continued in a stupor, apparently unconscious of his surroundings and scarcely alive except for breathing. Yet, when litters of blankets and rifles tied together had been fashioned and attached to the pack-saddles of tandem burros, as he was lifted into place for the return he seemed to understand that he was starting on a journey; for he said, disjointedly:

"Don't forget Wrath of God--and Jag Ear is thirsty--and bury Wrath of God fittingly--give him an epitaph! He was gloomy, but it was a good gloom, a kind of kingly gloom, and he liked the prospect when at last he stuck his head through the blue blanket of the horizon."

Those of the party who remained behind for the last duty to the dead counted its most solemn moment, perhaps, the one that gave Wrath of God the honorable due of a soldier who had fallen face to the enemy. Bob Worther wrote the epitaph with a pencil on a bit of wood: "Here lies the gloomiest pony that ever was. The gloomier he was the better he went and the better Jack Wingfield liked him;" which was Bob's way of interpreting Jack's instructions.

Then Worther and his detail rode as fast as they might to overtake the slow-marching group in trail of the litters with the question that all Little Rivers had been asking ever since, "How is he?" A ghastly, painfully tedious journey this homeward one, made mostly in the night, with the men going thirsty in the final stretches in order that wet bandages might be kept on Jack's feverish head; while Dr. Patterson was frequently thrusting his little thermometer between Jack's hot, cracking lips.

"If he were free of this jouncing! It is a terrible strain on him, but the only thing is to go on!" the doctor kept repeating.

But when Jack lay white and still in his bedroom and Firio was rapidly convalescing, the fever refused to abate. It seemed bound to burn out the life that remained after the hemorrhage from his wounds had ceased. Men found it hard to work in the fields while they waited on the crisis. John Wingfield, Sr. sat for hours under Dr. Patterson's umbrella-tree in moody absorption. He talked to all who would talk to him. Always he was asking about the duel in the _arroyo_ which was fought in Jack's way. He could not hear enough of it; and later he almost attached himself to the one eye-witness of the final duel, which had been fought in Leddy's way.

When Firio was well enough to walk out he was to be found in a long chair on Jack's porch, ever raising a warning finger for silence to anyone who approached and looking out across the yard to Jag Ear, who was winning back the fat he had lost in a constitutional crisis, and P.D., who, after bearing himself first and last in a manner characteristic of a pony who was P.D. but never Q., seemed already none the worse for the hardships he had endured. The master of twenty millions would sit on the steps, while Firio occupied the chair and regarded him much as if he were a blank wall. But at times Firio would humor the persistent inquirer with

a few abbreviated sentences. It was out of such fragments as this that John Wingfield, Sr. had to piece the story of the fight for the water-hole.

"Senor Jack and Mister Prather, they no look alike," said Firio one day, evidently bound to make an end of the father's company. "Anybody say that got bad eyes. Mister Prather"--and Firio smiled peculiarly--"I call him the mole! He burrow in the sand, so! His hand tremble, so! He act like a man believe himself the only god in the world when he in no danger, but when he get in danger he act like he afraid he got to meet some other god!"

"But Jack? Now, after Prather had gone?" persisted the father greedily.

"We glad the mole go. It sort of hurt inside to think a man like him. He make you wonder what for he born."

John Wingfield, Sr. half rose in a sudden movement, as if he were about to go, but remained in response to another emotion that was stronger than the impulse.

"And Jack? He kept his head! He figured out his chances coolly! Now, that trick he played by going up on the ridge under cover of darkness?"

"No trick!" said Firio resentfully, in instinctive defence. "That the place to fight! Senor Jack he see it."

"And all through the night you kept firing?"

"_Si_, after moon very bright and over our shoulders in their faces! _Si_, at the little lumps that lie so still. When they move quick like they stung, we know we hit!"

"Ah, that was it! You hit! You hit! And the other fellows couldn't. You had the light with you--everything! Jack had seen to that! He used his head! He--he was strong, strong!"

Quite unconsciously, John Wingfield, Sr. rubbed his palms together.

"When you pleased you always rub your hands same as Mister Prather," observed Firio.

"Oh! Do I? I--" John Wingfield, Sr. clasped his fingers together tightly. "Yes, and the finish of the fight--how was that?"

