FRANK NORRIS

VANDOVER AND THE BRUTE

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Содержание

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Chapter One

It was always a matter of wonder to Vandover that he was able to recall so little of his past life. With the exception of the most recent events he could remember nothing connectedly. What he at first imagined to be the story of his life, on closer inspection turned out to be but a few disconnected incidents that his memory had preserved with the greatest capriciousness, absolutely independent of their importance. One of these incidents might be a great sorrow, a tragedy, a death in his family; and another, recalled with the same vividness, the same accuracy of detail, might be a matter of the least moment.

A certain one of these wilful fillips of memory would always bring before him a particular scene during the migration of his family from Boston to their new home in San Francisco, at a time when Vandover was about eight years old.

It was in the depot of one of the larger towns in western New York. The day had been hot and after the long ride on the crowded day coach the cool shadow under the curved roof of the immense iron vaulted depot seemed very pleasant. The porter, the brakeman and Vandover's father very carefully lifted his mother from the car. She was lying back on pillows in a long steamer chair. The three men let the chair slowly down, the brakeman went away, but the porter remained, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead with the back of his left hand, which in turn he wiped against the pink palm of his right. The other train, the train to which they were to change, had not yet arrived. It was rather still; at the far end of the depot a locomotive, sitting back on its motionless drivers like some huge sphinx crouching along the rails, was steaming quietly, drawing long breaths. The repair gang in greasy caps and spotted blue overalls were inspecting the train, pottering about the trucks, opening and closing the journal-boxes, striking clear notes on the wheels with long-handled hammers.

Vandover stood close to his father, his thin legs wide apart, holding in both his hands the satchel he had been permitted to carry. He looked about him continually, rolling his big eyes vaguely, watching now the repair-gang, now a huge white cat dozing on an empty baggage truck.

Several passengers were walking up and down the platform, staring curiously at the invalid lying back in the steamer chair.

The journey was too much for her. She was very weak and very pale, her eyelids were heavy, the skin of her forehead looked blue and tightly drawn, and tiny beads of perspiration gathered around the corners of her mouth. Vandover's father put his hand and arm along the back of the chair and his sick wife rested against him, leaning her head on his waistcoat over the pocket where he kept his cigars and pocket-comb. They were all silent.

By and by she drew a long sigh, her face became the face of an imbecile, stupid, without expression, her eyes half-closed, her mouth half-open. Her head rolled forward as though she were nodding in her sleep, while a long drip of saliva trailed from her lower lip. Vandover's father bent over her quickly, crying out sharply, "Hallie!—what is it?" All at once the train for which they were waiting charged into the depot, filling the place with a hideous clangor and with the smell of steam and of hot oil.

This scene of her death was the only thing that Vandover could remember of his mother.

As he looked back over his life he could recall nothing after this for nearly five years. Even after that lapse of time the only scene he could picture with any degree of clearness was one of the greatest triviality in which he saw himself, a rank thirteen-year-old boy, sitting on a bit of carpet in the back yard of the San Francisco house playing with his guinea-pigs.

In order to get at his life during his teens, Vandover would have been obliged to collect these scattered memory pictures as best he could, rearrange them in some more orderly sequence, piece out what he could imperfectly recall and fill in the many gaps by mere guesswork and conjecture.

It was the summer of 1880 that they had come to San Francisco. Once settled there, Vandover's father began to build small residence houses and cheap flats which he rented at various prices, the cheapest at ten dollars, the more expensive at thirty-five and forty. He had closed out his business in the East, coming out to California on account of his wife's ill health. He had made his money in Boston and had intended to retire.

But he soon found that he could not do this. At this time he was an old man, nearly sixty. He had given his entire life to his business to the exclusion of everything else, and now when his fortune had been made and when he could afford to enjoy it, discovered that he had lost the capacity for enjoying anything but the business itself. Nothing else could interest him. He was not what would be called in America a rich man, but he had made money enough to travel, to allow himself any reasonable relaxation, to cultivate a taste for art, music, literature or the drama, to indulge in any harmless fad, such as collecting etchings, china or bric-à-brac, or even to permit himself the luxury of horses. In the place of all these he found himself, at nearly sixty years of age, forced again into the sordid round of business as the only escape from the mortal *ennui* and weariness of the spirit that preyed upon him during every leisure hour of the day.

Early and late he went about the city, personally superintending the building of his little houses and cheap flats, sitting on saw-horses and piles of lumber, watching the carpenters at work. In the evening he came home to a late supper, completely fagged, bringing with him the smell of mortar and of pine shavings.

On the first of each month when his agents turned over the rents to him he was in great spirits. He would bring home the little canvas sack of coin with him before banking it, and call his son's attention to the amount, never failing to stick a twenty-dollar gold-piece in each eye, monocle fashion, exclaiming, "Good for the masses," a meaningless jest that had been one of the family's household words for years.

