FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

Francis Fitzgerald
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The Beautiful and Damned:

Содержание

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I
ANTHONY PATCH

In 1913, when Anthony Patch was twenty-five, two years were already gone since irony, the Holy Ghost of this later day, had, theoretically at least, descended upon him. Irony was the final polish of the shoe, the ultimate dab of the clothes-brush, a sort of intellectual "There!" – yet at the brink of this story he has as yet gone no further than the conscious stage. As you first see him he wonders frequently whether he is not without honor and slightly mad, a shameful and obscene thinness glistening on the surface of the world like oil on a clean pond, these occasions being varied, of course, with those in which he thinks himself rather an exceptional young man, thoroughly sophisticated, well adjusted to his environment, and somewhat more significant than any one else he knows.

This was his healthy state and it made him cheerful, pleasant,

and very attractive to intelligent men and to all women. In this state he considered that he would one day accomplish some quiet subtle thing that the elect would deem worthy and, passing on, would join the dimmer stars in a nebulous, indeterminate heaven half-way between death and immortality. Until the time came for this effort he would be Anthony Patch – not a portrait of a man but a distinct and dynamic personality, opinionated, contemptuous, functioning from within outward – a man who was aware that there could be no honor and yet had honor, who knew the sophistry of courage and yet was brave.

A WORTHY MAN AND HIS GIFTED SON

Anthony drew as much consciousness of social security from being the grandson of Adam J. Patch as he would have had from tracing his line over the sea to the crusaders. This is inevitable; Virginians and Bostonians to the contrary notwithstanding, an aristocracy founded sheerly on money postulates wealth in the particular.

Now Adam J. Patch, more familiarly known as "Cross Patch," left his father's farm in Tarrytown early in sixty-one to join a New York cavalry regiment. He came home from the war a major, charged into Wall Street, and amid much fuss, fume, applause, and ill will he gathered to himself some seventy-five million dollars.

This occupied his energies until he was fifty-seven years old.

It was then that he determined, after a severe attack of sclerosis, to consecrate the remainder of his life to the moral regeneration of the world. He became a reformer among reformers. Emulating the magnificent efforts of Anthony Comstock, after whom his grandson was named, he levelled a varied assortment of uppercuts and body-blows at liquor, literature, vice, art, patent medicines, and Sunday theatres. His mind, under the influence of that insidious mildew which eventually forms on all but the few, gave itself up furiously to every indignation of the age. From an armchair in the office of his Tarrytown estate he directed against the enormous hypothetical enemy, unrighteousness, a campaign which went on through fifteen years, during which he displayed himself a rabid monomaniac, an unqualified nuisance, and an intolerable bore. The year in which this story opens found him wearying; his campaign had grown desultory; 1861 was creeping up slowly on 1895; his thoughts ran a great deal on the Civil War, somewhat on his dead wife and son, almost infinitesimally on his grandson Anthony.

Early in his career Adam Patch had married an anemic lady of thirty, Alicia Withers, who brought him one hundred thousand dollars and an impeccable entré into the banking circles of New York. Immediately and rather spunkily she had borne him a son and, as if completely devitalized by the magnificence of this performance, she had thenceforth effaced herself within the shadowy dimensions of the nursery. The boy, Adam Ulysses Patch, became an inveterate joiner of clubs, connoisseur of good

form, and driver of tandems – at the astonishing age of twenty-six he began his memoirs under the title "New York Society as I Have Seen It." On the rumor of its conception this work was eagerly bid for among publishers, but as it proved after his death to be immoderately verbose and overpoweringly dull, it never obtained even a private printing.

This Fifth Avenue Chesterfield married at twenty-two. His wife was Henrietta Lebrune, the Boston "Society Contralto," and the single child of the union was, at the request of his grandfather, christened Anthony Comstock Patch. When he went to Harvard, the Comstock dropped out of his name to a nether hell of oblivion and was never heard of thereafter.

Young Anthony had one picture of his father and mother together – so often had it faced his eyes in childhood that it had acquired the impersonality of furniture, but every one who came into his bedroom regarded it with interest. It showed a dandy of the nineties, spare and handsome, standing beside a tall dark lady with a muff and the suggestion of a bustle. Between them was a little boy with long brown curls, dressed in a velvet Lord Fauntleroy suit. This was Anthony at five, the year of his mother's death.

His memories of the Boston Society Contralto were nebulous and musical. She was a lady who sang, sang, sang, in the music room of their house on Washington Square – sometimes with guests scattered all about her, the men with their arms folded, balanced breathlessly on the edges of sofas, the women with their

hands in their laps, occasionally making little whispers to the men and always clapping very briskly and uttering cooing cries after each song – and often she sang to Anthony alone, in Italian or French or in a strange and terrible dialect which she imagined to be the speech of the Southern negro.

His recollections of the gallant Ulysses, the first man in America to roll the lapels of his coat, were much more vivid. After Henrietta Lebrune Patch had "joined another choir," as her widower huskily remarked from time to time, father and son lived up at grampa's in Tarrytown, and Ulysses came daily to Anthony's nursery and expelled pleasant, thick-smelling words for sometimes as much as an hour. He was continually promising Anthony hunting trips and fishing trips and excursions to Atlantic City, "oh, some time soon now"; but none of them ever materialized. One trip they did take; when Anthony was eleven they went abroad, to England and Switzerland, and there in the best hotel in Lucerne his father died with much sweating and grunting and crying aloud for air. In a panic of despair and terror Anthony was brought back to America, wedded to a vague melancholy that was to stay beside him through the rest of his life.

PAST AND PERSON OF THE HERO

At eleven he had a horror of death. Within six impressionable years his parents had died and his grandmother had faded off

almost imperceptibly, until, for the first time since her marriage, her person held for one day an unquestioned supremacy over her own drawing room. So to Anthony life was a struggle against death, that waited at every corner. It was as a concession to his hypochondriacal imagination that he formed the habit of reading in bed – it soothed him. He read until he was tired and often fell asleep with the lights still on.

His favorite diversion until he was fourteen was his stamp collection; enormous, as nearly exhaustive as a boy's could be – his grandfather considered fatuously that it was teaching him geography. So Anthony kept up a correspondence with a half dozen "Stamp and Coin" companies and it was rare that the mail failed to bring him new stamp-books or packages of glittering approval sheets – there was a mysterious fascination in transferring his acquisitions interminably from one book to another. His stamps were his greatest happiness and he bestowed impatient frowns on any one who interrupted him at play with them; they devoured his allowance every month, and he lay awake at night musing untiringly on their variety and many-colored splendor.

At sixteen he had lived almost entirely within himself, an inarticulate boy, thoroughly un-American, and politely bewildered by his contemporaries. The two preceding years had been spent in Europe with a private tutor, who persuaded him that Harvard was the thing; it would "open doors," it would be a tremendous tonic, it would give him innumerable self-sacrificing

and devoted friends. So he went to Harvard – there was no other logical thing to be done with him.

Oblivious to the social system, he lived for a while alone and unsought in a high room in Beck Hall – a slim dark boy of medium height with a shy sensitive mouth. His allowance was more than liberal. He laid the foundations for a library by purchasing from a wandering bibliophile first editions of Swinburne, Meredith, and Hardy, and a yellowed illegible autograph letter of Keats's, finding later that he had been amazingly overcharged. He became an exquisite dandy, amassed a rather pathetic collection of silk pajamas, brocaded dressing-gowns, and neckties too flamboyant to wear; in this secret finery he would parade before a mirror in his room or lie stretched in satin along his window-seat looking down on the yard and realizing dimly this clamor, breathless and immediate, in which it seemed he was never to have a part.

Curiously enough he found in senior year that he had acquired a position in his class. He learned that he was looked upon as a rather romantic figure, a scholar, a recluse, a tower of erudition. This amused him but secretly pleased him – he began going out, at first a little and then a great deal. He made the Pudding. He drank – quietly and in the proper tradition. It was said of him that had he not come to college so young he might have "done extremely well." In 1909, when he graduated, he was only twenty years old.

Then abroad again – to Rome this time, where he dallied with

architecture and painting in turn, took up the violin, and wrote some ghastly Italian sonnets, supposedly the ruminations of a thirteenth-century monk on the joys of the contemplative life. It became established among his Harvard intimates that he was in Rome, and those of them who were abroad that year looked him up and discovered with him, on many moonlight excursions, much in the city that was older than the Renaissance or indeed than the republic. Maury Noble, from Philadelphia, for instance, remained two months, and together they realized the peculiar charm of Latin women and had a delightful sense of being very young and free in a civilization that was very old and free. Not a few acquaintances of his grandfather's called on him, and had he so desired he might have been *persona grata* with the diplomatic set – indeed, he found that his inclinations tended more and more toward conviviality, but that long adolescent aloofness and consequent shyness still dictated to his conduct.

He returned to America in 1912 because of one of his grandfather's sudden illnesses, and after an excessively tiresome talk with the perpetually convalescent old man he decided to put off until his grandfather's death the idea of living permanently abroad. After a prolonged search he took an apartment on Fifty-second Street and to all appearances settled down.

In 1913 Anthony Patch's adjustment of himself to the universe was in process of consummation. Physically, he had improved since his undergraduate days – he was still too thin but his shoulders had widened and his brunette face had lost the

frightened look of his freshman year. He was secretly orderly and in person spick and span – his friends declared that they had never seen his hair rumpled. His nose was too sharp; his mouth was one of those unfortunate mirrors of mood inclined to droop perceptibly in moments of unhappiness, but his blue eyes were charming, whether alert with intelligence or half closed in an expression of melancholy humor.

One of those men devoid of the symmetry of feature essential to the Aryan ideal, he was yet, here and there, considered handsome – moreover, he was very clean, in appearance and in reality, with that especial cleanness borrowed from beauty.

THE REPROACHLESS APARTMENT

Fifth and Sixth Avenues, it seemed to Anthony, were the uprights of a gigantic ladder stretching from Washington Square to Central Park. Coming up-town on top of a bus toward Fifty-second Street invariably gave him the sensation of hoisting himself hand by hand on a series of treacherous rungs, and when the bus jolted to a stop at his own rung he found something akin to relief as he descended the reckless metal steps to the sidewalk.

After that, he had but to walk down Fifty-second Street half a block, pass a stodgy family of brownstone houses – and then in a jiffy he was under the high ceilings of his great front room. This was entirely satisfactory. Here, after all, life began. Here he slept, breakfasted, read, and entertained.

The house itself was of murky material, built in the late nineties; in response to the steadily growing need of small apartments each floor had been thoroughly remodelled and rented individually. Of the four apartments Anthony's, on the second floor, was the most desirable.

The front room had fine high ceilings and three large windows that loomed down pleasantly upon Fifty-second Street. In its appointments it escaped by a safe margin being of any particular period; it escaped stiffness, stuffiness, bareness, and decadence. It smelt neither of smoke nor of incense – it was tall and faintly blue. There was a deep lounge of the softest brown leather with somnolence drifting about it like a haze. There was a high screen of Chinese lacquer chiefly concerned with geometrical fishermen and huntsmen in black and gold; this made a corner alcove for a voluminous chair guarded by an orange-colored standing lamp. Deep in the fireplace a quartered shield was burned to a murky black.

Passing through the dining-room, which, as Anthony took only breakfast at home, was merely a magnificent potentiality, and down a comparatively long hall, one came to the heart and core of the apartment – Anthony's bedroom and bath.

Both of them were immense. Under the ceilings of the former even the great canopied bed seemed of only average size. On the floor an exotic rug of crimson velvet was soft as fleece on his bare feet. His bathroom, in contrast to the rather portentous character of his bedroom, was gay, bright, extremely habitable and even

faintly facetious. Framed around the walls were photographs of four celebrated thespian beauties of the day: Julia Sanderson as "The Sunshine Girl," Ina Claire as "The Quaker Girl," Billie Burke as "The Mind-the-Paint Girl," and Hazel Dawn as "The Pink Lady." Between Billie Burke and Hazel Dawn hung a print representing a great stretch of snow presided over by a cold and formidable sun – this, claimed Anthony, symbolized the cold shower.

The bathtub, equipped with an ingenious bookholder, was low and large. Beside it a wall wardrobe bulged with sufficient linen for three men and with a generation of neckties. There was no skimpy glorified towel of a carpet – instead, a rich rug, like the one in his bedroom a miracle of softness, that seemed almost to massage the wet foot emerging from the tub…

All in all a room to conjure with – it was easy to see that Anthony dressed there, arranged his immaculate hair there, in fact did everything but sleep and eat there. It was his pride, this bathroom. He felt that if he had a love he would have hung her picture just facing the tub so that, lost in the soothing steamings of the hot water, he might lie and look up at her and muse warmly and sensuously on her beauty.

NOR DOES HE SPIN

The apartment was kept clean by an English servant with the singularly, almost theatrically, appropriate name of Bounds,

whose technic was marred only by the fact that he wore a soft collar. Had he been entirely Anthony's Bounds this defect would have been summarily remedied, but he was also the Bounds of two other gentlemen in the neighborhood. From eight until eleven in the morning he was entirely Anthony's. He arrived with the mail and cooked breakfast. At nine-thirty he pulled the edge of Anthony's blanket and spoke a few terse words – Anthony never remembered clearly what they were and rather suspected they were deprecative; then he served breakfast on a card-table in the front room, made the bed and, after asking with some hostility if there was anything else, withdrew.

In the mornings, at least once a week, Anthony went to see his broker. His income was slightly under seven thousand a year, the interest on money inherited from his mother. His grandfather, who had never allowed his own son to graduate from a very liberal allowance, judged that this sum was sufficient for young Anthony's needs. Every Christmas he sent him a five-hundred-dollar bond, which Anthony usually sold, if possible, as he was always a little, not very, hard up.

The visits to his broker varied from semi-social chats to discussions of the safety of eight per cent investments, and Anthony always enjoyed them. The big trust company building seemed to link him definitely to the great fortunes whose solidarity he respected and to assure him that he was adequately chaperoned by the hierarchy of finance. From these hurried men he derived the same sense of safety that he had in contemplating

his grandfather's money – even more, for the latter appeared, vaguely, a demand loan made by the world to Adam Patch's own moral righteousness, while this money down-town seemed rather to have been grasped and held by sheer indomitable strengths and tremendous feats of will; in addition, it seemed more definitely and explicitly – money.

Closely as Anthony trod on the heels of his income, he considered it to be enough. Some golden day, of course, he would have many millions; meanwhile he possessed a *raison d'etre* in the theoretical creation of essays on the popes of the Renaissance. This flashes back to the conversation with his grandfather immediately upon his return from Rome.

He had hoped to find his grandfather dead, but had learned by telephoning from the pier that Adam Patch was comparatively well again – the next day he had concealed his disappointment and gone out to Tarrytown. Five miles from the station his taxicab entered an elaborately groomed drive that threaded a veritable maze of walls and wire fences guarding the estate – this, said the public, was because it was definitely known that if the Socialists had their way, one of the first men they'd assassinate would be old Cross Patch.

Anthony was late and the venerable philanthropist was awaiting him in a glass-walled sun parlor, where he was glancing through the morning papers for the second time. His secretary, Edward Shuttleworth – who before his regeneration had been gambler, saloon-keeper, and general reprobate –

ushered Anthony into the room, exhibiting his redeemer and benefactor as though he were displaying a treasure of immense value.

They shook hands gravely. "I'm awfully glad to hear you're better," Anthony said.

The senior Patch, with an air of having seen his grandson only last week, pulled out his watch.

"Train late?" he asked mildly.

It had irritated him to wait for Anthony. He was under the delusion not only that in his youth he had handled his practical affairs with the utmost scrupulousness, even to keeping every engagement on the dot, but also that this was the direct and primary cause of his success.

"It's been late a good deal this month," he remarked with a shade of meek accusation in his voice – and then after a long sigh, "Sit down."

Anthony surveyed his grandfather with that tacit amazement which always attended the sight. That this feeble, unintelligent old man was possessed of such power that, yellow journals to the contrary, the men in the republic whose souls he could not have bought directly or indirectly would scarcely have populated White Plains, seemed as impossible to believe as that he had once been a pink-and-white baby.

The span of his seventy-five years had acted as a magic bellows – the first quarter-century had blown him full with life, and the last had sucked it all back. It had sucked in the cheeks

and the chest and the girth of arm and leg. It had tyrannously demanded his teeth, one by one, suspended his small eyes in dark-bluish sacks, tweeked out his hairs, changed him from gray to white in some places, from pink to yellow in others – callously transposing his colors like a child trying over a paintbox. Then through his body and his soul it had attacked his brain. It had sent him night-sweats and tears and unfounded dreads. It had split his intense normality into credulity and suspicion. Out of the coarse material of his enthusiasm it had cut dozens of meek but petulant obsessions; his energy was shrunk to the bad temper of a spoiled child, and for his will to power was substituted a fatuous puerile desire for a land of harps and canticles on earth.

The amenities having been gingerly touched upon, Anthony felt that he was expected to outline his intentions – and simultaneously a glimmer in the old man's eye warned him against broaching, for the present, his desire to live abroad. He wished that Shuttleworth would have tact enough to leave the room – he detested Shuttleworth – but the secretary had settled blandly in a rocker and was dividing between the two Patches the glances of his faded eyes.

"Now that you're here you ought to *do* something," said his grandfather softly, "accomplish something."

Anthony waited for him to speak of "leaving something done when you pass on." Then he made a suggestion:

"I thought – it seemed to me that perhaps I'm best qualified to write – "

Adam Patch winced, visualizing a family poet with a long hair and three mistresses.

" – history," finished Anthony.

"History? History of what? The Civil War? The Revolution?"

"Why – no, sir. A history of the Middle Ages." Simultaneously an idea was born for a history of the Renaissance popes, written from some novel angle. Still, he was glad he had said "Middle Ages."

"Middle Ages? Why not your own country? Something you know about?"

"Well, you see I've lived so much abroad – "

"Why you should write about the Middle Ages, I don't know. Dark Ages, we used to call 'em. Nobody knows what happened, and nobody cares, except that they're over now." He continued for some minutes on the uselessness of such information, touching, naturally, on the Spanish Inquisition and the "corruption of the monasteries." Then:

"Do you think you'll be able to do any work in New York – or do you really intend to work at all?" This last with soft, almost imperceptible, cynicism.