"Sometimes, when there no firing, Senor Jack and Leddy call out to each other. Leddy he swear hard, like he fight. Senor Jack he sing back his answers cheerful, like he fight. Toward morning we both wounded and only Leddy and one other man alive on his side. When a cloud slip over the moon and the big darkness before morning come, we creep down from the ridge and with first light we bang-bang quick--and I no remember any more."

"Forced the fighting--forced it right at the end!" cried John Wingfield, Sr. in the flush of a great pride.

"The aggressive, that is it--that is the way to win, always!"

"But Senor Jack no fight just to win!" said Firio. "He no want to fight."

In the big darkness, before we crawl down to the water-hole, he call out to Leddy to make quits. He almost beg Leddy. But Leddy, he say: 'I never quit and I get you!' 'Sorry,' says Senor Jack, with the devil out again, 'sorry--and we'll see!' No, Senor Jack no like to fight till you make him fight and the devil is out. He fight for water; he fight for peace. He no want just to win and kill, but--but--" bringing his story to an end, Firio looked hard at the father, his velvety eyes shot with a comprehending gleam as he shrugged his shoulders--"but you no understand, you and the mole!"

John Wingfield, Sr. shifted his gaze hurriedly from the little Indian. His face went ashen and it was working convulsively as he assisted himself to rise by gripping the veranda post.

"Why do you think that?" he asked.

"I know!" said Firio.

His lips closed firmly. That was all he had to say. John Wingfield, Sr. turned away with the unsteady step of a man who is afraid of slipping or stumbling, though the path was hard and even.

Out in the street he met the cold nods of the people of a town where his son had a dominion founded on something that was lacking in his own. And one of those who nodded to him ever so politely was a new citizen, who had once been a unit of his own city within a city.

Peter Mortimer had arrived in Little Rivers only two days after his late employer. Peter had been like some old tree that everybody thinks has seen its last winter. But now he waited only on the good word from the sick-room for the sap of renewed youth to rise in his veins and his shriveled branches to break into leaf at the call of spring.

And the good word did come thrilling through the community. The physical crisis had passed. The fever was burning itself out. But a mental crisis developed, and with it a new cause for apprehension. Even after Jack's temperature was normal and he should have been well on the road to convalescence, there was a veil over his eyes which would not allow him to recognize anybody. When he spoke it was in delirium, living over some incident of the past or of sheer imagination.

Now he was the ancestor, fitting out his ship:

"No, you can't come! A man who is a malingerer on the London docks would be a malingerer on the Spanish Main. I don't want bullies and boasters. Let them stay at home to pick quarrels in the alleys and cheer the Lord Mayor's procession!"

Now his frigate was under full sail, sighting the enemy:

"Suppose they have two guns to our one! That makes it about even! We'll get the windward side, as we have before! Who cares about their guns once we start to board!"

Another time he was on the trail:

"I'll grow so strong, so strong that he can never call me a weakling again! He will be proud of me. That is my only way to make good."

Then he was apprenticed to the millions:

"All this detail makes me feel as if my brains were a tangled spool of thread. But I will master it--I will!"

Again, he was happily telling stories to the children; or tragically pleading with Leddy that there had been slaughter enough around the water-hole; or serenely planning the future which he foresaw for himself when the phantoms were laid:

"I may not know how to run the store, but I do seem to fit in here. We can find the capital! We will build the dam ourselves!"

His body grew stronger, with little appreciable change otherwise. For an instant he would seem to know the person who was speaking to him; then he was away on the winds of delirium.

"His mind is too strong for him not to come out of this all right. It is only a question of time, isn't it?" insisted the father.

"There was a far greater capacity in him for suffering in that hellish fight than there was in Pete Leddy," said Dr. Patterson. "He had sensitiveness to impressions which was born in him, at the same time that a will of steel was born in him--the sensitiveness of the mother, perhaps, and the will of the ancestor. His life hung by a thread when we found him and his nerves had been twisted and tortured by the ordeal of that night. And that isn't all. There was more than fighting. Something that preceded the fight was even harder on him. I knew from his look when he set out for Agua Fria that he was under a terrible strain; a strain worse than that of a few hours' battle--the kind that had been weighing day after day on the will that grimly sustained its weight. And that wound in the head was very close, very, and it came at the moment when he collapsed in reaction after that last telling shot. Something snapped then. There was a fracture of the kind that only nature can set. Will he come out of this delirium, you ask? I don't know. Much depends upon whether that strain is over for good or if it is still pressing on his mind. When he rises from his bed he may be himself or he may ride away madly into the face of the sun. I don't know. Nobody on earth can know."