His plan of building was peculiar. His credit was good, and having chosen his lot he would find out from the banks how much they would loan him upon it in case he should become the owner. If this amount suited him, he would buy the lot, making one large payment outright and giving his note for the balance. The lot once his, the banks loaned him the desired amount. With this money and with money of his own he would make the final payment on the lot and would begin the building itself, paying his labour on the nail, but getting his material, lumber, brick and fittings on time. When the building was half-way up he would negotiate a second loan from the banks in order to complete it and in order to meet the notes he had given to his contractors for material.

He believed this to be a shrewd business operation, since the rents as they returned to him were equal to the interest on a far larger sum than that which he had originally invested. He said little about the double mortgage on each piece of property "improved" after this fashion and which often represented a full two-thirds of its entire value. The interest on each loan was far more than covered by the rents; he chose his neighbourhoods with great discrimination; real estate was flourishing in the rapidly growing city, and the new houses, although built so cheaply that they were mere shells of lath and plaster, were nevertheless made gay and brave with varnish and cheap mill-work. They rented well at first, scarcely a one was ever vacant. People spoke of the Old Gentleman as one of the most successful realty owners in the city. So pleased did he become with the success of his new venture that in course of time all his money was reinvested after this fashion.

At the time of his father's greatest prosperity Vandover himself began to draw toward his fifteenth year, entering upon that period of change when the first raw elements of character began to assert themselves and when, if ever, there was a crying need for the influence of his mother. Any feminine influence would have been well for him at this time: that of an older sister, even that of a

hired governess. The housekeeper looked after him a little, mended his clothes, saw that he took his bath Saturday nights, and that he did not dig tunnels under the garden walks. But her influence was entirely negative and prohibitory and the two were constantly at war. Vandover grew in a haphazard way and after school hours ran about the streets almost at will.

At fifteen he put on long trousers, and the fall of the same year entered the High School. He had grown too fast and at this time was tall and very lean; his limbs were straight, angular, out of all proportion, with huge articulations at the elbows and knees. His neck was long and thin and his head large, his face was sallow and covered with pimples, his ears were big, red and stuck out stiff from either side of his head. His hair he wore "pompadour."

Within a month after his entry of the High School he had a nickname. The boys called him "Skinny-seldom-fed," to his infinite humiliation.

Little by little the crude virility of the young man began to develop in him. It was a distressing, uncanny period. Had Vandover been a girl he would at this time have been subject to all sorts of abnormal vagaries, such as eating his slate pencil, nibbling bits of chalk, wishing he were dead, and drifting into states of unreasoned melancholy. As it was, his voice began to change, a little golden down appeared on his cheeks and upon the nape of his neck, while his first summer vacation was altogether spoiled by a long spell of mumps.

His appetite was enormous. He ate heavy meat three times a day, but took little or no exercise. The pimples on his face became worse and worse. He grew peevish and nervous. He hated girls, and when in their society was a very bull-calf for bashfulness and awkward self-consciousness. At times the strangest and most morbid fancies took possession of him, chief of which was that every one was looking at him while he was walking in the street.

Vandover was a good little boy. Every night he said his prayers, going down upon his huge knees at the side of his bed. To the Lord's Prayer he added various petitions of his own. He prayed that he might be a good boy and live a long time and go to Heaven when he died and see his mother; that the next Saturday might be sunny all day long, and that the end of the world might not come while he was alive.

It was during Vandover's first year at the High School that his eyes were opened and that he acquired the knowledge of good and evil. Till very late he kept his innocence, the crude raw innocence of the boy, like that of a young animal, at once charming and absurd. But by and by he became very curious, stirred with a blind unreasoned instinct. In the Bible which he read Sunday afternoons, because his father gave him a quarter for doing so, he came across a great many things that filled him with vague and strange ideas; and one Sunday at church, when the minister was intoning the Litany, he remarked for the first time the words, "all women in the perils of child-birth."

He puzzled over this for a long time, smelling out a mystery beneath the words, feeling the presence of something hidden, with the instinct of a young brute. He could get no satisfaction from his father and by and by began to be ashamed to ask him; why, he did not know. Although he could not help hearing the abominable talk of the High School boys, he at first refused to believe that part of it which he could understand. For all that he was ashamed of his innocence and ignorance and affected to appreciate their stories nevertheless.

At length one day he heard the terse and brutal truth. In an instant he believed it, some lower, animal intuition in him reiterating and confirming the fact. But even then he hated to think that people were so low, so vile. One day, however, he was looking through the volumes of the old Encyclopædia Britannica in his father's library, hoping that he might find a dollar bill which the Old Gentleman told him had been at one time misplaced between the leaves of some one of the great tomes. All at once he came upon the long article "Obstetrics," profusely illustrated with old-fashioned plates and steel engravings. He read it from beginning to end.