"Why, yes, I do, sir."

"When'll you be done?"

"Well, there'll be an outline, you see – and a lot of preliminary reading."

"I should think you'd have done enough of that already."

The conversation worked itself jerkily toward a rather

abrupt conclusion, when Anthony rose, looked at his watch, and remarked that he had an engagement with his broker that afternoon. He had intended to stay a few days with his grandfather, but he was tired and irritated from a rough crossing, and quite unwilling to stand a subtle and sanctimonious browbeating. He would come out again in a few days, he said.

Nevertheless, it was due to this encounter that work had come into his life as a permanent idea. During the year that had passed since then, he had made several lists of authorities, he had even experimented with chapter titles and the division of his work into periods, but not one line of actual writing existed at present, or seemed likely ever to exist. He did nothing – and contrary to the most accredited copy-book logic, he managed to divert himself with more than average content.

AFTERNOON

It was October in 1913, midway in a week of pleasant days, with the sunshine loitering in the cross-streets and the atmosphere so languid as to seem weighted with ghostly falling leaves. It was pleasant to sit lazily by the open window finishing a chapter of "Erewhon." It was pleasant to yawn about five, toss the book on a table, and saunter humming along the hall to his bath.

"To … you … beaut-if-ul lady,"

he was singing as he turned on the tap.

"I raise … my … eyes;
To … you … beaut-if-ul la-a-dy
My … heart … cries – "

He raised his voice to compete with the flood of water pouring into the tub, and as he looked at the picture of Hazel Dawn upon the wall he put an imaginary violin to his shoulder and softly caressed it with a phantom bow. Through his closed lips he made a humming noise, which he vaguely imagined resembled the sound of a violin. After a moment his hands ceased their gyrations and wandered to his shirt, which he began to unfasten. Stripped, and adopting an athletic posture like the tiger-skin man in the advertisement, he regarded himself with some satisfaction in the mirror, breaking off to dabble a tentative foot in the tub. Readjusting a faucet and indulging in a few preliminary grunts, he slid in.

Once accustomed to the temperature of the water he relaxed into a state of drowsy content. When he finished his bath he would dress leisurely and walk down Fifth Avenue to the Ritz, where he had an appointment for dinner with his two most frequent companions, Dick Caramel and Maury Noble. Afterward he and Maury were going to the theatre – Caramel would probably trot home and work on his book, which ought to be finished pretty soon.

Anthony was glad *he* wasn't going to work on *his* book. The

notion of sitting down and conjuring up, not only words in which to clothe thoughts but thoughts worthy of being clothed – the whole thing was absurdly beyond his desires.

Emerging from his bath he polished himself with the meticulous attention of a bootblack. Then he wandered into the bedroom, and whistling the while a weird, uncertain melody, strolled here and there buttoning, adjusting, and enjoying the warmth of the thick carpet on his feet.

He lit a cigarette, tossed the match out the open top of the window, then paused in his tracks with the cigarette two inches from his mouth – which fell faintly ajar. His eyes were focussed upon a spot of brilliant color on the roof of a house farther down the alley.

It was a girl in a red negligé, silk surely, drying her hair by the still hot sun of late afternoon. His whistle died upon the stiff air of the room; he walked cautiously another step nearer the window with a sudden impression that she was beautiful. Sitting on the stone parapet beside her was a cushion the same color as her garment and she was leaning both arms upon it as she looked down into the sunny areaway, where Anthony could hear children playing.

He watched her for several minutes. Something was stirred in him, something not accounted for by the warm smell of the afternoon or the triumphant vividness of red. He felt persistently that the girl was beautiful – then of a sudden he understood: it was her distance, not a rare and precious distance of soul but

still distance, if only in terrestrial yards. The autumn air was between them, and the roofs and the blurred voices. Yet for a not altogether explained second, posing perversely in time, his emotion had been nearer to adoration than in the deepest kiss he had ever known.

He finished his dressing, found a black bow tie and adjusted it carefully by the three-sided mirror in the bathroom. Then yielding to an impulse he walked quickly into the bedroom and again looked out the window. The woman was standing up now; she had tossed her hair back and he had a full view of her. She was fat, full thirty-five, utterly undistinguished. Making a clicking noise with his mouth he returned to the bathroom and reparted his hair.

"To … you … beaut-if-ul lady,"

he sang lightly,

"I raise … my … eyes – "

Then with a last soothing brush that left an iridescent surface of sheer gloss he left his bathroom and his apartment and walked down Fifth Avenue to the Ritz-Carlton.

THREE MEN

At seven Anthony and his friend Maury Noble are sitting at a corner table on the cool roof. Maury Noble is like nothing so much as a large slender and imposing cat. His eyes are narrow and full of incessant, protracted blinks. His hair is smooth and flat, as though it has been licked by a possible – and, if so, Herculean – mother-cat. During Anthony's time at Harvard he had been considered the most unique figure in his class, the most brilliant, the most original – smart, quiet and among the saved.

This is the man whom Anthony considers his best friend. This is the only man of all his acquaintance whom he admires and, to a bigger extent than he likes to admit to himself, envies.

They are glad to see each other now – their eyes are full of kindness as each feels the full effect of novelty after a short separation. They are drawing a relaxation from each other's presence, a new serenity; Maury Noble behind that fine and absurdly catlike face is all but purring. And Anthony, nervous as a will-o'-the-wisp, restless – he is at rest now.

They are engaged in one of those easy short-speech conversations that only men under thirty or men under great stress indulge in.

ANTHONY: Seven o'clock. Where's the Caramel? *(Impatiently.)* I wish he'd finish that interminable novel. I've spent more time hungry —

MAURY: He's got a new name for it. "The Demon Lover " – not bad, eh?

ANTHONY: *(interested)* "The Demon Lover"? Oh "woman wailing" – No – not a bit bad! Not bad at all – d'you think?

MAURY: Rather good. What time did you say?

ANTHONY: Seven.

MAURY: *(His eyes narrowing – not unpleasantly, but to express a faint disapproval)* Drove me crazy the other day.

ANTHONY: How?

MAURY: That habit of taking notes.

ANTHONY: Me, too. Seems I'd said something night before that he considered material but he'd forgotten it – so he had at me. He'd say "Can't you try to concentrate?" And I'd say "You bore me to tears. How do I remember?"

(MAURY laughs noiselessly, by a sort of bland and appreciative wideningof his features.)

MAURY: Dick doesn't necessarily see more than any one else. He merely can put down a larger proportion of what he sees.

ANTHONY: That rather impressive talent —

MAURY: Oh, yes. Impressive!

ANTHONY: And energy – ambitious, well-directed energy. He's so entertaining – he's so tremendously stimulating and exciting. Often there's something breathless in being with him.

MAURY: Oh, yes.

(Silence, and then:)

ANTHONY: *(With his thin, somewhat uncertain face at its most convinced)* But not indomitable energy. Some day, bit by bit, it'll blow away, and his rather impressive talent with it, and leave only a wisp of a man, fretful and egotistic and garrulous.

MAURY: *(With laughter)* Here we sit vowing to each other that little Dick sees less deeply into things than we do. And I'll bet he feels a measure of superiority on his side – creative mind over merely critical mind and all that.

ANTHONY: Oh, yes. But he's wrong. He's inclined to fall for a million silly enthusiasms. If it wasn't that he's absorbed in realism and therefore has to adopt the garments of the cynic he'd be – he'd be credulous as a college religious leader. He's an idealist. Oh, yes. He thinks he's not, because he's rejected Christianity. Remember him in college? just swallow every writer whole, one after another, ideas, technic, and characters, Chesterton, Shaw, Wells, each one as easily as the last.

MAURY:*(Still considering his own last observation)* I remember.

ANTHONY: It's true. Natural born fetich-worshipper. Take art —

MAURY: Let's order. He'll be —

ANTHONY: Sure. Let's order. I told him —

MAURY: Here he comes. Look – he's going to bump that waiter. *(He lifts his finger as a signal – lifts it as though it were a soft and friendly claw.)* Here y'are, Caramel.

A NEW VOICE: *(Fiercely)* Hello, Maury. Hello, Anthony

Comstock Patch. How is old Adam's grandson? Débutantes still after you, eh?

In person RICHARD CARAMEL *is short and fair – he is to be bald at thirty-five. He has yellowish eyes – one of them startlingly clear, the other opaque as a muddy pool – and a bulging brow like a funny-paper baby. He bulges in other places – his paunch bulges, prophetically, his words have an air of bulging from his mouth, even his dinner coat pockets bulge, as though from contamination, with a dog-eared collection of time-tables, programmes, and miscellaneous scraps – on these he takes his notes with great screwings up of his unmatched yellow eyes and motions of silence with his disengaged left hand.*

When he reaches the table he shakes hands with ANTHONY and MAURY. He is one of those men who invariably shake hands, even with people whom they have seen an hour before.

ANTHONY: Hello, Caramel. Glad you're here. We needed a comic relief.

MAURY: You're late. Been racing the postman down the block? We've been clawing over your character.

DICK: (*Fixing* ANTHONY *eagerly with the bright eye*) What'd you say? Tell me and I'll write it down. Cut three thousand words out of Part One this afternoon.

MAURY: Noble aesthete. And I poured alcohol into my stomach.

DICK: I don't doubt it. I bet you two have been sitting here

for an hour talking about liquor.

ANTHONY: We never pass out, my beardless boy.

MAURY: We never go home with ladies we meet when we're lit.

ANTHONY: All in our parties are characterized by a certain haughty distinction.

DICK: The particularly silly sort who boast about being "tanks"! Trouble is you're both in the eighteenth century. School of the Old English Squire. Drink quietly until you roll under the table. Never have a good time. Oh, no, that isn't done at all.

ANTHONY: This from Chapter Six, I'll bet.

DICK: Going to the theatre?

MAURY: Yes. We intend to spend the evening doing some deep thinking over of life's problems. The thing is tersely called "The Woman." I presume that she will "pay."

ANTHONY: My God! Is that what it is? Let's go to the Follies again.

MAURY: I'm tired of it. I've seen it three times. (*To DICK:*) The first time, we went out after Act One and found a most amazing bar. When we came back we entered the wrong theatre.

ANTHONY: Had a protracted dispute with a scared young couple we thought were in our seats.

DICK: (*As though talking to himself*) I think – that when I've done another novel and a play, and maybe a book of short stories, I'll do a musical comedy.

MAURY: I know – with intellectual lyrics that no one will

listen to. And all the critics will groan and grunt about "Dear old Pinafore." And I shall go on shining as a brilliantly meaningless figure in a meaningless world.

DICK: (*Pompously*) Art isn't meaningless.

MAURY: It is in itself. It isn't in that it tries to make life less so.

ANTHONY: In other words, Dick, you're playing before a grand stand peopled with ghosts.

MAURY: Give a good show anyhow.

ANTHONY:(To MAURY) On the contrary, I'd feel that it being a meaningless world, why write? The very attempt to give it purpose is purposeless.

DICK: Well, even admitting all that, be a decent pragmatist and grant a poor man the instinct to live. Would you want every one to accept that sophistic rot?

ANTHONY: Yeah, I suppose so.

MAURY: No, sir! I believe that every one in America but a selected thousand should be compelled to accept a very rigid system of morals – Roman Catholicism, for instance. I don't complain of conventional morality. I complain rather of the mediocre heretics who seize upon the findings of sophistication and adopt the pose of a moral freedom to which they are by no means entitled by their intelligences.

(Here the soup arrives and what MAURY might have gone on to say is lostfor all time.)

NIGHT

Afterward they visited a ticket speculator and, at a price, obtained seats for a new musical comedy called "High Jinks." In the foyer of the theatre they waited a few moments to see the first-night crowd come in. There were opera cloaks stitched of myriad, many-colored silks and furs; there were jewels dripping from arms and throats and ear-tips of white and rose; there were innumerable broad shimmers down the middles of innumerable silk hats; there were shoes of gold and bronze and red and shining black; there were the high-piled, tight-packed coiffures of many women and the slick, watered hair of well-kept men – most of all there was the ebbing, flowing, chattering, chuckling, foaming, slow-rolling wave effect of this cheerful sea of people as to-night it poured its glittering torrent into the artificial lake of laughter…

After the play they parted – Maury was going to a dance at Sherry's, Anthony homeward and to bed.

He found his way slowly over the jostled evening mass of Times Square, which the chariot race and its thousand satellites made rarely beautiful and bright and intimate with carnival. Faces swirled about him, a kaleidoscope of girls, ugly, ugly as sin – too fat, too lean, yet floating upon this autumn air as upon their own warm and passionate breaths poured out into the night. Here, for all their vulgarity, he thought, they were faintly and subtly mysterious. He inhaled carefully, swallowing into his lungs

perfume and the not unpleasant scent of many cigarettes. He caught the glance of a dark young beauty sitting alone in a closed taxicab. Her eyes in the half-light suggested night and violets, and for a moment he stirred again to that half-forgotten remoteness of the afternoon.

Two young Jewish men passed him, talking in loud voices and craning their necks here and there in fatuous supercilious glances. They were dressed in suits of the exaggerated tightness then semi-fashionable; their turned over collars were notched at the Adam's apple; they wore gray spats and carried gray gloves on their cane handles.

Passed a bewildered old lady borne along like a basket of eggs between two men who exclaimed to her of the wonders of Times Square – explained them so quickly that the old lady, trying to be impartially interested, waved her head here and there like a piece of wind-worried old orange-peel. Anthony heard a snatch of their conversation:

"There's the Astor, mama!"

"Look! See the chariot race sign – "

"There's where we were to-day. No, *there!*"

"Good gracious! …"

"You should worry and grow thin like a dime." He recognized the current witticism of the year as it issued stridently from one of the pairs at his elbow.

"And I says to him, I says – "

The soft rush of taxis by him, and laughter, laughter hoarse

as a crow's, incessant and loud, with the rumble of the subways underneath – and over all, the revolutions of light, the growings and recedings of light – light dividing like pearls – forming and reforming in glittering bars and circles and monstrous grotesque figures cut amazingly on the sky.

He turned thankfully down the hush that blew like a dark wind out of a cross-street, passed a bakery-restaurant in whose windows a dozen roast chickens turned over and over on an automatic spit. From the door came a smell that was hot, doughy, and pink. A drug-store next, exhaling medicines, spilt soda water and a pleasant undertone from the cosmetic counter; then a Chinese laundry, still open, steamy and stifling, smelling folded and vaguely yellow. All these depressed him; reaching Sixth Avenue he stopped at a corner cigar store and emerged feeling better – the cigar store was cheerful, humanity in a navy blue mist, buying a luxury …

Once in his apartment he smoked a last cigarette, sitting in the dark by his open front window. For the first time in over a year he found himself thoroughly enjoying New York. There was a rare pungency in it certainly, a quality almost Southern. A lonesome town, though. He who had grown up alone had lately learned to avoid solitude. During the past several months he had been careful, when he had no engagement for the evening, to hurry to one of his clubs and find some one. Oh, there was a loneliness here —

His cigarette, its smoke bordering the thin folds of curtain

with rims of faint white spray, glowed on until the clock in St. Anne's down the street struck one with a querulous fashionable beauty. The elevated, half a quiet block away, sounded a rumble of drums – and should he lean from his window he would see the train, like an angry eagle, breasting the dark curve at the corner. He was reminded of a fantastic romance he had lately read in which cities had been bombed from aerial trains, and for a moment he fancied that Washington Square had declared war on Central Park and that this was a north-bound menace loaded with battle and sudden death. But as it passed the illusion faded; it diminished to the faintest of drums – then to a far-away droning eagle.

There were the bells and the continued low blur of auto horns from Fifth Avenue, but his own street was silent and he was safe in here from all the threat of life, for there was his door and the long hall and his guardian bedroom – safe, safe! The arc-light shining into his window seemed for this hour like the moon, only brighter and more beautiful than the moon.

A FLASH-BACK IN PARADISE

Beauty, who was born anew every hundred years, sat in a sort of outdoor waiting room through which blew gusts of white wind and occasionally a breathless hurried star. The stars winked at her intimately as they went by and the winds made a soft incessant flurry in her hair. She was incomprehensible, for, in her, soul and

spirit were one – the beauty of her body was the essence of her soul. She was that unity sought for by philosophers through many centuries. In this outdoor waiting room of winds and stars she had been sitting for a hundred years, at peace in the contemplation of herself.

It became known to her, at length, that she was to be born again. Sighing, she began a long conversation with a voice that was in the white wind, a conversation that took many hours and of which I can give only a fragment here.

BEAUTY: (*Her lips scarcely stirring, her eyes turned, as always, inward upon herself*) Whither shall I journey now?

THE VOICE: To a new country – a land you have never seen before.

BEAUTY: (*Petulantly*) I loathe breaking into these new civilizations. How long a stay this time?

THE VOICE: Fifteen years.

BEAUTY: And what's the name of the place?

THE VOICE: It is the most opulent, most gorgeous land on earth – a land whose wisest are but little wiser than its dullest; a land where the rulers have minds like little children and the law-givers believe in Santa Claus; where ugly women control strong men —

BEAUTY: (*In astonishment*) What?

THE VOICE: (*Very much depressed*) Yes, it is truly a melancholy spectacle. Women with receding chins and shapeless noses go about in broad daylight saying "Do this!" and "Do that!"

and all the men, even those of great wealth, obey implicitly their women to whom they refer sonorously either as "Mrs. So-and-so" or as "the wife."

BEAUTY: But this can't be true! I can understand, of course, their obedience to women of charm – but to fat women? to bony women? to women with scrawny cheeks?

THE VOICE: Even so.

BEAUTY: What of me? What chance shall I have?

THE VOICE: It will be "harder going," if I may borrow a phrase.

BEAUTY: (*After a dissatisfied pause*) Why not the old lands, the land of grapes and soft-tongued men or the land of ships and seas?

THE VOICE: It's expected that they'll be very busy shortly.

BEAUTY: Oh!

THE VOICE: Your life on earth will be, as always, the interval between two significant glances in a mundane mirror.

BEAUTY: What will I be? Tell me?