"Yes, yes!" said John Wingfield, Sr. slowly.

In Jack's wildest moments it was Mary's voice that had the most telling effect. However low she spoke he seemed always to recognize the tone and would greet it with a smile and frequently break into verses and scraps of remembered conversations of his boyhood exile in villa gardens. One morning, when she and Dr. Patterson had entered the room together, Jack called out miserably:

"Just killing, killing, killing! What will Mary say to me, now?"

He raised his hands, fingers spread, and stared at them with a ghastly look. She sprang to the bedside and seized them fast in hers, and bending very close to him, as if she would impart conviction with every quivering particle of her being, she said:

"She thinks you splendid! She is glad, glad! It is just what she wanted you to do. She wished every bullet that you fired luck--luck for your sake, to speed it straight to the mark!"

He seemed to understand what she was saying, as one understands that shade is cool after the broiling torment of the sun.

"Luck will always come at your command, Mary!" he whispered, repeating his last words when he left the Ewold garden to go to the wars.

"And she wants you to rest--just rest--and not worry!"

This had the effect of a soothing draught. Smilingly he fell back on the pillow and slept.

"You put some spirit into that!" said the doctor, after he and Mary had tiptoed out of the room; "a little of the spirit in keeping with a dark-eyed girl who lives in the land of the Eternal Painter."

"All I had!" answered Mary, with simple earnestness.

At noon Jack was still sleeping. He slept on through the last hours of the day.

"The first long stretch he has had," ran the bulletin, from tongue to tongue, "and real sleep, too--the kind that counts!"

In the late afternoon, when the coolness and the shadows of evening were creeping in at the doors and windows, the doctor, Peter Mortimer, the father, and Firio were on the veranda, while Mrs. Galway was on watch by the bedside.

"He's waking!" she came out to whisper.

The doctor hastened past her into the sick-room. As he entered, Jack looked up with a bright, puzzled light in his eyes.

"Just what does this mean?" he asked. "Just how does it happen that I am here? I thought that I--"

"We brought you in some days ago," the doctor explained. "And since you took the water-hole your mind has been enjoying a little vacation, while we moved your body about as we pleased."

"I took the water-hole, then! And Firio? Firio? He--"

"He is just waiting outside to congratulate you on the re-establishment of the old cordial relations between mind and body," the doctor returned; and slipped out to call Firio and to announce: "He is right as rain, right as rain!" news that Mrs. Galway set forth immediately to herald through the community.

As for Firio, he strode into Jack's presence with the air of conqueror, sage, and prophet in one.

"Is it really you, Firio? Come here, so that I can feel of you and make sure, you son of the sun!"

Jack put out his thin, white hand to Firio, and the velvet of Firio's eyes was very soft, indeed.

"Did you know when they brought you in?" Jack asked.

"When burro stumble I feel ouch and see desert and then I drift away up to sky again," answered Firio. "All right now, eh? Pretty soon you so strong I have to broil five--six--seven quail a day and still you hungry!"

The doctor who had been looking on from the doorway felt a vigorous touch on the arm and turned to hear John Wingfield, Sr. asking him to make way. With a grimace approaching a scowl he drew back free of Jack's sight and held up his hand in protest. "You had better not excite him!" he whispered.

"But I am his father!" said John Wingfield, Sr. with something of his old, masterful manner in a moment of irritation, as he pushed by the doctor. He paused rather abruptly when his eyes met Jack's. A faint flush, appearing in Jack's cheeks, only emphasized his wanness and the whiteness of his neck and chin and forehead.

"Well, Jack, right as rain, they say! I knew you would come out all right! It was in the blood that--" and the rest of John Wingfield, Sr.'s speech fell away into inarticulateness.

It was a weak, emaciated son, this son whom he saw in contrast to the one who had entered his office unannounced one morning; and yet the father now felt that same indefinable radiation of calm strength closing his throat that he had felt then. Jack was looking steadily in his father's direction, but through him as through a thin shadow and into the distance. He smiled, but very faintly and very meaningfully.

"Father, you will keep the bargain I have made," he said, as if this were a thing admitting of no dispute. "It is fair to the other one, isn't it? Yes, we have found the truth at last, haven't we? And the truth makes it all clear for him and for you and for me."

"You mean--it is all over--you stay out here for good--you--" said John Wingfield, Sr. gropingly.