It was the end of all his childish ideals, the destruction of all his first illusions. The whole of his rude little standard of morality was lowered immediately. Even his mother, whom he had always

believed to be some kind of an angel, fell at once in his estimation. She could never be the same to him after this, never so sweet, so good and so pure as he had hitherto imagined her.

It was very cruel, the whole thing was a grief to him, a blow, a great shock; he hated to think of it. Then little by little the first taint crept in, the innate vice stirred in him, the brute began to make itself felt, and a multitude of perverse and vicious ideas commenced to buzz about him like a swarm of nasty flies.

A certain word, the blunt Anglo-Saxon name for a lost woman, that he heard on one occasion among the boys at school, opened to him a vista of incredible wickedness, but now after the first moment of revolt the thing began to seem less horrible. There was even a certain attraction about it. Vandover soon became filled with an overwhelming curiosity, the eager evil curiosity of the schoolboy, the perverse craving for the knowledge of vice. He listened with all his ears to everything that was said and went about through the great city with eyes open only to its foulness. He even looked up in the dictionary the meanings of the new words, finding in the cold, scientific definitions some strange sort of satisfaction.

There was no feminine influence about Vandover at this critical time to help him see the world in the right light and to gauge things correctly, and he might have been totally corrupted while in his earliest teens had it not been for another side of his character that began to develop about the same time.

This was his artistic side. He seemed to be a born artist. At first he only showed bent for all general art. He drew well, he made curious little modellings in clayey mud; he had a capital ear for music and managed in some unknown way of his own to pick out certain tunes on the piano. At one time he gave evidence of a genuine talent for the stage. For days he would pretend to be some dreadful sort of character, he did not know whom, talking to himself, stamping and shaking his fists; then he would dress himself in an old smoking-cap, a red table-cloth and one of his father's discarded Templar swords, and pose before the long mirrors ranting and scowling. At another time he would devote his attention to literature, making up endless stories with which he terrified himself, telling them to himself in a low voice for hours after he had got into bed. Sometimes he would write out these stories and read them to his father after supper, standing up between the folding doors of the library, acting out the whole narrative with furious gestures. Once he even wrote a little poem which seriously disturbed the Old Gentleman, filling him with formless ideas and vague hopes for the future.

In a suitable environment Vandover might easily have become an author, actor or musician, since it was evident that he possessed the fundamental *afflatus* that underlies all branches of art. As it was, the merest chance decided his career.

In the same library where he had found the famous encyclopædia article was "A Home Book of Art," one of those showily bound gift books one sees lying about conspicuously on parlour centre tables. It was an English publication calculated to meet popular and general demand. There were a great many full-page pictures of lonely women, called "Reveries" or "Idylls," ideal "Heads" of gipsy girls, of coquettes, and heads of little girls crowned with cherries and illustrative of such titles as "Spring," "Youth," "Innocence." Besides these were sentimental pictures, as, for instance, one entitled "It Might Have Been," a sad-eyed girl, with long hair, musing over a miniature portrait, and another especially impressive which represented a handsomely dressed woman flung upon a *Louis Quinze* sofa, weeping, her hands clasped over her head. She was alone; it was twilight; on the floor was a heap of opened letters. The picture was called "Memories."

Vandover thought this last a wonderful work of art and made a hideous copy of it with very soft pencils. He was so pleased with it that he copied another one of the pictures and then another. By and by he had copied almost all of them. His father gave him a dollar and Vandover began to add to his usual evening petition the prayer that he might become a great artist. Thus it was that his career was decided upon.

He was allowed to have a drawing teacher. This was an elderly German, an immense old fellow, who wore a wig and breathed loudly through his nose. His voice was like a trumpet and he walked with a great striding gait like a colonel of cavalry. Besides drawing he taught ornamental writing and engrossing. With a dozen curved and flowing strokes of an ordinary writing pen he could draw upon a calling card a conventionalized outline-picture of some kind of dove or bird of paradise, all curves and curlicues, flying very gracefully and carrying in its beak a half-open scroll upon which could be inscribed such sentiments as "From a Friend" or "With Fond Regards," or even one's own name.

His system of drawing was of his own invention. Over the picture to be copied he would paste a great sheet of paper, ruling off the same into spaces of about an inch square. He would cut out one of these squares and Vandover would copy the portion of the picture thus disclosed. When he had copied the whole picture in this fashion the teacher would go over it himself, retouching it here and there, labouring to obviate the checker-board effect which the process invariably produced.

At other times Vandover copied into his sketch-book, with hard crayons, those lithographed studies on buff paper which are published by the firm in Berlin. He began with ladders, wheel-barrows and water barrels, working up in course of time to rustic buildings set in a bit of landscape; stone bridges and rural mills, overhung by some sort of linden tree, with ends of broken fences in a corner of the foreground to complete the composition. From these he went on to bunches of grapes, vases of fruit and at length to more "Ideal heads." The climax was reached with a life-sized Head, crowned with honeysuckles and entitled *"Flora."* He was three weeks upon it. It was an achievement, a veritable *chef-d'oeuvre.* Vandover gave it to his father upon Christmas morning, having signed his name to it with a great ornamental flourish. The Old Gentleman was astounded, the housekeeper was called in and exclaimed over it, raising her hands to Heaven. Vandover's father gave him a five-dollar gold-piece, fresh from the mint, had the picture framed in gilt and hung it up in his smoking-room over the clock.