THE VOICE: At first it was thought that you would go this time as an actress in the motion pictures but, after all, it's not advisable. You will be disguised during your fifteen years as what is called a "susciety gurl."

BEAUTY: What's that?

(*There is a new sound in the wind which must for our purposes be interpreted as* THE VOICE *scratching its head.*)

THE VOICE: (*At length*) It's a sort of bogus aristocrat.

BEAUTY: Bogus? What is bogus?

THE VOICE: That, too, you will discover in this land. You will find much that is bogus. Also, you will do much that is bogus.

BEAUTY: (*Placidly*) It all sounds so vulgar.

THE VOICE: Not half as vulgar as it is. You will be known during your fifteen years as a ragtime kid, a flapper, a jazz-baby, and a baby vamp. You will dance new dances neither more nor less gracefully than you danced the old ones.

BEAUTY: (*In a whisper*) Will I be paid?

THE VOICE: Yes, as usual – in love.

BEAUTY: (*With a faint laugh which disturbs only momentarily the immobility of her lips*) And will I like being called a jazz-baby?

THE VOICE: (*Soberly*) You will love it…

(The dialogue ends here, with BEAUTY still sitting quietly, the starspausing in an ecstasy of appreciation, the wind, white and gusty, blowing through her hair.

All this took place seven years before ANTHONY *sat by the front windows of his apartment and listened to the chimes of St. Anne's.*)

CHAPTER II
PORTRAIT OF A SIREN

Crispness folded down upon New York a month later, bringing November and the three big football games and a great fluttering of furs along Fifth Avenue. It brought, also, a sense of tension to the city, and suppressed excitement. Every morning now there were invitations in Anthony's mail. Three dozen virtuous females of the first layer were proclaiming their fitness, if not their specific willingness, to bear children unto three dozen millionaires. Five dozen virtuous females of the second layer were proclaiming not only this fitness, but in addition a tremendous undaunted ambition toward the first three dozen young men, who were of course invited to each of the ninety-six parties – as were the young lady's group of family friends, acquaintances, college boys, and eager young outsiders. To continue, there was a third layer from the skirts of the city, from Newark and the Jersey suburbs up to bitter Connecticut and the ineligible sections of Long Island – and doubtless contiguous layers down to the city's shoes: Jewesses were coming out into a society of Jewish men and women, from Riverside to the Bronx, and looking forward to a rising young broker or jeweller and a kosher wedding; Irish girls were casting their eyes, with license at last to do so, upon a society of young Tammany politicians, pious undertakers, and grown-up choirboys.

And, naturally, the city caught the contagious air of entré – the working girls, poor ugly souls, wrapping soap in the factories and showing finery in the big stores, dreamed that perhaps in the spectacular excitement of this winter they might obtain for themselves the coveted male – as in a muddled carnival crowd an inefficient pickpocket may consider his chances increased. And the chimneys commenced to smoke and the subway's foulness was freshened. And the actresses came out in new plays and the publishers came out with new books and the Castles came out with new dances. And the railroads came out with new schedules containing new mistakes instead of the old ones that the commuters had grown used to…

The City was coming out!

Anthony, walking along Forty-second Street one afternoon under a steel-gray sky, ran unexpectedly into Richard Caramel emerging from the Manhattan Hotel barber shop. It was a cold day, the first definitely cold day, and Caramel had on one of those knee-length, sheep-lined coats long worn by the working men of the Middle West, that were just coming into fashionable approval. His soft hat was of a discreet dark brown, and from under it his clear eye flamed like a topaz. He stopped Anthony enthusiastically, slapping him on the arms more from a desire to keep himself warm than from playfulness, and, after his inevitable hand shake, exploded into sound.

"Cold as the devil – Good Lord, I've been working like the deuce all day till my room got so cold I thought I'd get

pneumonia. Darn landlady economizing on coal came up when I yelled over the stairs for her for half an hour. Began explaining why and all. God! First she drove me crazy, then I began to think she was sort of a character, and took notes while she talked – so she couldn't see me, you know, just as though I were writing casually – "

He had seized Anthony's arm and walking him briskly up Madison Avenue.

"Where to?"

"Nowhere in particular."

"Well, then what's the use?" demanded Anthony.

They stopped and stared at each other, and Anthony wondered if the cold made his own face as repellent as Dick Caramel's, whose nose was crimson, whose bulging brow was blue, whose yellow unmatched eyes were red and watery at the rims. After a moment they began walking again.

"Done some good work on my novel." Dick was looking and talking emphatically at the sidewalk. "But I have to get out once in a while." He glanced at Anthony apologetically, as though craving encouragement.

"I have to talk. I guess very few people ever really *think*, I mean sit down and ponder and have ideas in sequence. I do my thinking in writing or conversation. You've got to have a start, sort of – something to defend or contradict – don't you think?"

Anthony grunted and withdrew his arm gently.

"I don't mind carrying you, Dick, but with that coat – "

"I mean," continued Richard Caramel gravely, "that on paper your first paragraph contains the idea you're going to damn or enlarge on. In conversation you've got your vis-à-vis's last statement – but when you simply *ponder*, why, your ideas just succeed each other like magic-lantern pictures and each one forces out the last."

They passed Forty-fifth Street and slowed down slightly. Both of them lit cigarettes and blew tremendous clouds of smoke and frosted breath into the air.

"Let's walk up to the Plaza and have an egg-nog," suggested Anthony. "Do you good. Air'll get the rotten nicotine out of your lungs. Come on – I'll let you talk about your book all the way."

"I don't want to if it bores you. I mean you needn't do it as a favor." The words tumbled out in haste, and though he tried to keep his face casual it screwed up uncertainly. Anthony was compelled to protest: "Bore me? I should say not!"

"Got a cousin – " began Dick, but Anthony interrupted by stretching out his arms and breathing forth a low cry of exultation.

"Good weather!" he exclaimed, "isn't it? Makes me feel about ten. I mean it makes me feel as I should have felt when I was ten. Murderous! Oh, God! one minute it's my world, and the next I'm the world's fool. To-day it's my world and everything's easy, easy. Even Nothing is easy!"

"Got a cousin up at the Plaza. Famous girl. We can go up and meet her. She lives there in the winter – has lately anyway – with

her mother and father."

"Didn't know you had cousins in New York."

"Her name's Gloria. She's from home – Kansas City. Her mother's a practising Bilphist, and her father's quite dull but a perfect gentleman."

"What are they? Literary material?"

"They try to be. All the old man does is tell me he just met the most wonderful character for a novel. Then he tells me about some idiotic friend of his and then he says: '*There*'s a character for you! Why don't you write him up? Everybody'd be interested in *him*.' Or else he tells me about Japan or Paris, or some other very obvious place, and says: 'Why don't you write a story about that place? That'd be a wonderful setting for a story!'"

"How about the girl?" inquired Anthony casually, "Gloria – Gloria what?"

"Gilbert. Oh, you've heard of her – Gloria Gilbert. Goes to dances at colleges – all that sort of thing."

"I've heard her name."

"Good-looking – in fact damned attractive."

They reached Fiftieth Street and turned over toward the Avenue.

"I don't care for young girls as a rule," said Anthony, frowning.

This was not strictly true. While it seemed to him that the average debutante spent every hour of her day thinking and talking about what the great world had mapped out for her to do during the next hour, any girl who made a living directly on her

prettiness interested him enormously.

"Gloria's darn nice – not a brain in her head."

Anthony laughed in a one-syllabled snort.

"By that you mean that she hasn't a line of literary patter."

"No, I don't."

"Dick, you know what passes as brains in a girl for you. Earnest young women who sit with you in a corner and talk earnestly about life. The kind who when they were sixteen argued with grave faces as to whether kissing was right or wrong – and whether it was immoral for freshmen to drink beer."

Richard Caramel was offended. His scowl crinkled like crushed paper.

"No – " he began, but Anthony interrupted ruthlessly.

"Oh, yes; kind who just at present sit in corners and confer on the latest Scandinavian Dante available in English translation."

Dick turned to him, a curious falling in his whole countenance. His question was almost an appeal.

"What's the matter with you and Maury? You talk sometimes as though I were a sort of inferior."

Anthony was confused, but he was also cold and a little uncomfortable, so he took refuge in attack.

"I don't think your brains matter, Dick."

"Of course they matter!" exclaimed Dick angrily. "What do you mean? Why don't they matter?"

"You might know too much for your pen."

"I couldn't possibly."

"I can imagine," insisted Anthony, "a man knowing too much for his talent to express. Like me. Suppose, for instance, I have more wisdom than you, and less talent. It would tend to make me inarticulate. You, on the contrary, have enough water to fill the pail and a big enough pail to hold the water."

"I don't follow you at all," complained Dick in a crestfallen tone. Infinitely dismayed, he seemed to bulge in protest. He was staring intently at Anthony and caroming off a succession of passers-by, who reproached him with fierce, resentful glances.

"I simply mean that a talent like Wells's could carry the intelligence of a Spencer. But an inferior talent can only be graceful when it's carrying inferior ideas. And the more narrowly you can look at a thing the more entertaining you can be about it."

Dick considered, unable to decide the exact degree of criticism intended by Anthony's remarks. But Anthony, with that facility which seemed so frequently to flow from him, continued, his dark eyes gleaming in his thin face, his chin raised, his voice raised, his whole physical being raised:

"Say I am proud and sane and wise – an Athenian among Greeks. Well, I might fail where a lesser man would succeed. He could imitate, he could adorn, he could be enthusiastic, he could be hopefully constructive. But this hypothetical me would be too proud to imitate, too sane to be enthusiastic, too sophisticated to be Utopian, too Grecian to adorn."

"Then you don't think the artist works from his intelligence?"

"No. He goes on improving, if he can, what he imitates in the

way of style, and choosing from his own interpretation of the things around him what constitutes material. But after all every writer writes because it's his mode of living. Don't tell me you like this 'Divine Function of the Artist' business?"

"I'm not accustomed even to refer to myself as an artist."

"Dick," said Anthony, changing his tone, "I want to beg your pardon."

"Why?"

"For that outburst. I'm honestly sorry. I was talking for effect."

Somewhat mollified, Dick rejoined:

"I've often said you were a Philistine at heart."

It was a crackling dusk when they turned in under the white façade of the Plaza and tasted slowly the foam and yellow thickness of an egg-nog. Anthony looked at his companion. Richard Caramel's nose and brow were slowly approaching a like pigmentation; the red was leaving the one, the blue deserting the other. Glancing in a mirror, Anthony was glad to find that his own skin had not discolored. On the contrary, a faint glow had kindled in his cheeks – he fancied that he had never looked so well.

"Enough for me," said Dick, his tone that of an athlete in training. "I want to go up and see the Gilberts. Won't you come?"

"Why – yes. If you don't dedicate me to the parents and dash off in the corner with Dora."

"Not Dora – Gloria."

A clerk announced them over the phone, and ascending to

the tenth floor they followed a winding corridor and knocked at 1088. The door was answered by a middle-aged lady – Mrs. Gilbert herself.

"How do you do?" She spoke in the conventional American lady-lady language. "Well, I'm *aw*fully glad to see you – "

Hasty interjections by Dick, and then:

"Mr. Pats? Well, do come in, and leave your coat there." She pointed to a chair and changed her inflection to a deprecatory laugh full of minute gasps. "This is really lovely – lovely. Why, Richard, you haven't been here for *so* long – no! – no!" The latter monosyllables served half as responses, half as periods, to some vague starts from Dick. "Well, do sit down and tell me what you've been doing."

One crossed and recrossed; one stood and bowed ever so gently; one smiled again and again with helpless stupidity; one wondered if she would ever sit down at length one slid thankfully into a chair and settled for a pleasant call.

"I suppose it's because you've been busy – as much as anything else," smiled Mrs. Gilbert somewhat ambiguously. The "as much as anything else" she used to balance all her more rickety sentences. She had two other ones: "at least that's the way I look at it" and "pure and simple" – these three, alternated, gave each of her remarks an air of being a general reflection on life, as though she had calculated all causes and, at length, put her finger on the ultimate one.

Richard Caramel's face, Anthony saw, was now quite normal.

The brow and cheeks were of a flesh color, the nose politely inconspicuous. He had fixed his aunt with the bright-yellow eye, giving her that acute and exaggerated attention that young males are accustomed to render to all females who are of no further value.

"Are you a writer too, Mr. Pats? … Well, perhaps we can all bask in Richard's fame." – Gentle laughter led by Mrs. Gilbert.

"Gloria's out," she said, with an air of laying down an axiom from which she would proceed to derive results. "She's dancing somewhere. Gloria goes, goes, goes. I tell her I don't see how she stands it. She dances all afternoon and all night, until I think she's going to wear herself to a shadow. Her father is very worried about her."

She smiled from one to the other. They both smiled.

She was composed, Anthony perceived, of a succession of semicircles and parabolas, like those figures that gifted folk make on the typewriter: head, arms, bust, hips, thighs, and ankles were in a bewildering tier of roundnesses. Well ordered and clean she was, with hair of an artificially rich gray; her large face sheltered weather-beaten blue eyes and was adorned with just the faintest white mustache.

"I always say," she remarked to Anthony, "that Richard is an ancient soul."

In the tense pause that followed, Anthony considered a pun – something about Dick having been much walked upon.

"We all have souls of different ages," continued Mrs. Gilbert

radiantly; "at least that's what I say."

"Perhaps so," agreed Anthony with an air of quickening to a hopeful idea. The voice bubbled on:

"Gloria has a very young soul – irresponsible, as much as anything else. She has no sense of responsibility."

"She's sparkling, Aunt Catherine," said Richard pleasantly. "A sense of responsibility would spoil her. She's too pretty."

"Well," confessed Mrs. Gilbert, "all I know is that she goes and goes and goes – "

The number of goings to Gloria's discredit was lost in the rattle of the door-knob as it turned to admit Mr. Gilbert.

He was a short man with a mustache resting like a small white cloud beneath his undistinguished nose. He had reached the stage where his value as a social creature was a black and imponderable negative. His ideas were the popular delusions of twenty years before; his mind steered a wabbly and anaemic course in the wake of the daily newspaper editorials. After graduating from a small but terrifying Western university, he had entered the celluloid business, and as this required only the minute measure of intelligence he brought to it, he did well for several years – in fact until about 1911, when he began exchanging contracts for vague agreements with the moving picture industry. The moving picture industry had decided about 1912 to gobble him up, and at this time he was, so to speak, delicately balanced on its tongue. Meanwhile he was supervising manager of the Associated Mid-western Film Materials Company, spending six months of each

year in New York and the remainder in Kansas City and St. Louis. He felt credulously that there was a good thing coming to him – and his wife thought so, and his daughter thought so too.

He disapproved of Gloria: she stayed out late, she never ate her meals, she was always in a mix-up – he had irritated her once and she had used toward him words that he had not thought were part of her vocabulary. His wife was easier. After fifteen years of incessant guerilla warfare he had conquered her – it was a war of muddled optimism against organized dulness, and something in the number of "yes's" with which he could poison a conversation had won him the victory.

"Yes-yes-yes-yes," he would say, "yes-yes-yes-yes. Let me see. That was the summer of – let me see – ninety-one or ninety-two – Yes-yes-yes-yes – "

Fifteen years of yes's had beaten Mrs. Gilbert. Fifteen further years of that incessant unaffirmative affirmative, accompanied by the perpetual flicking of ash-mushrooms from thirty-two thousand cigars, had broken her. To this husband of hers she made the last concession of married life, which is more complete, more irrevocable, than the first – she listened to him. She told herself that the years had brought her tolerance – actually they had slain what measure she had ever possessed of moral courage.

She introduced him to Anthony.

"This is Mr. Pats," she said.

The young man and the old touched flesh; Mr. Gilbert's hand was soft, worn away to the pulpy semblance of a squeezed

grapefruit. Then husband and wife exchanged greetings – he told her it had grown colder out; he said he had walked down to a news-stand on Forty-fourth Street for a Kansas City paper. He had intended to ride back in the bus but he had found it too cold, yes, yes, yes, yes, too cold.

Mrs. Gilbert added flavor to his adventure by being impressed with his courage in braving the harsh air.

"Well, you *are* spunky!" she exclaimed admiringly. "You *are* spunky. I wouldn't have gone out for anything."

Mr. Gilbert with true masculine impassivity disregarded the awe he had excited in his wife. He turned to the two young men and triumphantly routed them on the subject of the weather. Richard Caramel was called on to remember the month of November in Kansas. No sooner had the theme been pushed toward him, however, than it was violently fished back to be lingered over, pawed over, elongated, and generally devitalized by its sponsor.

The immemorial thesis that the days somewhere were warm but the nights very pleasant was successfully propounded and they decided the exact distance on an obscure railroad between two points that Dick had inadvertently mentioned. Anthony fixed Mr. Gilbert with a steady stare and went into a trance through which, after a moment, Mrs. Gilbert's smiling voice penetrated:

"It seems as though the cold were damper here – it seems to eat into my bones."

As this remark, adequately yessed, had been on the tip of

Mr. Gilbert's tongue, he could not be blamed for rather abruptly changing the subject.

"Where's Gloria?"

"She ought to be here any minute."

"Have you met my daughter, Mr. – ?"

"Haven't had the pleasure. I've heard Dick speak of her often."

"She and Richard are cousins."

"Yes?" Anthony smiled with some effort. He was not used to the society of his seniors, and his mouth was stiff from superfluous cheerfulness. It was such a pleasant thought about Gloria and Dick being cousins. He managed within the next minute to throw an agonized glance at his friend.

Richard Caramel was afraid they'd have to toddle off.

Mrs. Gilbert was tremendously sorry.

Mr. Gilbert thought it was too bad.

Mrs. Gilbert had a further idea – something about being glad they'd come, anyhow, even if they'd only seen an old lady 'way too old to flirt with them. Anthony and Dick evidently considered this a sly sally, for they laughed one bar in three-four time.

Would they come again soon?

"Oh, yes."

Gloria would be *aw*fully sorry!

"Good-by – "

"Good-by – "

Smiles!

Smiles!

Bang!

Two disconsolate young men walking down the tenth-floor corridor of the Plaza in the direction of the elevator.