Then another figure appeared in the doorway and Jack's eyes returned from the distances to rest on it fondly. In response to an impulse that he could not control, Peter Mortimer was peering timidly into the sick-room.

"Why, Peter!" exclaimed Jack, happily. "Come farther in, so I can see more of you than the tip of your nose."

After a glance of inquiry at the doctor, which received an affirmative nod, Peter ventured another step.

"So it's salads and roses, is it, Peter?" Jack continued. "Well, I think you may telegraph any time, now, that the others can come as soon as they are ready and their places are filled."

Thus John Wingfield, Sr. had his answer; thus the processes of fate that Dr. Bennington had said were in the younger man had worked out their end. Under the spur of a sudden, powerful resolution, the father withdrew. In the living-room he met Jasper Ewold. The two men paused, facing each other. They were alone with the frank, daring features from Velasquez's brush and with the "I give! I give!" of the Sargent, both reflecting the afterglow of sunset; while the features of the living--John Wingfield, Sr.'s, in stony anger, and Jasper Ewold's, serene in philosophy--told their story without the touch of a painter's genius.

"You have stolen my son, Jasper Ewold!" declared John Wingfield, Sr. with the bitterness of one whose personal edict excluded defeat from his lexicon, only to find it writ broad across the page. "I suppose you think you have won, damn you, Jasper Ewold!"

The Doge flushed. He seemed on the point of an outburst. Then he looked significantly from the portrait of the ancestor to the portrait of the mother.

"He was never yours to lose!" was the answer, without passion.

John Wingfield, Sr. recoiled, avoiding a glance at the walls where the pictures hung. The Doge stepped to one side to leave the way clear. John Wingfield, Sr. went out unsteadily, with head bowed. But he had not gone far before his head went up with a jerk and he struck fist into palm decisively. Rigidly, ignoring everyone he passed and looking straight ahead, he walked rapidly toward the station, as if every step meant welcome freedom, from the earth that it touched.

His private car was attached to the evening express, and while it started homeward with the king and the determinedly filial heir-apparent to the citadel of the push-buttons, through all the gardens of Little Rivers ran the joyous news that Jack was "right as rain." It was a thing to start a continual exchange of visits and to keep the lights burning in the houses unusually late.

But all was dark and silent out at Bill Lang's store. After their return from Agua Fria, the rescuing party, Jim Galway leading, had attended to another matter. The remnants of Pete Leddy's gang, far from offering any resistance, explained that they had business elsewhere which admitted of no delay. There was peace in the valley of Little Rivers. Its phantoms had been laid at the same time as Jack's.

XXXVIII

THEIR SIDE OF THE PASS

"Persiflage! Persiflage!" cried the Doge.

He and Jack were in the full tilt of controversy, Jack pressing an advantage as they came around the corner of the Ewold house. It was like the old times and better than the old times. For now there was understanding where then there had been mystery. The stream of their comradeship ran smoothly in an open country, with no unsounded depths.

"But I notice that you always say persiflage just as I am getting the better of the argument!" Jack whipped back.

"Has it taken you all this time to find that out? For what purpose is the word in the English vocabulary? But I'll take the other side, which is the easy one, next time, and then we'll see! Boom! boom!" The Doge pursed out his lips in mock terrorization of his opponent. "You are pretty near yourself again, young sir," he added, as he paused at the opening in the hedge.

"Yes, strength has been fairly flooding back the last two or three days. I can feel it travelling in my veins and making the tissues expand. It is glorious to be alive, O Doge!"

"Now, do you want me to take the other side on that question so you can have another unearned victory? I refuse to humor the invalid any longer and I agree. The proposition that it is glorious to live on such an afternoon as this is carried unanimously. But I will never agree that you can grow dates the equal of mine."

"Not until my first crop is ripe; then there will be no dispute!"

"That is real persiflage!" the Doge called after Jack.

Jack had made his first visit to the Doge's garden since he had left it to meet Prather and Leddy rather brief when he found that Mary was not at home. She had ridden out to the pass. Her trips to the pass had been so frequent of late that he had seen little of her during his convalescence. Yet he had eaten her jelly exclusively. He had eaten it with his bread, his porridge, his dessert, and with the quail that Firio had broiled. He had even intimated his willingness to mix it with his soup. She advised him to stir it into his coffee, instead.