Never for a moment did the Old Gentleman oppose Vandover's wish to become an artist and it was he himself who first spoke about Paris to the young man. Vandover was delighted; the Latin Quarter became his dream. Between the two it was arranged that he should go over as soon as he had finished his course at the High School. The Old Gentleman was to take him across, returning only when he was well established in some suitable studio.

At length Vandover graduated, and within three weeks of that event was on his way to Europe with his father. He never got farther than Boston.

At the last moment the Old Gentleman wavered. Vandover was still very young and would be entirely alone in Paris, ignorant of the language, exposed to every temptation. Besides this, his education would stop where it was. Somehow he could not make it seem right to him to cut the young man adrift in this fashion. On the other hand, the Old Gentleman had a great many old-time friends and business acquaintances in Boston who could be trusted with a nominal supervision of his son for four years. He had no college education himself, but in some vague way he felt convinced that Vandover would be a better artist for a four years' course at Harvard.

Vandover took his father's decision hardly. He had never thought of being a college-man and nothing in that life appealed to him. He urged upon his father the loss of time that the course would entail, but his father met this objection by offering to pay for any artistic tuition that would not interfere with the regular college work.

Little by little the idea of college life became more attractive to Vandover; at the worst, it was only postponing the Paris trip, not abandoning it. Besides this, two of his chums from the High School were expecting to enter Harvard that fall, and he could look forward to a very pleasant four years spent in their company.

Out at Cambridge the term was just closing. The Old Gentleman's friends procured him tickets to several of the more important functions. From the gallery of Memorial Hall Vandover and his father saw some of the great dinners; they went up to New London for the boat-race; they gained

admittance to the historic Yard on Class-day, and saw the strange football rush for flowers around the "Tree." They heard the seniors sing "Fair Harvard" for the last time, and later saw them receive their diplomas at Sander's Theatre.

The great ceremonies of the place, the picturesqueness of the elm-shaded Yard, the old red dormitories covered with ivy, the associations and traditions of the buildings, the venerable pump, Longfellow's room, the lecture hall where the minute-men had barracked, all of these things, in the end, appealed strongly to Vandover's imagination. Instead of passing the summer months in an ocean voyage and a continental journey, he at last became content to settle down to work under a tutor, "boning up" for the examinations. His father returned to San Francisco in July.

Vandover matriculated the September of the same year; on the first of October he signed the college rolls and became a Harvard freshman. At that time he was eighteen years old.

Chapter Two

There was little of the stubborn or unyielding about Vandover, his personality was not strong, his nature pliable and he rearranged himself to suit his new environment at Harvard very rapidly. Before the end of the first semester he had become to all outward appearances a typical Harvardian. He wore corduroy vests and a gray felt hat, the brim turned down over his eyes. He smoked a pipe and bought himself a brindled bull-terrier. He cut his lectures as often as he dared, "ragged" signs and barber-poles, and was in continual evidence about Foster's and among Leavitt and Pierce's billiard-tables. When the great football games came off he worked himself into a frenzy of excitement over them and even tried to make several of his class teams, though without success.

He chummed with Charlie Geary and with young Dolliver Haight, the two San Francisco boys. The three were continually together. They took the same courses, dined at the same table in Memorial Hall and would have shared the same room if it had been possible. Vandover and Charlie Geary were fortunate enough to get a room in Matthew's on the lower floor looking out upon the Yard; young Haight was obliged to put up with an outside room in a boarding house.

Vandover had grown up with these fellows and during all his life was thrown in their company. Haight was a well-bred young boy of good family, very quiet; almost every morning he went to Chapel. He was always polite, even to his two friends. He invariably tried to be pleasant and agreeable and had a way of making people like him. Otherwise, his character was not strongly marked.

Geary was quite different. He never could forget himself. He was incessantly talking about what he had done or was going to do. In the morning he would inform Vandover of how many hours he had slept and of the dreams he had dreamed. In the evening he would tell him everything he had done that day; the things he had said, how many lectures he had cut, what brilliant recitations he had made, and even what food he had eaten at Memorial. He was pushing, self-confident, very shrewd and clever, devoured with an inordinate ambition and particularly pleased when he could get the better of anybody, even of Vandover or of young Haight. He delighted to assume the management of things. Vandover, he made his protégé, taking over the charge of such business as the two had in common. It was he who had found the room in Matthew's, getting it away from all other applicants, securing it at the eleventh hour. He put Vandover's name on the waiting list at Memorial, saw that he filled out his blanks at the proper time, helped him balance his accounts, guided him in the choice of his courses and in the making out of his study-card.