A LADY'S LEGS

Behind Maury Noble's attractive indolence, his irrelevance and his easy mockery, lay a surprising and relentless maturity of purpose. His intention, as he stated it in college, had been to use three years in travel, three years in utter leisure – and then to become immensely rich as quickly as possible.

His three years of travel were over. He had accomplished the globe with an intensity and curiosity that in any one else would have seemed pedantic, without redeeming spontaneity, almost the self-editing of a human Baedeker; but, in this case, it assumed an air of mysterious purpose and significant design – as though Maury Noble were some predestined anti-Christ, urged by a preordination to go everywhere there was to go along the earth and to see all the billions of humans who bred and wept and slew each other here and there upon it.

Back in America, he was sallying into the search for amusement with the same consistent absorption. He who had never taken more than a few cocktails or a pint of wine at a sitting, taught himself to drink as he would have taught himself Greek – like Greek it would be the gateway to a wealth of new sensations, new psychic states, new reactions in joy or misery.

His habits were a matter for esoteric speculation. He had three rooms in a bachelor apartment on Forty-forth street, but he was seldom to be found there. The telephone girl had received the most positive instructions that no one should even have his ear without first giving a name to be passed upon. She had a list of half a dozen people to whom he was never at home, and of the same number to whom he was always at home. Foremost on the latter list were Anthony Patch and Richard Caramel.

Maury's mother lived with her married son in Philadelphia, and there Maury went usually for the week-ends, so one Saturday night when Anthony, prowling the chilly streets in a fit of utter boredom, dropped in at the Molton Arms he was overjoyed to find that Mr. Noble was at home.

His spirits soared faster than the flying elevator. This was so good, so extremely good, to be about to talk to Maury – who would be equally happy at seeing him. They would look at each other with a deep affection just behind their eyes which both would conceal beneath some attenuated raillery. Had it been summer they would have gone out together and indolently sipped two long Tom Collinses, as they wilted their collars and watched the faintly diverting round of some lazy August cabaret. But it was cold outside, with wind around the edges of the tall buildings and December just up the street, so better far an evening together under the soft lamplight and a drink or two of Bushmill's, or a thimbleful of Maury's Grand Marnier, with the books gleaming like ornaments against the walls, and Maury radiating a divine

inertia as he rested, large and catlike, in his favorite chair.

There he was! The room closed about Anthony, warmed him. The glow of that strong persuasive mind, that temperament almost Oriental in its outward impassivity, warmed Anthony's restless soul and brought him a peace that could be likened only to the peace a stupid woman gives. One must understand all – else one must take all for granted. Maury filled the room, tigerlike, godlike. The winds outside were stilled; the brass candlesticks on the mantel glowed like tapers before an altar.

"What keeps you here to-day?" Anthony spread himself over a yielding sofa and made an elbow-rest among the pillows.

"Just been here an hour. Tea dance – and I stayed so late I missed my train to Philadelphia."

"Strange to stay so long," commented Anthony curiously.

"Rather. What'd you do?"

"Geraldine. Little usher at Keith's. I told you about her."

"Oh!"

"Paid me a call about three and stayed till five. Peculiar little soul – she gets me. She's so utterly stupid."

Maury was silent.

"Strange as it may seem," continued Anthony, "so far as I'm concerned, and even so far as I know, Geraldine is a paragon of virtue."

He had known her a month, a girl of nondescript and nomadic habits. Someone had casually passed her on to Anthony, who considered her amusing and rather liked the chaste and fairylike

kisses she had given him on the third night of their acquaintance, when they had driven in a taxi through the Park. She had a vague family – a shadowy aunt and uncle who shared with her an apartment in the labyrinthine hundreds. She was company, familiar and faintly intimate and restful. Further than that he did not care to experiment – not from any moral compunction, but from a dread of allowing any entanglement to disturb what he felt was the growing serenity of his life.

"She has two stunts," he informed Maury; "one of them is to get her hair over her eyes some way and then blow it out, and the other is to say 'You cra-a-azy!' when some one makes a remark that's over her head. It fascinates me. I sit there hour after hour, completely intrigued by the maniacal symptoms she finds in my imagination."

Maury stirred in his chair and spoke.

"Remarkable that a person can comprehend so little and yet live in such a complex civilization. A woman like that actually takes the whole universe in the most matter-of-fact way. From the influence of Rousseau to the bearing of the tariff rates on her dinner, the whole phenomenon is utterly strange to her. She's just been carried along from an age of spearheads and plunked down here with the equipment of an archer for going into a pistol duel. You could sweep away the entire crust of history and she'd never know the difference."

"I wish our Richard would write about her."

"Anthony, surely you don't think she's worth writing about."

"As much as anybody," he answered, yawning. "You know I was thinking to-day that I have a great confidence in Dick. So long as he sticks to people and not to ideas, and as long as his inspirations come from life and not from art, and always granting a normal growth, I believe he'll be a big man."

"I should think the appearance of the black note-book would prove that he's going to life."

Anthony raised himself on his elbow and answered eagerly:

"He tries to go to life. So does every author except the very worst, but after all most of them live on predigested food. The incident or character may be from life, but the writer usually interprets it in terms of the last book he read. For instance, suppose he meets a sea captain and thinks he's an original character. The truth is that he sees the resemblance between the sea captain and the last sea captain Dana created, or whoever creates sea captains, and therefore he knows how to set this sea captain on paper. Dick, of course, can set down any consciously picturesque, character-like character, but could he accurately transcribe his own sister?"

Then they were off for half an hour on literature.

"A classic," suggested Anthony, "is a successful book that has survived the reaction of the next period or generation. Then it's safe, like a style in architecture or furniture. It's acquired a picturesque dignity to take the place of its fashion…"

After a time the subject temporarily lost its tang. The interest of the two young men was not particularly technical. They

were in love with generalities. Anthony had recently discovered Samuel Butler and the brisk aphorisms in the note-book seemed to him the quintessence of criticism. Maury, his whole mind so thoroughly mellowed by the very hardness of his scheme of life, seemed inevitably the wiser of the two, yet in the actual stuff of their intelligences they were not, it seemed, fundamentally different.

They drifted from letters to the curiosities of each other's day.

"Whose tea was it?"

"People named Abercrombie."

"Why'd you stay late? Meet a luscious débutante?"

"Yes."

"Did you really?" Anthony's voice lifted in surprise.

"Not a débutante exactly. Said she came out two winters ago in Kansas City."

"Sort of left-over?"

"No," answered Maury with some amusement, "I think that's the last thing I'd say about her. She seemed – well, somehow the youngest person there."

"Not too young to make you miss a train."

"Young enough. Beautiful child."

Anthony chuckled in his one-syllable snort.

"Oh, Maury, you're in your second childhood. What do you mean by beautiful?"

Maury gazed helplessly into space.

"Well, I can't describe her exactly – except to say that she was

beautiful. She was – tremendously alive. She was eating gum-drops."

"What!"

"It was a sort of attenuated vice. She's a nervous kind – said she always ate gum-drops at teas because she had to stand around so long in one place."

"What'd you talk about – Bergson? Bilphism? Whether the one-step is immoral?"

Maury was unruffled; his fur seemed to run all ways.

"As a matter of fact we did talk on Bilphism. Seems her mother's a Bilphist. Mostly, though, we talked about legs."

Anthony rocked in glee.

"My God! Whose legs?"

"Hers. She talked a lot about hers. As though they were a sort of choice bric-à-brac. She aroused a great desire to see them."

"What is she – a dancer?"

"No, I found she was a cousin of Dick's."

Anthony sat upright so suddenly that the pillow he released stood on end like a live thing and dove to the floor.

"Name's Gloria Gilbert?" he cried.

"Yes. Isn't she remarkable?"

"I'm sure I don't know – but for sheer dulness her father – "

"Well," interrupted Maury with implacable conviction, "her family may be as sad as professional mourners but I'm inclined to think that she's a quite authentic and original character. The outer signs of the cut-and-dried Yale prom girl and all that – but

different, very emphatically different."

"Go on, go on!" urged Anthony. "Soon as Dick told me she didn't have a brain in her head I knew she must be pretty good."

"Did he say that?"

"Swore to it," said Anthony with another snorting laugh.

"Well, what he means by brains in a woman is – "

"I know," interrupted Anthony eagerly, "he means a smattering of literary misinformation."

"That's it. The kind who believes that the annual moral let-down of the country is a very good thing or the kind who believes it's a very ominous thing. Either pince-nez or postures. Well, this girl talked about legs. She talked about skin too – her own skin. Always her own. She told me the sort of tan she'd like to get in the summer and how closely she usually approximated it."

"You sat enraptured by her low alto?"

"By her low alto! No, by tan! I began thinking about tan. I began to think what color I turned when I made my last exposure about two years ago. I did use to get a pretty good tan. I used to get a sort of bronze, if I remember rightly."

Anthony retired into the cushions, shaken with laughter.

"She's got you going – oh, Maury! Maury the Connecticut life-saver. The human nutmeg. Extra! Heiress elopes with coast-guard because of his luscious pigmentation! Afterward found to be Tasmanian strain in his family!"

Maury sighed; rising he walked to the window and raised the shade.

"Snowing hard."

Anthony, still laughing quietly to himself, made no answer.

"Another winter." Maury's voice from the window was almost a whisper. "We're growing old, Anthony. I'm twenty-seven, by God! Three years to thirty, and then I'm what an undergraduate calls a middle-aged man."

Anthony was silent for a moment.

"You *are* old, Maury," he agreed at length. "The first signs of a very dissolute and wabbly senescence – you have spent the afternoon talking about tan and a lady's legs."

Maury pulled down the shade with a sudden harsh snap.

"Idiot!" he cried, "that from you! Here I sit, young Anthony, as I'll sit for a generation or more and watch such gay souls as you and Dick and Gloria Gilbert go past me, dancing and singing and loving and hating one another and being moved, being eternally moved. And I am moved only by my lack of emotion. I shall sit and the snow will come – oh, for a Caramel to take notes – and another winter and I shall be thirty and you and Dick and Gloria will go on being eternally moved and dancing by me and singing. But after you've all gone I'll be saying things for new Dicks to write down, and listening to the disillusions and cynicisms and emotions of new Anthonys – yes, and talking to new Glorias about the tans of summers yet to come."

The firelight flurried up on the hearth. Maury left the window, stirred the blaze with a poker, and dropped a log upon the andirons. Then he sat back in his chair and the remnants of his

voice faded in the new fire that spit red and yellow along the bark.

"After all, Anthony, it's you who are very romantic and young. It's you who are infinitely more susceptible and afraid of your calm being broken. It's me who tries again and again to be moved – let myself go a thousand times and I'm always me. Nothing – quite – stirs me.

"Yet," he murmured after another long pause, "there was something about that little girl with her absurd tan that was eternally old – like me."

TURBULENCE

Anthony turned over sleepily in his bed, greeting a patch of cold sun on his counterpane, crisscrossed with the shadows of the leaded window. The room was full of morning. The carved chest in the corner, the ancient and inscrutable wardrobe, stood about the room like dark symbols of the obliviousness of matter; only the rug was beckoning and perishable to his perishable feet, and Bounds, horribly inappropriate in his soft collar, was of stuff as fading as the gauze of frozen breath he uttered. He was close to the bed, his hand still lowered where he had been jerking at the upper blanket, his dark-brown eyes fixed imperturbably upon his master.

"Bows!" muttered the drowsy god. "Thachew, Bows?"

"It's I, sir."

Anthony moved his head, forced his eyes wide, and blinked

triumphantly.

"Bounds."

"Yes, sir?"

"Can you get off – yeow-ow-oh-oh-oh God! – " Anthony yawned insufferably and the contents of his brain seemed to fall together in a dense hash. He made a fresh start.

"Can you come around about four and serve some tea and sandwiches or something?"

"Yes, sir."

Anthony considered with chilling lack of inspiration. "Some sandwiches," he repeated helplessly, "oh, some cheese sandwiches and jelly ones and chicken and olive, I guess. Never mind breakfast."

The strain of invention was too much. He shut his eyes wearily, let his head roll to rest inertly, and quickly relaxed what he had regained of muscular control. Out of a crevice of his mind crept the vague but inevitable spectre of the night before – but it proved in this case to be nothing but a seemingly interminable conversation with Richard Caramel, who had called on him at midnight; they had drunk four bottles of beer and munched dry crusts of bread while Anthony listened to a reading of the first part of "The Demon Lover."

– Came a voice now after many hours. Anthony disregarded it, as sleep closed over him, folded down upon him, crept up into the byways of his mind.

Suddenly he was awake, saying: "What?"

"For how many, sir?" It was still Bounds, standing patient and motionless at the foot of the bed – Bounds who divided his manner among three gentlemen.

"How many what?"

"I think, sir, I'd better know how many are coming. I'll have to plan for the sandwiches, sir."

"Two," muttered Anthony huskily; "lady and a gentleman."

Bounds said, "Thank you, sir," and moved away, bearing with him his humiliating reproachful soft collar, reproachful to each of the three gentlemen, who only demanded of him a third.

After a long time Anthony arose and drew an opalescent dressing grown of brown and blue over his slim pleasant figure. With a last yawn he went into the bathroom, and turning on the dresser light (the bathroom had no outside exposure) he contemplated himself in the mirror with some interest. A wretched apparition, he thought; he usually thought so in the morning – sleep made his face unnaturally pale. He lit a cigarette and glanced through several letters and the morning Tribune.

An hour later, shaven and dressed, he was sitting at his desk looking at a small piece of paper he had taken out of his wallet. It was scrawled with semi-legible memoranda: "See Mr. Howland at five. Get hair-cut. See about Rivers' bill. Go book-store."

– And under the last: "Cash in bank, $690 (crossed out), $612 (crossed out), $607."

Finally, down at the bottom and in a hurried scrawl: "Dick and Gloria Gilbert for tea."

This last item brought him obvious satisfaction. His day, usually a jelly-like creature, a shapeless, spineless thing, had attained Mesozoic structure. It was marching along surely, even jauntily, toward a climax, as a play should, as a day should. He dreaded the moment when the backbone of the day should be broken, when he should have met the girl at last, talked to her, and then bowed her laughter out the door, returning only to the melancholy dregs in the teacups and the gathering staleness of the uneaten sandwiches.

There was a growing lack of color in Anthony's days. He felt it constantly and sometimes traced it to a talk he had had with Maury Noble a month before. That anything so ingenuous, so priggish, as a sense of waste should oppress him was absurd, but there was no denying the fact that some unwelcome survival of a fetish had drawn him three weeks before down to the public library, where, by the token of Richard Caramel's card, he had drawn out half a dozen books on the Italian Renaissance. That these books were still piled on his desk in the original order of carriage, that they were daily increasing his liabilities by twelve cents, was no mitigation of their testimony. They were cloth and morocco witnesses to the fact of his defection. Anthony had had several hours of acute and startling panic.

In justification of his manner of living there was first, of course, The Meaninglessness of Life. As aides and ministers, pages and squires, butlers and lackeys to this great Khan there were a thousand books glowing on his shelves, there was his

apartment and all the money that was to be his when the old man up the river should choke on his last morality. From a world fraught with the menace of débutantes and the stupidity of many Geraldines he was thankfully delivered – rather should he emulate the feline immobility of Maury and wear proudly the culminative wisdom of the numbered generations.

Over and against these things was something which his brain persistently analyzed and dealt with as a tiresome complex but which, though logically disposed of and bravely trampled under foot, had sent him out through the soft slush of late November to a library which had none of the books he most wanted. It is fair to analyze Anthony as far as he could analyze himself; further than that it is, of course, presumption. He found in himself a growing horror and loneliness. The idea of eating alone frightened him; in preference he dined often with men he detested. Travel, which had once charmed him, seemed at length, unendurable, a business of color without substance, a phantom chase after his own dream's shadow.

– If I am essentially weak, he thought, I need work to do, work to do. It worried him to think that he was, after all, a facile mediocrity, with neither the poise of Maury nor the enthusiasm of Dick. It seemed a tragedy to want nothing – and yet he wanted something, something. He knew in flashes what it was – some path of hope to lead him toward what he thought was an imminent and ominous old age.

After cocktails and luncheon at the University Club Anthony

felt better. He had run into two men from his class at Harvard, and in contrast to the gray heaviness of their conversation his life assumed color. Both of them were married: one spent his coffee time in sketching an extra-nuptial adventure to the bland and appreciative smiles of the other. Both of them, he thought, were Mr. Gilberts in embryo; the number of their "yes's" would have to be quadrupled, their natures crabbed by twenty years – then they would be no more than obsolete and broken machines, pseudo-wise and valueless, nursed to an utter senility by the women they had broken.

Ah, he was more than that, as he paced the long carpet in the lounge after dinner, pausing at the window to look into the harried street. He was Anthony Patch, brilliant, magnetic, the heir of many years and many men. This was his world now – and that last strong irony he craved lay in the offing.

With a stray boyishness he saw himself a power upon the earth; with his grandfather's money he might build his own pedestal and be a Talleyrand, a Lord Verulam. The clarity of his mind, its sophistication, its versatile intelligence, all at their maturity and dominated by some purpose yet to be born would find him work to do. On this minor his dream faded – work to do: he tried to imagine himself in Congress rooting around in the litter of that incredible pigsty with the narrow and porcine brows he saw pictured sometimes in the rotogravure sections of the Sunday newspapers, those glorified proletarians babbling blandly to the nation the ideas of high school seniors! Little men with

copy-book ambitions who by mediocrity had thought to emerge from mediocrity into the lustreless and unromantic heaven of a government by the people – and the best, the dozen shrewd men at the top, egotistic and cynical, were content to lead this choir of white ties and wire collar-buttons in a discordant and amazing hymn, compounded of a vague confusion between wealth as a reward of virtue and wealth as a proof of vice, and continued cheers for God, the Constitution, and the Rocky Mountains!

Lord Verulam! Talleyrand!

Back in his apartment the grayness returned. His cocktails had died, making him sleepy, somewhat befogged and inclined to be surly. Lord Verulam – he? The very thought was bitter. Anthony Patch with no record of achievement, without courage, without strength to be satisfied with truth when it was given him. Oh, he was a pretentious fool, making careers out of cocktails and meanwhile regretting, weakly and secretly, the collapse of an insufficient and wretched idealism. He had garnished his soul in the subtlest taste and now he longed for the old rubbish. He was empty, it seemed, empty as an old bottle —

The buzzer rang at the door. Anthony sprang up and lifted the tube to his ear. It was Richard Caramel's voice, stilted and facetious:

"Announcing Miss Gloria Gilbert."