When he was seated in the long chair on the porch and she called to ask how he was, they had kept to the domain of nonsense, with never a reference to sombre memories; but she was a little constrained, a little shy, and he never gave her cause to raise the barrier, even if she had been of the mind in face of a possible recurrence of former provocations while he was weak and easily tired. It was enough for him to hear her talk; enough to look out restfully toward the gray masses of the range; enough to know that the desert had brought him oblivion to the past; enough to see his future as clear as the V of Galeria against the sky, sharing the life of the same community with her.

And what else? He was almost in fear of the very question that was never out of his mind. She might wish him luck in the wars, but he knew her too well to have any illusions that this meant the giving of the great thing she had to give, unless in the full spontaneity of spirit. This afternoon, with the flood of returning strength, the question suddenly became commanding in a fresh-born suspense.

As he walked back to the house he met Belvy Smith and some of the children. Of course they asked for a story, and he continued one about a battered knight and his Heart's Desire, which he had begun some days previously.

"He wasn't a particularly handsome knight or particularly good--inclined to mischief, I think, when he forgot himself--but he was mightily in earnest. He didn't know how to take no. Say 'No!' to him and push him off the mountain top and there he was, starting for the peak again! And he was not so foolish as he might seem. When he reached the top he was happy just to get a smile from his Heart's Desire before he was tossed back again. His fingers were worn clear down to the first joint and his feet off up to the knees, so he could not hold on to the seams of canyons as well as before. He would have been a ridiculous spectacle if he weren't so pitiful. And that wasn't the worst of it. He was pretty well shot to pieces by the brigands whom he had met on his travels. With every ascent there was less of him to climb, you see. In fact, he was being worn down

so fast that pretty soon there wouldn't be much left of him except his wishbone. That was indestructible. He would always wish. And after the hardest climb of all, here he is very near the top again, and--"

"And--and--"

"I'll have to finish this story later," said Jack, sending the youngsters on their way, while he went his own to call to Firio, as he entered the yard: "Son of the sun, I feel so strong that I am going for a ride!"

"You wear the big spurs and the grand chaps?" Firio asked.

Jack hesitated thoughtfully.

"No, just plain togs," he answered. "I think we will hang up that circus costume as a souvenir. We are past that stage of our career. My devil is dead."

It was Firio's turn to be thoughtful.

"_Si_! We had enough fight! We get old and sober! _Si_, I know! We settle down. I am going to begin to shave!" he concluded, stroking the black down on his boyish lip.

With the town behind him and the sinking sun over his shoulder, the battered knight rode toward the foothills and on up the winding path, oblivious of the Eternal Painter's magic and conscious only that every step brought him nearer his Heart's Desire. Here was the rock where she was seated when he had first seen her. What ages had passed since then! And there, around the escarpment, he saw her pony on the shelf! Dropping P.D.'s reins, he hurried on impetuously. With the final turn he found Mary seated on the rock where she had been the day that he had come to say farewell before he went to battle with the millions. Now as then, she was gazing far out over that sea of singing, quivering light, and the crunch of his footsteps awakened her from her revery.

But how differently she looked around! Her breaths were coming in a happy storm, her face crimsoning, her nostrils playing in trembling dilation. In her eyes he saw open gates and a long vista of a fair highway in a glorious land; and the splendor of her was something near and yielding. He sank down beside her. Her hands stole into his; her head dropped on his shoulder; and he felt a warm and palpitating union with the very breath of her life.

"What do I see!" cried the Eternal Painter. "Two human beings who have climbed up as near heaven as they could and seem as happy as if they had reached it!"

"We have reached it!" Jack called back. "And we like it, you hoary-bearded, Olympian impersonality!"

Thus they watched the sun go down, gilding the foliage of their Little Rivers, seeing their future in the fulness and richness of the life of their choice, which should spread the oasis the length of that valley, and knowing that any excursions to the world over the pass would only sink their roots deeper in the soil of the valley that had given them life.

"Jack, oh, Jack! How I did fight against the thing that was born in me

that morning in the _arroyo_! I was in fear of it and of myself. In fear of it I ran from you that day you climbed down to the pine. But I shan't run again--not so far but that I can be sure you can catch me. Jack, oh, Jack! And this is the hand that saved you from Leddy--the right hand! I think I shall always like it better than the left hand! And, Jack, there is a little touch of gray on the temples"--Mary was running her fingers very, very gently over the wound--"which I like. But we shall be so happy that it will be centuries before the rest of your hair is gray! Jack, oh, Jack!"

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