"Look here, Charlie," Vandover would exclaim, throwing down the Announcement of Courses, "I can't make this thing out. It's all in a tangle. See here, I've got to fill up my hours some way or other; *you* straighten this thing out for me. Find me some nice little course, two hours a week, say, that comes late in the morning, a good hour after breakfast; something easy, all lectures, no outside reading, nice instructor and all that." And Geary would glance over the complicated schedule, cleverly untangling it at once and would find two or three such courses as Vandover desired.

Vandover's yielding disposition led him to submit to Geary's dictatorship and he thus early began to contract easy, irresponsible habits, becoming indolent, shirking his duty whenever he could, sure that Geary would think for the two and pull him out of any difficulty into which he might drift.

Otherwise the three freshmen were very much alike. They were hardly more than boys and full of boyish spirits and activity. They began to see "college life." Vandover was already smoking; pretty soon he began to drink. He affected beer, whisky he loathed, and such wine as was not too expensive was either too sweet or too sour. It became a custom for the three to go into town two or three nights in the week and have beer and Welsh rabbits at Billy Park's. On these occasions, however, young Haight drank only beer, he never touched wine or spirits.

It was in Billy Park's the evening after the football game between the Yale and Harvard freshmen that Vandover was drunk for the first time. He was not so drunk but that he knew he was, and

the knowledge of the fact so terrified him that it kept him from getting very bad. The first sensation soon wore off, and by the time that Geary took charge of him and brought him back to Cambridge he was disposed to treat the affair less seriously. Nevertheless when he got to his room he looked at himself in the mirror a long time, saying to himself over and over again, "I'm drunk—just regularly drunk. Good Heavens! what *would* the governor say to *this*?"

In the morning he was surprised to find that he felt so little ashamed. Geary and young Haight treated the matter as a huge joke and told him of certain funny things he had said and done and which he had entirely forgotten. It was impossible for him to take the matter seriously even if he had wished to, and within a few weeks he was drunk again. He found that he was not an exception; Geary was often drunk with him, fully a third of all the Harvard men he knew were intoxicated at different times. It was out of the question for Vandover to consider them as drunkards. Certainly, neither he nor any of the others drank because they liked the beer; after the fifth or sixth glass it was all they could do to force down another. Such being the case, Vandover often asked himself why he got drunk at all. This question he was never able to answer.

It was the same with gambling. At first the idea of playing cards for money shocked him beyond all expression. But soon he found that a great many of the fellows, fellows like young Haight, beyond question steady, sensible and even worthy of emulation in other ways, "went in for that sort of thing." Every now and then Vandover's "crowd" got together in his room in Matthew's, and played Van John "for keeps," as they said, until far into the night. Vandover joined them. The stakes were small, he lost as often as he won, but the habit of the cards never grew upon him. It was like the beer, he "went in for it" because the others did, without knowing why. Geary, however, drew his line at gambling; he never talked against it or tried to influence Vandover, but he never could be induced to play "for keeps" himself.

One very warm Sunday afternoon in the first days of April, when the last snows were melting, Vandover and Geary were in their room, sitting at opposite ends of their window-seat, Geary translating his Monday's "Horace" by the help of a Bonn's translation, Vandover making a pen and ink drawing for the next *Lampoon*. A couple of young women passed down the walk, going across the Yard toward the Square. They were cheaply and showily dressed. One of them wore a mannish shirtwaist, with a high collar and scarf. The other had taken off her gloves and was swinging a bright red cape in one of her bare hands. As the couple passed they stared calmly at the two young fellows in the window; Vandover lowered his eyes over his work, blushing, he could not tell why. Geary stared back at them, following them with his eyes until they had gone by.

All at once he began laughing and pounding on the window.

"Oh, for goodness sake, quit!" exclaimed Vandover in great alarm, twisting off the window-seat and shrinking back out of sight into the room. "Quit, Charlie; you don't want to insult a girl that way." Geary looked at him over his shoulder in some surprise, and was about to answer when he turned to the window again and exclaimed, grinning and waving his hand:

"Oh, just come here, Skinny; get on to this, will you? Ah, come here and look, you old chump! Do you think they're nice girls? Just take a *look* at them." Vandover peered timidly around Geary's head and saw that the two girls were looking back and laughing, and that the one with the red cape was waving it at them.

At supper that night they saw the girls in the gallery of Memorial. They pointed them out to young Haight, and Geary at length managed to attract their attention. After supper the three freshmen, together with two of their sophomore acquaintances, strolled slowly over toward the Yard, lighting their pipes and cigarettes. All at once, as they turned into the lower gate, they came full upon the same pair of girls. They were walking fast, talking and laughing very loudly.