"How do you do?" he said, smiling and holding the door ajar.

Dick bowed.

"Gloria, this is Anthony."

"Well!" she cried, holding out a little gloved hand. Under her fur coat her dress was Alice-blue, with white lace crinkled stiffly about her throat.

"Let me take your things."

Anthony stretched out his arms and the brown mass of fur tumbled into them.

"Thanks."

"What do you think of her, Anthony?" Richard Caramel demanded barbarously. "Isn't she beautiful?"

"Well!" cried the girl defiantly – withal unmoved.

She was dazzling – alight; it was agony to comprehend her beauty in a glance. Her hair, full of a heavenly glamour, was gay against the winter color of the room.

Anthony moved about, magician-like, turning the mushroom lamp into an orange glory. The stirred fire burnished the copper andirons on the hearth —

"I'm a solid block of ice," murmured Gloria casually, glancing around with eyes whose irises were of the most delicate and transparent bluish white. "What a slick fire! We found a place where you could stand on an iron-bar grating, sort of, and it blew warm air up at you – but Dick wouldn't wait there with me. I told him to go on alone and let me be happy."

Conventional enough this. She seemed talking for her own pleasure, without effort. Anthony, sitting at one end of the sofa, examined her profile against the foreground of the lamp: the exquisite regularity of nose and upper lip, the chin, faintly

decided, balanced beautifully on a rather short neck. On a photograph she must have been completely classical, almost cold – but the glow of her hair and cheeks, at once flushed and fragile, made her the most living person he had ever seen.

"… Think you've got the best name I've heard," she was saying, still apparently to herself; her glance rested on him a moment and then flitted past him – to the Italian bracket-lamps clinging like luminous yellow turtles at intervals along the walls, to the books row upon row, then to her cousin on the other side. "Anthony Patch. Only you ought to look sort of like a horse, with a long narrow face – and you ought to be in tatters."

"That's all the Patch part, though. How should Anthony look?"

"You look like Anthony," she assured him seriously – he thought she had scarcely seen him – "rather majestic," she continued, "and solemn."

Anthony indulged in a disconcerted smile.

"Only I like alliterative names," she went on, "all except mine. Mine's too flamboyant. I used to know two girls named Jinks, though, and just think if they'd been named anything except what they were named – Judy Jinks and Jerry Jinks. Cute, what? Don't you think?" Her childish mouth was parted, awaiting a rejoinder.

"Everybody in the next generation," suggested Dick, "will be named Peter or Barbara – because at present all the piquant literary characters are named Peter or Barbara."

Anthony continued the prophecy:

"Of course Gladys and Eleanor, having graced the last

generation of heroines and being at present in their social prime, will be passed on to the next generation of shop-girls – "

"Displacing Ella and Stella," interrupted Dick.

"And Pearl and Jewel," Gloria added cordially, "and Earl and Elmer and Minnie."

"And then I'll come along," remarked Dick, "and picking up the obsolete name, Jewel, I'll attach it to some quaint and attractive character and it'll start its career all over again."

Her voice took up the thread of subject and wove along with faintly upturning, half-humorous intonations for sentence ends – as though defying interruption – and intervals of shadowy laughter. Dick had told her that Anthony's man was named Bounds – she thought that was wonderful! Dick had made some sad pun about Bounds doing patchwork, but if there was one thing worse than a pun, she said, it was a person who, as the inevitable come-back to a pun, gave the perpetrator a mock-reproachful look.

"Where are you from?" inquired Anthony. He knew, but beauty had rendered him thoughtless.

"Kansas City, Missouri."

"They put her out the same time they barred cigarettes."

"Did they bar cigarettes? I see the hand of my holy grandfather."

"He's a reformer or something, isn't he?"

"I blush for him."

"So do I," she confessed. "I detest reformers, especially the

sort who try to reform me."

"Are there many of those?"

"Dozens. It's 'Oh, Gloria, if you smoke so many cigarettes you'll lose your pretty complexion!' and 'Oh, Gloria, why don't you marry and settle down?'"

Anthony agreed emphatically while he wondered who had had the temerity to speak thus to such a personage.

"And then," she continued, "there are all the subtle reformers who tell you the wild stories they've heard about you and how they've been sticking up for you."

He saw, at length, that her eyes were gray, very level and cool, and when they rested on him he understood what Maury had meant by saying she was very young and very old. She talked always about herself as a very charming child might talk, and her comments on her tastes and distastes were unaffected and spontaneous.

"I must confess," said Anthony gravely, "that even *I*'ve heard one thing about you."

Alert at once, she sat up straight. Those eyes, with the grayness and eternity of a cliff of soft granite, caught his.

"Tell me. I'll believe it. I always believe anything any one tells me about myself – don't you?"

"Invariably!" agreed the two men in unison.

"Well, tell me."

"I'm not sure that I ought to," teased Anthony, smiling unwillingly. She was so obviously interested, in a state of almost

laughable self-absorption.

"He means your nickname," said her cousin.

"What name?" inquired Anthony, politely puzzled.

Instantly she was shy – then she laughed, rolled back against the cushions, and turned her eyes up as she spoke:

"Coast-to-Coast Gloria." Her voice was full of laughter, laughter undefined as the varying shadows playing between fire and lamp upon her hair. "O Lord!"

Still Anthony was puzzled.

"What do you mean?"

"*Me*, I mean. That's what some silly boys coined for *me*."

"Don't you see, Anthony," explained Dick, "traveller of a nation-wide notoriety and all that. Isn't that what you've heard? She's been called that for years – since she was seventeen."

Anthony's eyes became sad and humorous.

"Who's this female Methuselah you've brought in here, Caramel?"

She disregarded this, possibly rather resented it, for she switched back to the main topic.

"What *have* you heard of me?"

"Something about your physique."

"Oh," she said, coolly disappointed, "that all?"

"Your tan."

"My tan?" She was puzzled. Her hand rose to her throat, rested there an instant as though the fingers were feeling variants of color.

"Do you remember Maury Noble? Man you met about a month ago. You made a great impression."

She thought a moment.

"I remember – but he didn't call me up."

"He was afraid to, I don't doubt."

It was black dark without now and Anthony wondered that his apartment had ever seemed gray – so warm and friendly were the books and pictures on the walls and the good Bounds offering tea from a respectful shadow and the three nice people giving out waves of interest and laughter back and forth across the happy fire.

DISSATISFACTION

On Thursday afternoon Gloria and Anthony had tea together in the grill room at the Plaza. Her fur-trimmed suit was gray – "because with gray you *have* to wear a lot of paint," she explained – and a small toque sat rakishly on her head, allowing yellow ripples of hair to wave out in jaunty glory. In the higher light it seemed to Anthony that her personality was infinitely softer – she seemed so young, scarcely eighteen; her form under the tight sheath, known then as a hobble-skirt, was amazingly supple and slender, and her hands, neither "artistic" nor stubby, were small as a child's hands should be.

As they entered, the orchestra were sounding the preliminary whimpers to a maxixe, a tune full of castanets and facile

faintly languorous violin harmonies, appropriate to the crowded winter grill teeming with an excited college crowd, high-spirited at the approach of the holidays. Carefully, Gloria considered several locations, and rather to Anthony's annoyance paraded him circuitously to a table for two at the far side of the room. Reaching it she again considered. Would she sit on the right or on the left? Her beautiful eyes and lips were very grave as she made her choice, and Anthony thought again how naïve was her every gesture; she took all the things of life for hers to choose from and apportion, as though she were continually picking out presents for herself from an inexhaustible counter.

Abstractedly she watched the dancers for a few moments, commenting murmurously as a couple eddied near.

"There's a pretty girl in blue" – and as Anthony looked obediently – " there! No. behind you – there!"

"Yes," he agreed helplessly.

"You didn't see her."

"I'd rather look at you."

"I know, but she was pretty. Except that she had big ankles."

"Was she? – I mean, did she?" he said indifferently.

A girl's salutation came from a couple dancing close to them.

"Hello, Gloria! O Gloria!"

"Hello there."

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Somebody." She caught sight of another face. "Hello, Muriel!" Then to Anthony: "There's Muriel Kane. Now

I think she's attractive, 'cept not very."

Anthony chuckled appreciatively.

"Attractive, 'cept not very," he repeated.

She smiled – was interested immediately.

"Why is that funny?" Her tone was pathetically intent.

"It just was."

"Do you want to dance?"

"Do you?"

"Sort of. But let's sit," she decided.

"And talk about you? You love to talk about you, don't you?"

"Yes." Caught in a vanity, she laughed.

"I imagine your autobiography would be a classic."

"Dick says I haven't got one."

"Dick!" he exclaimed. "What does he know about you?"

"Nothing. But he says the biography of every woman begins with the first kiss that counts, and ends when her last child is laid in her arms."

"He's talking from his book."

"He says unloved women have no biographies – they have histories."

Anthony laughed again.

"Surely you don't claim to be unloved!"

"Well, I suppose not."

"Then why haven't you a biography? Haven't you ever had a kiss that counted?" As the words left his lips he drew in his breath sharply as though to suck them back. This *baby*!

"I don't know what you mean 'counts,'" she objected.

"I wish you'd tell me how old you are."

"Twenty-two," she said, meeting his eyes gravely. "How old did you think?"

"About eighteen."

"I'm going to start being that. I don't like being twenty-two. I hate it more than anything in the world."

"Being twenty-two?"

"No. Getting old and everything. Getting married."

"Don't you ever want to marry?"

"I don't want to have responsibility and a lot of children to take care of."

Evidently she did not doubt that on her lips all things were good. He waited rather breathlessly for her next remark, expecting it to follow up her last. She was smiling, without amusement but pleasantly, and after an interval half a dozen words fell into the space between them:

"I wish I had some gum-drops."

"You shall!" He beckoned to a waiter and sent him to the cigar counter.

"D'you mind? I love gum-drops. Everybody kids me about it because I'm always whacking away at one – whenever my daddy's not around."

"Not at all. – Who are all these children?" he asked suddenly. "Do you know them all?"

"Why – no, but they're from – oh, from everywhere, I suppose.

Don't you ever come here?"

"Very seldom. I don't care particularly for 'nice girls.'"

Immediately he had her attention. She turned a definite shoulder to the dancers, relaxed in her chair, and demanded:

"What *do* you do with yourself?"

Thanks to a cocktail Anthony welcomed the question. In a mood to talk, he wanted, moreover, to impress this girl whose interest seemed so tantalizingly elusive – she stopped to browse in unexpected pastures, hurried quickly over the inobviously obvious. He wanted to pose. He wanted to appear suddenly to her in novel and heroic colors. He wanted to stir her from that casualness she showed toward everything except herself.

"I do nothing," he began, realizing simultaneously that his words were to lack the debonair grace he craved for them. "I do nothing, for there's nothing I can do that's worth doing."

"Well?" He had neither surprised her nor even held her, yet she had certainly understood him, if indeed he had said aught worth understanding.

"Don't you approve of lazy men?"

She nodded.

"I suppose so, if they're gracefully lazy. Is that possible for an American?"

"Why not?" he demanded, discomfited.

But her mind had left the subject and wandered up ten floors.

"My daddy's mad at me," she observed dispassionately.

"Why? But I want to know just why it's impossible for an

American to be gracefully idle" – his words gathered conviction – "it astonishes me. It – it – I don't understand why people think that every young man ought to go down-town and work ten hours a day for the best twenty years of his life at dull, unimaginative work, certainly not altruistic work."

He broke off. She watched him inscrutably. He waited for her to agree or disagree, but she did neither.

"Don't you ever form judgments on things?" he asked with some exasperation.

She shook her head and her eyes wandered back to the dancers as she answered:

"I don't know. I don't know anything about – what you should do, or what anybody should do."

She confused him and hindered the flow of his ideas. Self-expression had never seemed at once so desirable and so impossible.

"Well," he admitted apologetically, "neither do I, of course, but – "

"I just think of people," she continued, "whether they seem right where they are and fit into the picture. I don't mind if they don't do anything. I don't see why they should; in fact it always astonishes me when anybody does anything."

"You don't want to do anything?"

"I want to sleep."

For a second he was startled, almost as though she had meant this literally.

"Sleep?"

"Sort of. I want to just be lazy and I want some of the people around me to be doing things, because that makes me feel comfortable and safe – and I want some of them to be doing nothing at all, because they can be graceful and companionable for me. But I never want to change people or get excited over them."

"You're a quaint little determinist," laughed Anthony. "It's your world, isn't it?"

"Well – " she said with a quick upward glance, "isn't it? As long as I'm – young."

She had paused slightly before the last word and Anthony suspected that she had started to say "beautiful." It was undeniably what she had intended.

Her eyes brightened and he waited for her to enlarge on the theme. He had drawn her out, at any rate – he bent forward slightly to catch the words.

But "Let's dance!" was all she said.

ADMIRATION

That winter afternoon at the Plaza was the first of a succession of "dates" Anthony made with her in the blurred and stimulating days before Christmas. Invariably she was busy. What particular strata of the city's social life claimed her he was a long time finding out. It seemed to matter very little. She attended the

semi-public charity dances at the big hotels; he saw her several times at dinner parties in Sherry's, and once as he waited for her to dress, Mrs. Gilbert, apropos of her daughter's habit of "going," rattled off an amazing holiday programme that included half a dozen dances to which Anthony had received cards.

He made engagements with her several times for lunch and tea – the former were hurried and, to him at least, rather unsatisfactory occasions, for she was sleepy-eyed and casual, incapable of concentrating upon anything or of giving consecutive attention to his remarks. When after two of these sallow meals he accused her of tendering him the skin and bones of the day she laughed and gave him a tea-time three days off. This was infinitely more satisfactory.

One Sunday afternoon just before Christmas he called up and found her in the lull directly after some important but mysterious quarrel: she informed him in a tone of mingled wrath and amusement that she had sent a man out of her apartment – here Anthony speculated violently – and that the man had been giving a little dinner for her that very night and that of course she wasn't going. So Anthony took her to supper.

"Let's go to something!" she proposed as they went down in the elevator. "I want to see a show, don't you?"

Inquiry at the hotel ticket desk disclosed only two Sunday night "concerts."

"They're always the same," she complained unhappily, "same old Yiddish comedians. Oh, let's go somewhere!"

To conceal a guilty suspicion that he should have arranged a performance of some kind for her approval Anthony affected a knowing cheerfulness.

"We'll go to a good cabaret."

"I've seen every one in town."

"Well, we'll find a new one."

She was in wretched humor; that was evident. Her gray eyes were granite now indeed. When she wasn't speaking she stared straight in front of her as if at some distasteful abstraction in the lobby.

"Well, come on, then."

He followed her, a graceful girl even in her enveloping fur, out to a taxicab, and, with an air of having a definite place in mind, instructed the driver to go over to Broadway and then turn south. He made several casual attempts at conversation but as she adopted an impenetrable armor of silence and answered him in sentences as morose as the cold darkness of the taxicab he gave up, and assuming a like mood fell into a dim gloom.

A dozen blocks down Broadway Anthony's eyes were caught by a large and unfamiliar electric sign spelling "Marathon" in glorious yellow script, adorned with electrical leaves and flowers that alternately vanished and beamed upon the wet and glistening street. He leaned and rapped on the taxi-window and in a moment was receiving information from a colored doorman: Yes, this was a cabaret. Fine cabaret. Bes' showina city!

"Shall we try it?"

With a sigh Gloria tossed her cigarette out the open door and prepared to follow it; then they had passed under the screaming sign, under the wide portal, and up by a stuffy elevator into this unsung palace of pleasure.

The gay habitats of the very rich and the very poor, the very dashing and the very criminal, not to mention the lately exploited very Bohemian, are made known to the awed high school girls of Augusta, Georgia, and Redwing, Minnesota, not only through the bepictured and entrancing spreads of the Sunday theatrical supplements but through the shocked and alarmful eyes of Mr. Rupert Hughes and other chroniclers of the mad pace of America. But the excursions of Harlem onto Broadway, the deviltries of the dull and the revelries of the respectable are a matter of esoteric knowledge only to the participants themselves.

A tip circulates – and in the place knowingly mentioned, gather the lower moral-classes on Saturday and Sunday nights – the little troubled men who are pictured in the comics as "the Consumer" or "the Public." They have made sure that the place has three qualifications: it is cheap; it imitates with a sort of shoddy and mechanical wistfulness the glittering antics of the great cafes in the theatre district; and – this, above all, important – it is a place where they can "take a nice girl," which means, of course, that every one has become equally harmless, timid, and uninteresting through lack of money and imagination.

There on Sunday nights gather the credulous, sentimental, underpaid, overworked people with hyphenated occupations:

book-keepers, ticket-sellers, office-managers, salesmen, and, most of all, clerks – clerks of the express, of the mail, of the grocery, of the brokerage, of the bank. With them are their giggling, over-gestured, pathetically pretentious women, who grow fat with them, bear them too many babies, and float helpless and uncontent in a colorless sea of drudgery and broken hopes.

They name these brummagem cabarets after Pullman cars. The "Marathon"! Not for them the salacious similes borrowed from the cafés of Paris! This is where their docile patrons bring their "nice women," whose starved fancies are only too willing to believe that the scene is comparatively gay and joyous, and even faintly immoral. This is life! Who cares for the morrow?

Abandoned people!

Anthony and Gloria, seated, looked about them. At the next table a party of four were in process of being joined by a party of three, two men and a girl, who were evidently late – and the manner of the girl was a study in national sociology. She was meeting some new men – and she was pretending desperately. By gesture she was pretending and by words and by the scarcely perceptible motionings of her eyelids that she belonged to a class a little superior to the class with which she now had to do, that a while ago she had been, and presently would again be, in a higher, rarer air. She was almost painfully refined – she wore a last year's hat covered with violets no more yearningly pretentious and palpably artificial than herself.

Fascinated, Anthony and Gloria watched the girl sit down and

radiate the impression that she was only condescendingly present. For *me*, her eyes said, this is practically a slumming expedition, to be cloaked with belittling laughter and semi-apologetics.

– And the other women passionately poured out the impression that though they were in the crowd they were not of it. This was not the sort of place to which they were accustomed; they had dropped in because it was near by and convenient – every party in the restaurant poured out that impression … who knew? They were forever changing class, all of them – the women often marrying above their opportunities, the men striking suddenly a magnificent opulence: a sufficiently preposterous advertising scheme, a celestialized ice cream cone. Meanwhile, they met here to eat, closing their eyes to the economy displayed in infrequent changings of table-cloths, in the casualness of the cabaret performers, most of all in the colloquial carelessness and familiarity of the waiters. One was sure that these waiters were not impressed by their patrons. One expected that presently they would sit at the tables …

"Do you object to this?" inquired Anthony.

Gloria's face warmed and for the first time that evening she smiled.

"I love it," she said frankly. It was impossible to doubt her. Her gray eyes roved here and there, drowsing, idle or alert, on each group, passing to the next with unconcealed enjoyment, and to Anthony were made plain the different values of her profile, the wonderfully alive expressions of her mouth, and the authentic

distinction of face and form and manner that made her like a single flower amidst a collection of cheap bric-à-brac. At her happiness, a gorgeous sentiment welled into his eyes, choked him up, set his nerves a-tingle, and filled his throat with husky and vibrant emotion. There was a hush upon the room. The careless violins and saxophones, the shrill rasping complaint of a child near by, the voice of the violet-hatted girl at the next table, all moved slowly out, receded, and fell away like shadowy reflections on the shining floor – and they two, it seemed to him, were alone and infinitely remote, quiet. Surely the freshness of her cheeks was a gossamer projection from a land of delicate and undiscovered shades; her hand gleaming on the stained table-cloth was a shell from some far and wildly virginal sea…

Then the illusion snapped like a nest of threads; the room grouped itself around him, voices, faces, movement; the garish shimmer of the lights overhead became real, became portentous; breath began, the slow respiration that she and he took in time with this docile hundred, the rise and fall of bosoms, the eternal meaningless play and interplay and tossing and reiterating of word and phrase – all these wrenched his senses open to the suffocating pressure of life – and then her voice came at him, cool as the suspended dream he had left behind.

"I belong here," she murmured, "I'm like these people."

For an instant this seemed a sardonic and unnecessary paradox hurled at him across the impassable distances she created about herself. Her entrancement had increased – her eyes rested upon

a Semitic violinist who swayed his shoulders to the rhythm of the year's mellowest fox-trot:

"Something – goes
Ring-a-ting-a-ling-a-ling
Right in-your ear – "

Again she spoke, from the centre of this pervasive illusion of her own. It amazed him. It was like blasphemy from the mouth of a child.

"I'm like they are – like Japanese lanterns and crape paper, and the music of that orchestra."

"You're a young idiot!" he insisted wildly. She shook her blond head.

"No, I'm not. I *am* like them… You ought to see… You don't know me." She hesitated and her eyes came back to him, rested abruptly on his, as though surprised at the last to see him there. "I've got a streak of what you'd call cheapness. I don't know where I get it but it's – oh, things like this and bright colors and gaudy vulgarity. I seem to belong here. These people could appreciate me and take me for granted, and these men would fall in love with me and admire me, whereas the clever men I meet would just analyze me and tell me I'm this because of this or that because of that."

– Anthony for the moment wanted fiercely to paint her, to set her down *now*, as she was, as, as with each relentless second she could never be again.

"What were you thinking?" she asked.

"Just that I'm not a realist," he said, and then: "No, only the romanticist preserves the things worth preserving."

Out of the deep sophistication of Anthony an understanding formed, nothing atavistic or obscure, indeed scarcely physical at all, an understanding remembered from the romancings of many generations of minds that as she talked and caught his eyes and turned her lovely head, she moved him as he had never been moved before. The sheath that held her soul had assumed significance – that was all. She was a sun, radiant, growing, gathering light and storing it – then after an eternity pouring it forth in a glance, the fragment of a sentence, to that part of him that cherished all beauty and all illusion.

CHAPTER III
THE CONNOISSEUR OF KISSES

From his undergraduate days as editor of The Harvard Crimson Richard Caramel had desired to write. But as a senior he had picked up the glorified illusion that certain men were set aside for "service" and, going into the world, were to accomplish a vague yearnful something which would react either in eternal reward or, at the least, in the personal satisfaction of having striven for the greatest good of the greatest number.

This spirit has long rocked the colleges in America. It begins, as a rule, during the immaturities and facile impressions of freshman year – sometimes back in preparatory school. Prosperous apostles known for their emotional acting go the rounds of the universities and, by frightening the amiable sheep and dulling the quickening of interest and intellectual curiosity which is the purpose of all education, distil a mysterious conviction of sin, harking back to childhood crimes and to the ever-present menace of "women." To these lectures go the wicked youths to cheer and joke and the timid to swallow the tasty pills, which would be harmless if administered to farmers' wives and pious drug-clerks but are rather dangerous medicine for these "future leaders of men."

This octopus was strong enough to wind a sinuous tentacle about Richard Caramel. The year after his graduation it called

him into the slums of New York to muck about with bewildered Italians as secretary to an "Alien Young Men's Rescue Association." He labored at it over a year before the monotony began to weary him. The aliens kept coming inexhaustibly – Italians, Poles, Scandinavians, Czechs, Armenians – with the same wrongs, the same exceptionally ugly faces and very much the same smells, though he fancied that these grew more profuse and diverse as the months passed. His eventual conclusions about the expediency of service were vague, but concerning his own relation to it they were abrupt and decisive. Any amiable young man, his head ringing with the latest crusade, could accomplish as much as he could with the débris of Europe – and it was time for him to write.

He had been living in a down-town Y.M.C.A., but when he quit the task of making sow-ear purses out of sows' ears, he moved up-town and went to work immediately as a reporter for The Sun. He kept at this for a year, doing desultory writing on the side, with little success, and then one day an infelicitous incident peremptorily closed his newspaper career. On a February afternoon he was assigned to report a parade of Squadron A. Snow threatening, he went to sleep instead before a hot fire, and when he woke up did a smooth column about the muffled beats of the horses' hoofs in the snow… This he handed in. Next morning a marked copy of the paper was sent down to the City Editor with a scrawled note: "Fire the man who wrote this." It seemed that Squadron A had also seen the snow

threatening – had postponed the parade until another day.

A week later he had begun "The Demon Lover."…

In January, the Monday of the months, Richard Caramel's nose was blue constantly, a sardonic blue, vaguely suggestive of the flames licking around a sinner. His book was nearly ready, and as it grew in completeness it seemed to grow also in its demands, sapping him, overpowering him, until he walked haggard and conquered in its shadow. Not only to Anthony and Maury did he pour out his hopes and boasts and indecisions, but to any one who could be prevailed upon to listen. He called on polite but bewildered publishers, he discussed it with his casual vis-à-vis at the Harvard Club; it was even claimed by Anthony that he had been discovered, one Sunday night, debating the transposition of Chapter Two with a literary ticket-collector in the chill and dismal recesses of a Harlem subway station. And latest among his confidantes was Mrs. Gilbert, who sat with him by the hour and alternated between Bilphism and literature in an intense cross-fire.

"Shakespeare was a Bilphist," she assured him through a fixed smile. "Oh, yes! He was a Bilphist. It's been proved."

At this Dick would look a bit blank.

"If you've read 'Hamlet' you can't help but see."

"Well, he – he lived in a more credulous age – a more religious age."

But she demanded the whole loaf:

"Oh, yes, but you see Bilphism isn't a religion. It's the science

of all religions." She smiled defiantly at him. This was the *bon mot* of her belief. There was something in the arrangement of words which grasped her mind so definitely that the statement became superior to any obligation to define itself. It is not unlikely that she would have accepted any idea encased in this radiant formula – which was perhaps not a formula; it was the *reductio ad absurdum* of all formulas.

Then eventually, but gorgeously, would come Dick's turn.

"You've heard of the new poetry movement. You haven't? Well, it's a lot of young poets that are breaking away from the old forms and doing a lot of good. Well, what I was going to say was that my book is going to start a new prose movement, a sort of renaissance."

"I'm sure it will," beamed Mrs. Gilbert. "I'm *sure* it will. I went to Jenny Martin last Tuesday, the palmist, you know, that every one's *mad* about. I told her my nephew was engaged upon a work and she said she knew I'd be glad to hear that his success would be *extraordinary*. But she'd never seen you or known anything about you – not even your *name*."

Having made the proper noises to express his amazement at this astounding phenomenon, Dick waved her theme by him as though he were an arbitrary traffic policeman, and, so to speak, beckoned forward his own traffic.

"I'm absorbed, Aunt Catherine," he assured her, "I really am. All my friends are joshing me – oh, I see the humor in it and I don't care. I think a person ought to be able to take joshing. But

I've got a sort of conviction," he concluded gloomily.

"You're an ancient soul, I always say."

"Maybe I am." Dick had reached the stage where he no longer fought, but submitted. He *must* be an ancient soul, he fancied grotesquely; so old as to be absolutely rotten. However, the reiteration of the phrase still somewhat embarrassed him and sent uncomfortable shivers up his back. He changed the subject.

"Where is my distinguished cousin Gloria?"

"She's on the go somewhere, with some one."

Dick paused, considered, and then, screwing up his face into what was evidently begun as a smile but ended as a terrifying frown, delivered a comment.

"I think my friend Anthony Patch is in love with her."

Mrs. Gilbert started, beamed half a second too late, and breathed her "Really?" in the tone of a detective play-whisper.

"I *think* so," corrected Dick gravely. "She's the first girl I've ever seen him with, so much."

"Well, of course," said Mrs. Gilbert with meticulous carelessness, "Gloria never makes me her confidante. She's very secretive. Between you and me" – she bent forward cautiously, obviously determined that only Heaven and her nephew should share her confession – "between you and me, I'd like to see her settle down."

Dick arose and paced the floor earnestly, a small, active, already rotund young man, his hands thrust unnaturally into his bulging pockets.

"I'm not claiming I'm right, mind you," he assured the infinitely-of-the-hotel steel-engraving which smirked respectably back at him. "I'm saying nothing that I'd want Gloria to know. But I think Mad Anthony is interested – tremendously so. He talks about her constantly. In any one else that'd be a bad sign."

"Gloria is a very young soul – " began Mrs. Gilbert eagerly, but her nephew interrupted with a hurried sentence:

"Gloria'd be a very young nut not to marry him." He stopped and faced her, his expression a battle map of lines and dimples, squeezed and strained to its ultimate show of intensity – this as if to make up by his sincerity for any indiscretion in his words. "Gloria's a wild one, Aunt Catherine. She's uncontrollable. How she's done it I don't know, but lately she's picked up a lot of the funniest friends. She doesn't seem to care. And the men she used to go with around New York were – " He paused for breath.

"Yes-yes-yes," interjected Mrs. Gilbert, with an anaemic attempt to hide the immense interest with which she listened.

"Well," continued Richard Caramel gravely, "there it is. I mean that the men she went with and the people she went with used to be first rate. Now they aren't."

Mrs. Gilbert blinked very fast – her bosom trembled, inflated, remained so for an instant, and with the exhalation her words flowed out in a torrent.

She knew, she cried in a whisper; oh, yes, mothers see these things. But what could she do? He knew Gloria. He'd seen

enough of Gloria to know how hopeless it was to try to deal with her. Gloria had been so spoiled – in a rather complete and unusual way. She had been suckled until she was three, for instance, when she could probably have chewed sticks. Perhaps – one never knew – it was this that had given that health and *hardiness* to her whole personality. And then ever since she was twelve years old she'd had boys about her so thick – oh, so thick one couldn't *move*. At sixteen she began going to dances at preparatory schools, and then came the colleges; and everywhere she went, boys, boys, boys. At first, oh, until she was eighteen there had been so many that it never seemed one any more than the others, but then she began to single them out.

She knew there had been a string of affairs spread over about three years, perhaps a dozen of them altogether. Sometimes the men were undergraduates, sometimes just out of college – they lasted on an average of several months each, with short attractions in between. Once or twice they had endured longer and her mother had hoped she would be engaged, but always a new one came – a new one —

The men? Oh, she made them miserable, literally! There was only one who had kept any sort of dignity, and he had been a mere child, young Carter Kirby, of Kansas City, who was so conceited anyway that he just sailed out on his vanity one afternoon and left for Europe next day with his father. The others had been – wretched. They never seemed to know when she was tired of them, and Gloria had seldom been deliberately unkind. They

would keep phoning, writing letters to her, trying to see her, making long trips after her around the country. Some of them had confided in Mrs. Gilbert, told her with tears in their eyes that they would never get over Gloria … at least two of them had since married, though… But Gloria, it seemed, struck to kill – to this day Mr. Carstairs called up once a week, and sent her flowers which she no longer bothered to refuse.

Several times, twice, at least, Mrs. Gilbert knew it had gone as far as a private engagement – with Tudor Baird and that Holcome boy at Pasadena. She was sure it had, because – this must go no further – she had come in unexpectedly and found Gloria acting, well, very much engaged indeed. She had not spoken to her daughter, of course. She had had a certain sense of delicacy and, besides, each time she had expected an announcement in a few weeks. But the announcement never came; instead, a new man came.

Scenes! Young men walking up and down the library like caged tigers! Young men glaring at each other in the hall as one came and the other left! Young men calling up on the telephone and being hung up upon in desperation! Young men threatening South America! … Young men writing the most pathetic letters! (She said nothing to this effect, but Dick fancied that Mrs. Gilbert's eyes had seen some of these letters.)

… And Gloria, between tears and laughter, sorry, glad, out of love and in love, miserable, nervous, cool, amidst a great returning of presents, substitution of pictures in immemorial

frames, and taking of hot baths and beginning again – with the next.

That state of things continued, assumed an air of permanency. Nothing harmed Gloria or changed her or moved her. And then out of a clear sky one day she informed her mother that undergraduates wearied her. She was absolutely going to no more college dances.

This had begun the change – not so much in her actual habits, for she danced, and had as many "dates" as ever – but they were dates in a different spirit. Previously it had been a sort of pride, a matter of her own vainglory. She had been, probably, the most celebrated and sought-after young beauty in the country. Gloria Gilbert of Kansas City! She had fed on it ruthlessly – enjoying the crowds around her, the manner in which the most desirable men singled her out; enjoying the fierce jealousy of other girls; enjoying the fabulous, not to say scandalous, and, her mother was glad to say, entirely unfounded rumors about her – for instance, that she had gone in the Yale swimming-pool one night in a chiffon evening dress.

And from loving it with a vanity that was almost masculine – it had been in the nature of a triumphant and dazzling career – she became suddenly anaesthetic to it. She retired. She who had dominated countless parties, who had blown fragrantly through many ballrooms to the tender tribute of many eyes, seemed to care no longer. He who fell in love with her now was dismissed utterly, almost angrily. She went listlessly with the

most indifferent men. She continually broke engagements, not as in the past from a cool assurance that she was irreproachable, that the man she insulted would return like a domestic animal – but indifferently, without contempt or pride. She rarely stormed at men any more – she yawned at them. She seemed – and it was so strange – she seemed to her mother to be growing cold.

Richard Caramel listened. At first he had remained standing, but as his aunt's discourse waxed in content – it stands here pruned by half, of all side references to the youth of Gloria's soul and to Mrs. Gilbert's own mental distresses – he drew a chair up and attended rigorously as she floated, between tears and plaintive helplessness, down the long story of Gloria's life. When she came to the tale of this last year, a tale of the ends of cigarettes left all over New York in little trays marked "Midnight Frolic" and "Justine Johnson's Little Club," he began nodding his head slowly, then faster and faster, until, as she finished on a staccato note, it was bobbing briskly up and down, absurdly like a doll's wired head, expressing – almost anything.

In a sense Gloria's past was an old story to him. He had followed it with the eyes of a journalist, for he was going to write a book about her some day. But his interests, just at present, were family interests. He wanted to know, in particular, who was this Joseph Bloeckman that he had seen her with several times; and those two girls she was with constantly, "this" Rachael Jerryl and "this" Miss Kane – surely Miss Kane wasn't exactly the sort one would associate with Gloria!

But the moment had passed. Mrs. Gilbert having climbed the hill of exposition was about to glide swiftly down the ski-jump of collapse. Her eyes were like a blue sky seen through two round, red window-casements. The flesh about her mouth was trembling.

And at the moment the door opened, admitting into the room Gloria and the two young ladies lately mentioned.

TWO YOUNG WOMEN

"Well!"

"How do you do, Mrs. Gilbert!"

Miss Kane and Miss Jerryl are presented to Mr. Richard Caramel. "This is Dick" (laughter).

"I've heard so much about you," says Miss Kane between a giggle and a shout.

"How do you do," says Miss Jerryl shyly.

Richard Caramel tries to move about as if his figure were better. He is torn between his innate cordiality and the fact that he considers these girls rather common – not at all the Farmover type.

Gloria has disappeared into the bedroom.

"Do sit down," beams Mrs. Gilbert, who is by now quite herself. "Take off your things." Dick is afraid she will make some remark about the age of his soul, but he forgets his qualms in completing a conscientious, novelist's examination of the two

young women.

Muriel Kane had originated in a rising family of East Orange. She was short rather than small, and hovered audaciously between plumpness and width. Her hair was black and elaborately arranged. This, in conjunction with her handsome, rather bovine eyes, and her over-red lips, combined to make her resemble Theda Bara, the prominent motion picture actress. People told her constantly that she was a "vampire," and she believed them. She suspected hopefully that they were afraid of her, and she did her utmost under all circumstances to give the impression of danger. An imaginative man could see the red flag that she constantly carried, waving it wildly, beseechingly – and, alas, to little spectacular avail. She was also tremendously timely: she knew the latest songs, all the latest songs – when one of them was played on the phonograph she would rise to her feet and rock her shoulders back and forth and snap her fingers, and if there was no music she would accompany herself by humming.

Her conversation was also timely: "I don't care," she would say, "I should worry and lose my figure" – and again: "I can't make my feet behave when I hear that tune. Oh, baby!"