"Track!" called out one of the sophomores, and the group of young fellows parted to let them pass. The sophomore exclaimed in a tone of regret, "Don't be in such a hurry, girls." Vandover became scarlet and turned his face away, but the girls looked back and laughed good-naturedly. "Come on,"

said the sophomore. The group closed around the girls and brought them to a standstill; they were not in the least embarrassed at this, but laughed more than ever. Neither of them was pretty, but there was a certain attraction about them that pleased Vandover immensely. He was very excited.

Then there was a very embarrassing pause. No one knew what to say. Geary alone regained his assurance at length, and began a lively interchange of chaff with one of them. The others could only stand about and smile.

"Well," cried the other girl after a while, "I ain't going to stand here in the snow all *night*. Let's take a walk; come along. I choose *you*." Before Vandover knew it she had taken his arm. The sophomore managed in some way to pair off with the other girl; Haight had already left the group; the two couples started off, while Geary and the other sophomore who were left out followed awkwardly in the rear for a little way and then disappeared.

Vandover was so excited that he could scarcely speak. This was a new experience. At first it attracted him, but the hopeless vulgarity of the girl at his side, her tawdry clothes, her sordid, petty talk, her slang, her miserable profanity, soon began to revolt him. He felt that he could not keep his self-respect while such a girl hung upon his arm.

"Say," said the girl at length, "didn't I see you in town the other afternoon on Washington Street?"

"Maybe you did," answered Vandover, trying to be polite. "I'm down there pretty often."

"Well, I guess yes," she answered. "You Harvard sports make a regular promenade out o' Washington Street Saturday afternoons. I suppose I've seen you down there pretty often, but didn't notice. Do you stand or walk?"

Vandover's gorge rose with disgust. He stopped abruptly and pulled away from the girl. Not only did she disgust him, but he felt sorry for her; he felt ashamed and pitiful for a woman who had fallen so low. Still he tried to be polite to her; he did not know how to be rude with any kind of woman.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said, taking off his hat. "I don't believe I can take a walk with you to-night. I—you see—I've got a good deal of work to do; I think I'll have to leave you." Then he bowed to her with his hat in his hand, hurrying away before she could answer him a word.

He found Geary alone in their room, cribbing "'Horace" again.

"Ah, you bet," Geary said. "I shook those chippies. I sized them up right away. I was clever enough for that. They were no good. I thought you would get enough of it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Vandover after a while, as he settled to his drawing. "She was pretty common, but anyhow I don't want to help bring down a poor girl like that any lower than she is already." This saying struck Vandover as being very good and noble, and he found occasion to repeat it to young Haight the next day.

But within three days of this, at the time when Vandover would have fancied himself farthest from such a thing, he underwent a curious reaction. On a certain evening, moved by an unreasoned instinct, he sought out the girl who had just filled him with such deep pity and such violent disgust, and that night did not come back to the room in Matthew's. The thing was done almost before he knew it. He could not tell why he had acted as he did, and he certainly would not have believed himself capable of it.

He passed the next few days in a veritable agony of repentance, overwhelmed by a sense of shame and dishonour that were almost feminine in their bitterness and intensity. He felt himself lost, unworthy, and as if he could never again look a pure woman in the eyes unless with an abominable hypocrisy. He was ashamed even before Geary and young Haight, and went so far as to send a long letter to his father acknowledging and deploring what he had done, asking for his forgiveness and reiterating his resolve to shun such a thing forever after.

What had been bashfulness in the boy developed in the young man to a profound respect and an instinctive regard for women. This stood him in good stead throughout all his four years of Harvard life. In general, he kept himself pretty straight. There were plenty of fast girls and lost women about

Cambridge, but Vandover found that he could not associate with them to any degree of satisfaction. He never knew how to take them, never could rid himself of the idea that they were to be treated as ladies. They, on their part, did not like him; he was too diffident, too courteous, too "slow." They preferred the rough self-assertion and easy confidence of Geary, who never took "no" as an answer and who could chaff with them on their own ground.

Vandover did poor work at Harvard and only graduated, as Geary said, "by a squeak." Besides his regular studies he took time to pass three afternoons a week in the studio of a Boston artist, where he studied anatomy and composition and drew figures from the nude. In the summer vacations he did not return home, but accompanied this artist on sketching tours along the coast of Maine. His style improved immensely the moment he abandoned flat studies and began to work directly from Nature. He drew figures well, showed a feeling for desolate landscapes, and even gave promise of a good eye for colour. But he allowed his fondness for art to interfere constantly with his college work. By the middle of his senior year he was so loaded with conditions that it was only Geary's unwearied coaching that pulled him through at all—as Vandover knew it would, for that matter.

Vandover returned to San Francisco when he was twenty-two. It was astonishing; he had gone away a pimply, overgrown boy, raw and callow as a fledgling, constrained in society, diffident, awkward. Now he returned, a tall, well-formed Harvardian, as careful as a woman in the matter of dress, very refined in his manners. Besides, he was a delightful conversationalist. His father was rejoiced; every one declared he was a charming fellow.

They were right. Vandover was at his best at this time; it was undeniable that he had great talent, but he was so modest about it that few knew how clever he really was.

He went out to dinners and receptions and began to move a little in society. He became very popular: the men liked him because he was so unaffected, so straightforward, and the women because he was so respectful and so deferential.

He had no vices. He had gone through the ordeal of college life and had come out without contracting any habit more serious than a vague distaste for responsibility, and an inclination to shirk disagreeable duties. Cards he never thought of. It was rare that he drank so much as a glass of beer.

However, he had come back to a great disappointment. Business in San Francisco had entered upon a long period of decline, and values were decreasing; for ten years rents had been sagging lower and lower. At the same time the interest on loans and insurances had increased, and real estate was brought to a standstill; one spoke bitterly of a certain great monopoly that was ruining both the city and state. Vandover's father had suffered with the rest, and now told his son that he could not at this time afford to send him to Paris. He would have to wait for better times.

At first this was a sharp grief to Vandover; for years he had looked forward to an artist's life in the Quarter. For a time he was inconsolable, then at length readjusted himself good-naturedly to suit the new order of things with as little compunction as before, when he had entered Harvard. He found that he could be contented in almost any environment, the weakness, the certain pliability of his character easily fitting itself into new grooves, reshaping itself to suit new circumstances. He prevailed upon his father to allow him to have a downtown studio. In a little while he was perfectly happy again.

Vandover's love for his art was keen. On the whole he kept pretty steadily to his work, spending a good six hours at his easel every day, very absorbed over the picture in hand. He was working up into large canvases the sketches he had made along the Maine coast, great, empty expanses of sea, sky, and sand-dune, full of wind and sun. They were really admirable. He even sold one of them. The Old Gentleman was delighted, signed him a check for twenty dollars, and told him that in three years he could afford to send him abroad.

In the meanwhile Vandover set himself to enjoy the new life. Little by little his "set" formed around him; Geary and young Haight, of course, and some half dozen young men of the city: young lawyers, medical students, and clerks in insurance offices. As Vandover thus began to see the different

phases of that life which lay beyond the limits of the college, he perceived more and more clearly that he was an exception among men for his temperance, his purity, and his clean living.

At their clubs and in their smoking-rooms he heard certain practices, which he had always believed to be degrading and abominable, discussed with shouts of laughter. Those matters which until now he had regarded with an almost sacred veneration were subjects for immense jokes. A few years ago he would have been horrified at it all, but the fine quality of this first sensitiveness had been blunted since his experience at college. He tolerated these things in his friends now.

Gradually Vandover allowed his ideas and tastes to be moulded by this new order of things. He assumed the manners of these young men of the city, very curious to see for himself the other lower side of their life that began after midnight in the private rooms of fast cafés and that was continued in the heavy musk-laden air of certain parlours amid the rustle of heavy silks.

Slowly the fascination of this thing grew upon him until it mounted to a veritable passion. His strong artist's imagination began to be filled with a world of charming sensuous pictures.

He commenced to chafe under his innate respect and deference for women, to resent and to despise it. As the desire of vice, the blind, reckless desire of the male, grew upon him, he set himself to destroy this barrier that had so long stood in his way. He knew that it was the wilful and deliberate corruption of part of that which was best in him; he was sorry for it, but persevered, nevertheless, ashamed of his old-time timidity, his ignorance, his boyish purity.

For a second time the animal in him, the perverse evil brute, awoke and stirred. The idea of resistance hardly occurred to Vandover; it would be hard, it would be disagreeable to resist, and Vandover had not accustomed himself to the performance of hard, disagreeable duties. They were among the unpleasant things that he shirked. He told himself that later on, when he had grown older and steadier and had profited by experience and knowledge of the world, when he was stronger, in a word, he would curb the thing and restrain it. He saw no danger in such a course. It was what other men did with impunity.

In company with Geary and young Haight he had come to frequent a certain one of the fast cafés of the city. Here he met and became acquainted with a girl called Flossie. It was the opportunity for which he was waiting, and he seized it at once.

This time there was no recoil of conscience, no shame, no remorse; he even felt a better estimation of himself, that self-respect that comes with wider experiences and with larger views of life. He told himself that all men should at one time see certain phases of the world; it rounded out one's life. After all, one had to be a man of the world. Those men only were perverted who allowed themselves to be corrupted by such vice.

Thus it was that Vandover, by degrees, drifted into the life of a certain class of the young men of the city. Vice had no hold on him. The brute had grown larger in him, but he knew that he had the creature in hand. He was its master, and only on rare occasions did he permit himself to gratify its demands, feeding its abominable hunger from that part of him which he knew to be the purest, the cleanest, and the best.