Her finger-nails were too long and ornate, polished to a pink and unnatural fever. Her clothes were too tight, too stylish, too vivid, her eyes too roguish, her smile too coy. She was almost pitifully overemphasized from head to foot.

The other girl was obviously a more subtle personality. She was an exquisitely dressed Jewess with dark hair and a lovely

milky pallor. She seemed shy and vague, and these two qualities accentuated a rather delicate charm that floated about her. Her family were "Episcopalians," owned three smart women's shops along Fifth Avenue, and lived in a magnificent apartment on Riverside Drive. It seemed to Dick, after a few moments, that she was attempting to imitate Gloria – he wondered that people invariably chose inimitable people to imitate.

"We had the most *hectic* time!" Muriel was exclaiming enthusiastically. "There was a crazy woman behind us on the bus. She was absitively, posolutely *nutty*! She kept talking to herself about something she'd like to do to somebody or something. I was *pet*rified, but Gloria simply *wouldn't* get off."

Mrs. Gilbert opened her mouth, properly awed.

"Really?"

"Oh, she was crazy. But we should worry, she didn't hurt us. Ugly! Gracious! The man across from us said her face ought to be on a night-nurse in a home for the blind, and we all *howled*, naturally, so the man tried to pick us up."

Presently Gloria emerged from her bedroom and in unison every eye turned on her. The two girls receded into a shadowy background, unperceived, unmissed.

"We've been talking about you," said Dick quickly, " – your mother and I."

"Well," said Gloria.

A pause – Muriel turned to Dick.

"You're a great writer, aren't you?"

"I'm a writer," he confessed sheepishly.

"I always say," said Muriel earnestly, "that if I ever had time to write down all my experiences it'd make a wonderful book."

Rachael giggled sympathetically; Richard Caramel's bow was almost stately. Muriel continued:

"But I don't see how you can sit down and do it. And poetry! Lordy, I can't make two lines rhyme. Well, I should worry!"

Richard Caramel with difficulty restrained a shout of laughter. Gloria was chewing an amazing gum-drop and staring moodily out the window. Mrs. Gilbert cleared her throat and beamed.

"But you see," she said in a sort of universal exposition, "you're not an ancient soul – like Richard."

The Ancient Soul breathed a gasp of relief – it was out at last.

Then as if she had been considering it for five minutes, Gloria made a sudden announcement:

"I'm going to give a party."

"Oh, can I come?" cried Muriel with facetious daring.

"A dinner. Seven people: Muriel and Rachael and I, and you, Dick, and Anthony, and that man named Noble – I liked him – and Bloeckman."

Muriel and Rachael went into soft and purring ecstasies of enthusiasm. Mrs. Gilbert blinked and beamed. With an air of casualness Dick broke in with a question:

"Who is this fellow Bloeckman, Gloria?"

Scenting a faint hostility, Gloria turned to him.

"Joseph Bloeckman? He's the moving picture man. Vice-

president of 'Films Par Excellence.' He and father do a lot of business."

"Oh!"

"Well, will you all come?"

They would all come. A date was arranged within the week. Dick rose, adjusted hat, coat, and muffler, and gave out a general smile.

"By-by," said Muriel, waving her hand gaily, "call me up some time."

Richard Caramel blushed for her.

DEPLORABLE END OF THE CHEVALIER O'KEEFE

It was Monday and Anthony took Geraldine Burke to luncheon at the Beaux Arts – afterward they went up to his apartment and he wheeled out the little rolling-table that held his supply of liquor, selecting vermouth, gin, and absinthe for a proper stimulant.

Geraldine Burke, usher at Keith's, had been an amusement of several months. She demanded so little that he liked her, for since a lamentable affair with a débutante the preceding summer, when he had discovered that after half a dozen kisses a proposal was expected, he had been wary of girls of his own class. It was only too easy to turn a critical eye on their imperfections: some physical harshness or a general lack of personal delicacy – but

a girl who was usher at Keith's was approached with a different attitude. One could tolerate qualities in an intimate valet that would be unforgivable in a mere acquaintance on one's social level.

Geraldine, curled up at the foot of the lounge, considered him with narrow slanting eyes.

"You drink all the time, don't you?" she said suddenly.

"Why, I suppose so," replied Anthony in some surprise. "Don't you?"

"Nope. I go on parties sometimes – you know, about once a week, but I only take two or three drinks. You and your friends keep on drinking all the time. I should think you'd ruin your health."

Anthony was somewhat touched.

"Why, aren't you sweet to worry about me!"

"Well, I do."

"I don't drink so very much," he declared. "Last month I didn't touch a drop for three weeks. And I only get really tight about once a week."

"But you have something to drink every day and you're only twenty-five. Haven't you any ambition? Think what you'll be at forty?"

"I sincerely trust that I won't live that long."

She clicked her tongue with her teeth.

"You cra-azy!" she said as he mixed another cocktail – and then: "Are you any relation to Adam Patch?"

"Yes, he's my grandfather."

"Really?" She was obviously thrilled.

"Absolutely."

"That's funny. My daddy used to work for him."

"He's a queer old man."

"Is he nice?" she demanded.

"Well, in private life he's seldom unnecessarily disagreeable."

"Tell us about him."

"Why," Anthony considered " – he's all shrunken up and he's got the remains of some gray hair that always looks as though the wind were in it. He's very moral."

"He's done a lot of good," said Geraldine with intense gravity.

"Rot!" scoffed Anthony. "He's a pious ass – a chickenbrain."

Her mind left the subject and flitted on.

"Why don't you live with him?"

"Why don't I board in a Methodist parsonage?"

"You cra-azy!"

Again she made a little clicking sound to express disapproval. Anthony thought how moral was this little waif at heart – how completely moral she would still be after the inevitable wave came that would wash her off the sands of respectability.

"Do you hate him?"

"I wonder. I never liked him. You never like people who do things for you."

"Does he hate you?"

"My dear Geraldine," protested Anthony, frowning

humorously, "do have another cocktail. I annoy him. If I smoke a cigarette he comes into the room sniffing. He's a prig, a bore, and something of a hypocrite. I probably wouldn't be telling you this if I hadn't had a few drinks, but I don't suppose it matters."

Geraldine was persistently interested. She held her glass, untasted, between finger and thumb and regarded him with eyes in which there was a touch of awe.

"How do you mean a hypocrite?"

"Well," said Anthony impatiently, "maybe he's not. But he doesn't like the things that I like, and so, as far as I'm concerned, he's uninteresting."

"Hm." Her curiosity seemed, at length, satisfied. She sank back into the sofa and sipped her cocktail.

"You're a funny one," she commented thoughtfully. "Does everybody want to marry you because your grandfather is rich?"

"They don't – but I shouldn't blame them if they did. Still, you see, I never intend to marry."

She scorned this.

"You'll fall in love someday. Oh, you will – I know." She nodded wisely.

"It'd be idiotic to be overconfident. That's what ruined the Chevalier O'Keefe."

"Who was he?"

"A creature of my splendid mind. He's my one creation, the Chevalier."

"Cra-a-azy!" she murmured pleasantly, using the clumsy rope

ladder with which she bridged all gaps and climbed after her mental superiors. Subconsciously she felt that it eliminated distances and brought the person whose imagination had eluded her back within range.

"Oh, no!" objected Anthony, "oh, no, Geraldine. You mustn't play the alienist upon the Chevalier. If you feel yourself unable to understand him I won't bring him in. Besides, I should feel a certain uneasiness because of his regrettable reputation."

"I guess I can understand anything that's got any sense to it," answered Geraldine a bit testily.

"In that case there are various episodes in the life of the Chevalier which might prove diverting."

"Well?"

"It was his untimely end that caused me to think of him and made him apropos in the conversation. I hate to introduce him end foremost, but it seems inevitable that the Chevalier must back into your life."

"Well, what about him? Did he die?"

"He did! In this manner. He was an Irishman, Geraldine, a semi-fictional Irishman – the wild sort with a genteel brogue and 'reddish hair.' He was exiled from Erin in the late days of chivalry and, of course, crossed over to France. Now the Chevalier O'Keefe, Geraldine, had, like me, one weakness. He was enormously susceptible to all sorts and conditions of women. Besides being a sentimentalist he was a romantic, a vain fellow, a man of wild passions, a little blind in one eye

and almost stone-blind in the other. Now a male roaming the world in this condition is as helpless as a lion without teeth, and in consequence the Chevalier was made utterly miserable for twenty years by a series of women who hated him, used him, bored him, aggravated him, sickened him, spent his money, made a fool of him – in brief, as the world has it, loved him.

"This was bad, Geraldine, and as the Chevalier, save for this one weakness, this exceeding susceptibility, was a man of penetration, he decided that he would rescue himself once and for all from these drains upon him. With this purpose he went to a very famous monastery in Champagne called – well, anachronistically known as St. Voltaire's. It was the rule at St. Voltaire's that no monk could descend to the ground story of the monastery so long as he lived, but should exist engaged in prayer and contemplation in one of the four towers, which were called after the four commandments of the monastery rule: Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Silence.

"When the day came that was to witness the Chevalier's farewell to the world he was utterly happy. He gave all his Greek books to his landlady, and his sword he sent in a golden sheath to the King of France, and all his mementos of Ireland he gave to the young Huguenot who sold fish in the street where he lived.

"Then he rode out to St. Voltaire's, slew his horse at the door, and presented the carcass to the monastery cook.

"At five o'clock that night he felt, for the first time, free – forever free from sex. No woman could enter the monastery; no

monk could descend below the second story. So as he climbed the winding stair that led to his cell at the very top of the Tower of Chastity he paused for a moment by an open window which looked down fifty feet on to a road below. It was all so beautiful, he thought, this world that he was leaving, the golden shower of sun beating down upon the long fields, the spray of trees in the distance, the vineyards, quiet and green, freshening wide miles before him. He leaned his elbows on the window casement and gazed at the winding road.

"Now, as it happened, Thérèse, a peasant girl of sixteen from a neighboring village, was at that moment passing along this same road that ran in front of the monastery. Five minutes before, the little piece of ribbon which held up the stocking on her pretty left leg had worn through and broken. Being a girl of rare modesty she had thought to wait until she arrived home before repairing it, but it had bothered her to such an extent that she felt she could endure it no longer. So, as she passed the Tower of Chastity, she stopped and with a pretty gesture lifted her skirt – as little as possible, be it said to her credit – to adjust her garter.

"Up in the tower the newest arrival in the ancient monastery of St. Voltaire, as though pulled forward by a gigantic and irresistible hand, leaned from the window. Further he leaned and further until suddenly one of the stones loosened under his weight, broke from its cement with a soft powdery sound – and, first headlong, then head over heels, finally in a vast and impressive revolution tumbled the Chevalier O'Keefe, bound for

the hard earth and eternal damnation.

"Thérèse was so much upset by the occurrence that she ran all the way home and for ten years spent an hour a day in secret prayer for the soul of the monk whose neck and vows were simultaneously broken on that unfortunate Sunday afternoon.

"And the Chevalier O'Keefe, being suspected of suicide, was not buried in consecrated ground, but tumbled into a field near by, where he doubtless improved the quality of the soil for many years afterward. Such was the untimely end of a very brave and gallant gentleman. What do you think, Geraldine?"

But Geraldine, lost long before, could only smile roguishly, wave her first finger at him, and repeat her bridge-all, her explain-all:

"Crazy!" she said, "you cra-a-azy!"

His thin face was kindly, she thought, and his eyes quite gentle. She liked him because he was arrogant without being conceited, and because, unlike the men she met about the theatre, he had a horror of being conspicuous. What an odd, pointless story! But she had enjoyed the part about the stocking!

After the fifth cocktail he kissed her, and between laughter and bantering caresses and a half-stifled flare of passion they passed an hour. At four-thirty she claimed an engagement, and going into the bathroom she rearranged her hair. Refusing to let him order her a taxi she stood for a moment in the doorway.

"You *will* get married," she was insisting, "you wait and see."

Anthony was playing with an ancient tennis ball, and he

bounced it carefully on the floor several times before he answered with a soupçon of acidity:

"You're a little idiot, Geraldine."

She smiled provokingly.

"Oh, I am, am I? Want to bet?"

"That'd be silly too."

"Oh, it would, would it? Well, I'll just bet you'll marry somebody inside of a year."

Anthony bounced the tennis ball very hard. This was one of his handsome days, she thought; a sort of intensity had displaced the melancholy in his dark eyes.

"Geraldine," he said, at length, "in the first place I have no one I want to marry; in the second place I haven't enough money to support two people; in the third place I am entirely opposed to marriage for people of my type; in the fourth place I have a strong distaste for even the abstract consideration of it."

But Geraldine only narrowed her eyes knowingly, made her clicking sound, and said she must be going. It was late.

"Call me up soon," she reminded him as he kissed her goodbye, "you haven't for three weeks, you know."

"I will," he promised fervently.

He shut the door and coming back into the room stood for a moment lost in thought with the tennis ball still clasped in his hand. There was one of his lonelinesses coming, one of those times when he walked the streets or sat, aimless and depressed, biting a pencil at his desk. It was a self-absorption with no

comfort, a demand for expression with no outlet, a sense of time rushing by, ceaselessly and wastefully – assuaged only by that conviction that there was nothing to waste, because all efforts and attainments were equally valueless.

He thought with emotion – aloud, ejaculative, for he was hurt and confused.

"No *idea* of getting married, by *God*!"

Of a sudden he hurled the tennis ball violently across the room, where it barely missed the lamp, and, rebounding here and there for a moment, lay still upon the floor.

SIGNLIGHT AND MOONLIGHT

For her dinner Gloria had taken a table in the Cascades at the Biltmore, and when the men met in the hall outside a little after eight, "that person Bloeckman" was the target of six masculine eyes. He was a stoutening, ruddy Jew of about thirty-five, with an expressive face under smooth sandy hair – and, no doubt, in most business gatherings his personality would have been considered ingratiating. He sauntered up to the three younger men, who stood in a group smoking as they waited for their hostess, and introduced himself with a little too evident assurance – nevertheless it is to be doubted whether he received the intended impression of faint and ironic chill: there was no hint of understanding in his manner.

"You related to Adam J. Patch?" he inquired of Anthony,

emitting two slender strings of smoke from nostrils overwide.

Anthony admitted it with the ghost of a smile.

"He's a fine man," pronounced Bloeckman profoundly. "He's a fine example of an American."

"Yes," agreed Anthony, "he certainly is."

– I detest these underdone men, he thought coldly. Boiled looking! Ought to be shoved back in the oven; just one more minute would do it.

Bloeckman squinted at his watch.

"Time these girls were showing up …"

– Anthony waited breathlessly; it came —

"… but then," with a widening smile, "you know how women are."

The three young men nodded; Bloeckman looked casually about him, his eyes resting critically on the ceiling and then passing lower. His expression combined that of a Middle Western farmer appraising his wheat crop and that of an actor wondering whether he is observed – the public manner of all good Americans. As he finished his survey he turned back quickly to the reticent trio, determined to strike to their very heart and core.

"You college men? … Harvard, eh. I see the Princeton boys beat you fellows in hockey."

Unfortunate man. He had drawn another blank. They had been three years out and heeded only the big football games. Whether, after the failure of this sally, Mr. Bloeckman would have perceived himself to be in a cynical atmosphere is

problematical, for —

Gloria arrived. Muriel arrived. Rachael arrived. After a hurried "Hello, people!" uttered by Gloria and echoed by the other two, the three swept by into the dressing room.

A moment later Muriel appeared in a state of elaborate undress and *crept* toward them. She was in her element: her ebony hair was slicked straight back on her head; her eyes were artificially darkened; she reeked of insistent perfume. She was got up to the best of her ability as a siren, more popularly a "vamp" – a picker up and thrower away of men, an unscrupulous and fundamentally unmoved toyer with affections. Something in the exhaustiveness of her attempt fascinated Maury at first sight – a woman with wide hips affecting a panther-like litheness! As they waited the extra three minutes for Gloria, and, by polite assumption, for Rachael, he was unable to take his eyes from her. She would turn her head away, lowering her eyelashes and biting her nether lip in an amazing exhibition of coyness. She would rest her hands on her hips and sway from side to side in tune to the music, saying:

"Did you ever hear such perfect ragtime? I just can't make my shoulders behave when I hear that."

Mr. Bloeckman clapped his hands gallantly.

"You ought to be on the stage."

"I'd like to be!" cried Muriel; "will you back me?"

"I sure will."

With becoming modesty Muriel ceased her motions and

turned to Maury, asking what he had "seen" this year. He interpreted this as referring to the dramatic world, and they had a gay and exhilarating exchange of titles, after this manner:

MURIEL: Have you seen "Peg o' My Heart"?

MAURY: No, I haven't.

MURIEL: (*Eagerly*) It's wonderful! You want to see it.

MAURY: Have you seen "Omar, the Tentmaker"?

MURIEL: No, but I hear it's wonderful. I'm very anxious to see it. Have you seen "Fair and Warmer"?

MAURY: (*Hopefully*) Yes.

MURIEL: I don't think it's very good. It's trashy.

MAURY: (*Faintly*) Yes, that's true.

MURIEL: But I went to "Within the Law" last night and I thought it was fine. Have you seen "The Little Cafe"?..

This continued until they ran out of plays. Dick, meanwhile, turned to Mr. Bloeckman, determined to extract what gold he could from this unpromising load.

"I hear all the new novels are sold to the moving pictures as soon as they come out."

"That's true. Of course the main thing in a moving picture is a strong story."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"So many novels are all full of talk and psychology. Of course those aren't as valuable to us. It's impossible to make much of that interesting on the screen."

"You want plots first," said Richard brilliantly.

"Of course. Plots first – " He paused, shifted his gaze. His pause spread, included the others with all the authority of a warning finger. Gloria followed by Rachael was coming out of the dressing room.

Among other things it developed during dinner that Joseph Bloeckman never danced, but spent the music time watching the others with the bored tolerance of an elder among children. He was a dignified man and a proud one. Born in Munich he had begun his American career as a peanut vender with a travelling circus. At eighteen he was a side show ballyhoo; later, the manager of the side show, and, soon after, the proprietor of a second-class vaudeville house. Just when the moving picture had passed out of the stage of a curiosity and become a promising industry he was an ambitious young man of twenty-six with some money to invest, nagging financial ambitions and a good working knowledge of the popular show business. That had been nine years before. The moving picture industry had borne him up with it where it threw off dozens of men with more financial ability, more imagination, and more practical ideas…and now he sat here and contemplated the immortal Gloria for whom young Stuart Holcome had gone from New York to Pasadena – watched her, and knew that presently she would cease dancing and come back to sit on his left hand.

He hoped she would hurry. The oysters had been standing some minutes.

Meanwhile Anthony, who had been placed on Gloria's left

hand, was dancing with her, always in a certain fourth of the floor. This, had there been stags, would have been a delicate tribute to the girl, meaning "Damn you, don't cut in!" It was very consciously intimate.

"Well," he began, looking down at her, "you look mighty sweet to-night."

She met his eyes over the horizontal half foot that separated them.

"Thank you – Anthony."

"In fact you're uncomfortably beautiful," he added. There was no smile this time.

"And you're very charming."

"Isn't this nice?" he laughed. "We actually approve of each other."

"Don't you, usually?" She had caught quickly at his remark, as she always did at any unexplained allusion to herself, however faint.

He lowered his voice, and when he spoke there was in it no more than a wisp of badinage.

"Does a priest approve the Pope?"

"I don't know – but that's probably the vaguest compliment I ever received."

"Perhaps I can muster a few bromides."

"Well, I wouldn't have you strain yourself. Look at Muriel! Right here next to us."

He glanced over his shoulder. Muriel was resting her brilliant

cheek against the lapel of Maury Noble's dinner coat and her powdered left arm was apparently twisted around his head. One was impelled to wonder why she failed to seize the nape of his neck with her hand. Her eyes, turned ceiling-ward, rolled largely back and forth; her hips swayed, and as she danced she kept up a constant low singing. This at first seemed to be a translation of the song into some foreign tongue but became eventually apparent as an attempt to fill out the metre of the song with the only words she knew – the words of the title —

"He's a rag-picker,
A rag-picker;
A rag-time picking man,
Rag-picking, picking, pick, pick,
Rag-pick, pick, pick."

– and so on, into phrases still more strange and barbaric. When she caught the amused glances of Anthony and Gloria she acknowledged them only with a faint smile and a half-closing of her eyes, to indicate that the music entering into her soul had put her into an ecstatic and exceedingly seductive trance.

The music ended and they returned to their table, whose solitary but dignified occupant arose and tendered each of them a smile so ingratiating that it was as if he were shaking their hands and congratulating them on a brilliant performance.

"Blockhead never will dance! I think he has a wooden leg," remarked Gloria to the table at large. The three young men

started and the gentleman referred to winced perceptibly.

This was the one rough spot in the course of Bloeckman's acquaintance with Gloria. She relentlessly punned on his name. First it had been "Block-house." lately, the more invidious "Blockhead." He had requested with a strong undertone of irony that she use his first name, and this she had done obediently several times – then slipping, helpless, repentant but dissolved in laughter, back into "Blockhead."

It was a very sad and thoughtless thing.

"I'm afraid Mr. Bloeckman thinks we're a frivolous crowd," sighed Muriel, waving a balanced oyster in his direction.

"He has that air," murmured Rachael. Anthony tried to remember whether she had said anything before. He thought not. It was her initial remark.

Mr. Bloeckman suddenly cleared his throat and said in a loud, distinct voice:

"On the contrary. When a man speaks he's merely tradition. He has at best a few thousand years back of him. But woman, why, she is the miraculous mouthpiece of posterity."

In the stunned pause that followed this astounding remark, Anthony choked suddenly on an oyster and hurried his napkin to his face. Rachael and Muriel raised a mild if somewhat surprised laugh, in which Dick and Maury joined, both of them red in the face and restraining uproariousness with the most apparent difficulty.

" – My God!" thought Anthony. "It's a subtitle from one of

his movies. The man's memorized it!"

Gloria alone made no sound. She fixed Mr. Bloeckman with a glance of silent reproach.

"Well, for the love of Heaven! Where on earth did you dig that up?"

Bloeckman looked at her uncertainly, not sure of her intention. But in a moment he recovered his poise and assumed the bland and consciously tolerant smile of an intellectual among spoiled and callow youth.

The soup came up from the kitchen – but simultaneously the orchestra leader came up from the bar, where he had absorbed the tone color inherent in a seidel of beer. So the soup was left to cool during the delivery of a ballad entitled "Everything's at Home Except Your Wife."

Then the champagne – and the party assumed more amusing proportions. The men, except Richard Caramel, drank freely; Gloria and Muriel sipped a glass apiece; Rachael Jerryl took none. They sat out the waltzes but danced to everything else – all except Gloria, who seemed to tire after a while and preferred to sit smoking at the table, her eyes now lazy, now eager, according to whether she listened to Bloeckman or watched a pretty woman among the dancers. Several times Anthony wondered what Bloeckman was telling her. He was chewing a cigar back and forth in his mouth, and had expanded after dinner to the extent of violent gestures.

Ten o'clock found Gloria and Anthony beginning a dance. Just

as they were out of ear-shot of the table she said in a low voice:

"Dance over by the door. I want to go down to the drug-store."

Obediently Anthony guided her through the crowd in the designated direction; in the hall she left him for a moment, to reappear with a cloak over her arm.

"I want some gum-drops," she said, humorously apologetic; "you can't guess what for this time. It's just that I want to bite my finger-nails, and I will if I don't get some gum-drops." She sighed, and resumed as they stepped into the empty elevator: "I've been biting 'em all day. A bit nervous, you see. Excuse the pun. It was unintentional – the words just arranged themselves. Gloria Gilbert, the female wag."

Reaching the ground floor they naïvely avoided the hotel candy counter, descended the wide front staircase, and walking through several corridors found a drug-store in the Grand Central Station. After an intense examination of the perfume counter she made her purchase. Then on some mutual unmentioned impulse they strolled, arm in arm, not in the direction from which they had come, but out into Forty-third Street.

The night was alive with thaw; it was so nearly warm that a breeze drifting low along the sidewalk brought to Anthony a vision of an unhoped-for hyacinthine spring. Above in the blue oblong of sky, around them in the caress of the drifting air, the illusion of a new season carried relief from the stiff and breathed-over atmosphere they had left, and for a hushed moment the traffic sounds and the murmur of water flowing in

the gutters seemed an illusive and rarefied prolongation of that music to which they had lately danced. When Anthony spoke it was with surety that his words came from something breathless and desirous that the night had conceived in their two hearts.

"Let's take a taxi and ride around a bit!" he suggested, without looking at her.

Oh, Gloria, Gloria!

A cab yawned at the curb. As it moved off like a boat on a labyrinthine ocean and lost itself among the inchoate night masses of the great buildings, among the now stilled, now strident, cries and clangings, Anthony put his arm around the girl, drew her over to him and kissed her damp, childish mouth.

She was silent. She turned her face up to him, pale under the wisps and patches of light that trailed in like moonshine through a foliage. Her eyes were gleaming ripples in the white lake of her face; the shadows of her hair bordered the brow with a persuasive unintimate dusk. No love was there, surely; nor the imprint of any love. Her beauty was cool as this damp breeze, as the moist softness of her own lips.

"You're such a swan in this light," he whispered after a moment. There were silences as murmurous as sound. There were pauses that seemed about to shatter and were only to be snatched back to oblivion by the tightening of his arms about her and the sense that she was resting there as a caught, gossamer feather, drifted in out of the dark. Anthony laughed, noiselessly and exultantly, turning his face up and away from her, half in an

overpowering rush of triumph, half lest her sight of him should spoil the splendid immobility of her expression. Such a kiss – it was a flower held against the face, never to be described, scarcely to be remembered; as though her beauty were giving off emanations of itself which settled transiently and already dissolving upon his heart.

… The buildings fell away in melted shadows; this was the Park now, and after a long while the great white ghost of the Metropolitan Museum moved majestically past, echoing sonorously to the rush of the cab.

"Why, Gloria! Why, Gloria!"

Her eyes appeared to regard him out of many thousand years: all emotion she might have felt, all words she might have uttered, would have seemed inadequate beside the adequacy of her silence, ineloquent against the eloquence of her beauty – and of her body, close to him, slender and cool.

"Tell him to turn around," she murmured, "and drive pretty fast going back…"

Up in the supper room the air was hot. The table, littered with napkins and ash-trays, was old and stale. It was between dances as they entered, and Muriel Kane looked up with roguishness extraordinary.

"Well, where have *you* been?"

"To call up mother," answered Gloria coolly. "I promised her I would. Did we miss a dance?"

Then followed an incident that though slight in itself Anthony

had cause to reflect on many years afterward. Joseph Bloeckman, leaning well back in his chair, fixed him with a peculiar glance, in which several emotions were curiously and inextricably mingled. He did not greet Gloria except by rising, and he immediately resumed a conversation with Richard Caramel about the influence of literature on the moving pictures.

MAGIC

The stark and unexpected miracle of a night fades out with the lingering death of the last stars and the premature birth of the first newsboys. The flame retreats to some remote and platonic fire; the white heat has gone from the iron and the glow from the coal.

Along the shelves of Anthony's library, filling a wall amply, crept a chill and insolent pencil of sunlight touching with frigid disapproval Thérèse of France and Ann the Superwoman, Jenny of the Orient Ballet and Zuleika the Conjurer – and Hoosier Cora – then down a shelf and into the years, resting pityingly on the over-invoked shades of Helen, Thaïs, Salome, and Cleopatra.

Anthony, shaved and bathed, sat in his most deeply cushioned chair and watched it until at the steady rising of the sun it lay glinting for a moment on the silk ends of the rug – and went out.

It was ten o'clock. The Sunday Times, scattered about his feet, proclaimed by rotogravure and editorial, by social revelation and sporting sheet, that the world had been tremendously engrossed

during the past week in the business of moving toward some splendid if somewhat indeterminate goal. For his part Anthony had been once to his grandfather's, twice to his broker's, and three times to his tailor's – and in the last hour of the week's last day he had kissed a very beautiful and charming girl.

When he reached home his imagination had been teeming with high pitched, unfamiliar dreams. There was suddenly no question on his mind, no eternal problem for a solution and resolution. He had experienced an emotion that was neither mental nor physical, nor merely a mixture of the two, and the love of life absorbed him for the present to the exclusion of all else. He was content to let the experiment remain isolated and unique. Almost impersonally he was convinced that no woman he had ever met compared in any way with Gloria. She was deeply herself; she was immeasurably sincere – of these things he was certain. Beside her the two dozen schoolgirls and debutantes, young married women and waifs and strays whom he had known were so many females, in the word's most contemptuous sense, breeders and bearers, exuding still that faintly odorous atmosphere of the cave and the nursery.

So far as he could see, she had neither submitted to any will of his nor caressed his vanity – except as her pleasure in his company was a caress. Indeed he had no reason for thinking she had given him aught that she did not give to others. This was as it should be. The idea of an entanglement growing out of the evening was as remote as it would have been repugnant. And she

had disclaimed and buried the incident with a decisive untruth. Here were two young people with fancy enough to distinguish a game from its reality – who by the very casualness with which they met and passed on would proclaim themselves unharmed.

Having decided this he went to the phone and called up the Plaza Hotel.

Gloria was out. Her mother knew neither where she had gone nor when she would return.

It was somehow at this point that the first wrongness in the case asserted itself. There was an element of callousness, almost of indecency, in Gloria's absence from home. He suspected that by going out she had intrigued him into a disadvantage. Returning she would find his name, and smile. Most discreetly! He should have waited a few hours in order to drive home the utter inconsequence with which he regarded the incident. What an asinine blunder! She would think he considered himself particularly favored. She would think he was reacting with the most inept intimacy to a quite trivial episode.

He remembered that during the previous month his janitor, to whom he had delivered a rather muddled lecture on the "brotherhoove man," had come up next day and, on the basis of what had happened the night before, seated himself in the window seat for a cordial and chatty half-hour. Anthony wondered in horror if Gloria would regard him as he had regarded that man. Him – Anthony Patch! Horror!

It never occurred to him that he was a passive thing, acted

upon by an influence above and beyond Gloria, that he was merely the sensitive plate on which the photograph was made. Some gargantuan photographer had focussed the camera on Gloria and *snap*! – the poor plate could but develop, confined like all things to its nature.

But Anthony, lying upon his couch and staring at the orange lamp, passed his thin fingers incessantly through his dark hair and made new symbols for the hours. She was in a shop now, it seemed, moving lithely among the velvets and the furs, her own dress making, as she walked, a debonair rustle in that world of silken rustles and cool soprano laughter and scents of many slain but living flowers. The Minnies and Pearls and jewels and jennies would gather round her like courtiers, bearing wispy frailties of Georgette crepe, delicate chiffon to echo her cheeks in faint pastel, milky lace to rest in pale disarray against her neck – damask was used but to cover priests and divans in these days, and cloth of Samarand was remembered only by the romantic poets.

She would go elsewhere after a while, tilting her head a hundred ways under a hundred bonnets, seeking in vain for mock cherries to match her lips or plumes that were graceful as her own supple body.

Noon would come – she would hurry along Fifth Avenue, a Nordic Ganymede, her fur coat swinging fashionably with her steps, her cheeks redder by a stroke of the wind's brush, her breath a delightful mist upon the bracing air – and the doors of

the Ritz would revolve, the crowd would divide, fifty masculine eyes would start, stare, as she gave back forgotten dreams to the husbands of many obese and comic women.

One o'clock. With her fork she would tantalize the heart of an adoring artichoke, while her escort served himself up in the thick, dripping sentences of an enraptured man.

Four o'clock: her little feet moving to melody, her face distinct in the crowd, her partner happy as a petted puppy and mad as the immemorial hatter… Then – then night would come drifting down and perhaps another damp. The signs would spill their light into the street. Who knew? No wiser than he, they haply sought to recapture that picture done in cream and shadow they had seen on the hushed Avenue the night before. And they might, ah, they might! A thousand taxis would yawn at a thousand corners, and only to him was that kiss forever lost and done. In a thousand guises Thaïs would hail a cab and turn up her face for loving. And her pallor would be virginal and lovely, and her kiss chaste as the moon…

He sprang excitedly to his feet. How inappropriate that she should be out! He had realized at last what he wanted – to kiss her again, to find rest in her great immobility. She was the end of all restlessness, all malcontent.

Anthony dressed and went out, as he should have done long before, and down to Richard Caramel's room to hear the last revision of the last chapter of "The Demon Lover." He did not call Gloria again until six. He did not find her in until eight

and – oh, climax of anticlimaxes! – she could give him no engagement until Tuesday afternoon. A broken piece of gutta-percha clattered to the floor as he banged up the phone.

BLACK MAGIC

Tuesday was freezing cold. He called at a bleak two o'clock and as they shook hands he wondered confusedly whether he had ever kissed her; it was almost unbelievable – he seriously doubted if she remembered it.

"I called you four times on Sunday," he told her.

"Did you?"

There was surprise in her voice and interest in her expression. Silently he cursed himself for having told her. He might have known her pride did not deal in such petty triumphs. Even then he had not guessed at the truth – that never having had to worry about men she had seldom used the wary subterfuges, the playings out and haulings in, that were the stock in trade of her sisterhood. When she liked a man, that was trick enough. Did she think she loved him – there was an ultimate and fatal thrust. Her charm endlessly preserved itself.

"I was anxious to see you," he said simply. "I want to talk to you – I mean really talk, somewhere where we can be alone. May I?"

"What do you mean?"

He swallowed a sudden lump of panic. He felt that she knew

what he wanted.

"I mean, not at a tea table," he said.

"Well, all right, but not to-day. I want to get some exercise. Let's walk!"

It was bitter and raw. All the evil hate in the mad heart of February was wrought into the forlorn and icy wind that cut its way cruelly across Central Park and down along Fifth Avenue. It was almost impossible to talk, and discomfort made him distracted, so much so that he turned at Sixty-first Street to find that she was no longer beside him. He looked around. She was forty feet in the rear standing motionless, her face half hidden in her fur coat collar, moved either by anger or laughter – he could not determine which. He started back.

"Don't let me interrupt your walk!" she called.

"I'm mighty sorry," he answered in confusion. "Did I go too fast?"

"I'm cold," she announced. "I want to go home. And you walk too fast."

"I'm very sorry."

Side by side they started for the Plaza. He wished he could see her face.

"Men don't usually get so absorbed in themselves when they're with me."

"I'm sorry."

"That's very interesting."

"It *is* rather too cold to walk," he said, briskly, to hide his

annoyance.

She made no answer and he wondered if she would dismiss him at the hotel entrance. She walked in without speaking, however, and to the elevator, throwing him a single remark as she entered it:

"You'd better come up."

He hesitated for the fraction of a moment.

"Perhaps I'd better call some other time."

"Just as you say." Her words were murmured as an aside. The main concern of life was the adjusting of some stray wisps of hair in the elevator mirror. Her cheeks were brilliant, her eyes sparkled – she had never seemed so lovely, so exquisitely to be desired.

Despising himself, he found that he was walking down the tenth-floor corridor a subservient foot behind her; was in the sitting room while she disappeared to shed her furs. Something had gone wrong – in his own eyes he had lost a shred of dignity; in an unpremeditated yet significant encounter he had been completely defeated.

However, by the time she reappeared in the sitting-room he had explained himself to himself with sophistic satisfaction. After all he had done the strongest thing, he thought. He had wanted to come up, he had come. Yet what happened later on that afternoon must be traced to the indignity he had experienced in the elevator; the girl was worrying him intolerably, so much so that when she came out he involuntarily drifted into criticism.

"Who's this Bloeckman, Gloria?"

"A business friend of father's."

"Odd sort of fellow!"

"He doesn't like you either," she said with a sudden smile.

Anthony laughed.

"I'm flattered at his notice. He evidently considers me a – " He broke off with "Is he in love with you?"

"I don't know."

"The deuce you don't," he insisted. "Of course he is. I remember the look he gave me when we got back to the table. He'd probably have had me quietly assaulted by a delegation of movie supes if you hadn't invented that phone call."

"He didn't mind. I told him afterward what really happened."

"You told him!"

"He asked me."

"I don't like that very well," he remonstrated.

She laughed again.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.