Three years passed in this fashion.

Chapter Three

Vandover had decided at lunch that day that he would not go back to work at his studio in the afternoon, but would stay at home instead and read a very interesting story about two men who had bought a wrecked opium ship for fifty thousand dollars, and had afterward discovered that she contained only a few tins of the drug. He was curious to see how it turned out; the studio was a long way downtown, the day was a little cold, and he felt that he would enjoy a little relaxation. Anyhow, he meant to stay at home and put in the whole afternoon on a good novel.

But even when he had made up his mind to do this he did not immediately get out his book and settle down to it. After lunch he loitered about the house while his meal digested, feeling very comfortable and contented. He strummed his banjo a little and played over upon the piano the three pieces he had picked up: two were polkas, and the third, the air of a topical song; he always played the three together and in the same sequence. Then he strolled up to his room, and brushed his hair for a while, trying to make it lie very flat and smooth. After this he went out to look at Mr. Corkle, the terrier, and let him run a bit in the garden; then he felt as though he must have a smoke, and so went back to his room and filled his pipe. When it was going well, he took down his book and threw himself into a deep leather chair, only to jump up again to put on his smoking-jacket. All at once he became convinced that he must have something to eat while he read, and so went to the kitchen and got himself some apples and a huge slice of fresh bread. Ever since Vandover was a little boy he had loved fresh bread and apples. Through the windows of the dining-room he saw Mr. Corkle digging up great holes in the geranium beds. He went out and abused him and finally let him come back into the house and took him upstairs with him.

Then at last he settled down to his novel, in the very comfortable leather chair, before a little fire, for the last half of August is cold in San Francisco. The room was warm and snug, the fresh bread and apples were delicious, the good tobacco in his pipe purred like a sleeping kitten, and his novel was interesting and well written. He felt calm and soothed and perfectly content, and took in the pleasure of the occasion with the lazy complacency of a drowsing cat.

Vandover was self-indulgent—he loved these sensuous pleasures, he loved to eat good things, he loved to be warm, he loved to sleep. He hated to be bored and worried—he liked to have a good time.

At about half-past four o'clock he came to a good stopping-place in his book; the two men had got to quarrelling, and his interest flagged a little. He pushed Mr. Corkle off his lap and got up yawning and went to the window.

Vandover's home was on California Street not far from Franklin. It was a large frame house of two stories; all the windows in the front were bay. The front door was directly in the middle between the windows of the parlour and those of the library, while over the vestibule was a sort of balcony that no one ever thought of using. The house was set in a large well-kept yard. The lawn was pretty; an enormous eucalyptus tree grew at one corner. Nearer to the house were magnolia and banana trees growing side by side with pines and firs. Humming-birds built in these, and one could hear their curious little warbling mingling with the hoarse chirp of the English sparrows which nested under the eaves. The back yard was separated from the lawn by a high fence of green lattice-work. The hens and chickens were kept here and two roosters, one of which crowed every time a cable-car passed the house. On the door cut through the lattice-fence was a sign, "Look Out for the Dog." Close to the unused barn stood an immense windmill with enormous arms; when the wind blew in the afternoon the sails whirled about at a surprising speed, pumping up water from the artesian well sunk beneath. There was a small conservatory where the orchids were kept. Altogether, it was a charming place. However, adjoining it was a huge vacant lot with cows in it. It was full of dry weeds and heaps of ashes, while around it was an enormous fence painted with signs of cigars, patent bitters, and soap.

Vandover stood at a front window and looked out on a rather dreary prospect. The inevitable afternoon trades had been blowing hard since three, strong and brisk from the ocean, driving hard through the Golden Gate and filling the city with a taint of salt. Now the fog was coming in; Vandover could see great patches of it sweeping along between him and the opposite houses. All the eucalyptus trees were dripping, and occasionally there came the faint moan of the fog-horn out at the heads. He could see up the street for nearly two miles as it climbed over Nob Hill. It was almost deserted; a cable-car now and then crawled up and down its length, and at times a delivery wagon rattled across it; but that was about all. On the opposite sidewalk two boys and a girl were coasting downhill on their roller-skates and their brake-wagons. The cable in its slot kept up an incessant burr and clack. The whole view was rather forlorn, and Vandover turned his back on it, taking up his book again.

About five o'clock his father came home from his office. "Hello!" said he, looking into the room; "aren't you home a little early to-day? Ah, I thought you weren't going to bring that dog into the house any more. I wish you wouldn't, son; he gets hair and fleas about everywhere."

"All right, governor," answered Vandover. "I'll take him out. Come along, Cork."

"But aren't you home earlier than usual to-day?" persisted his father as Vandover got up.

"Yes," said Vandover, "I guess I am, a little."

After supper the same evening when Vandover came downstairs, drawing on his gloves, his father looked over his paper, saying pleasantly:

"Well, where are you going to-night?"

"I'm going to see my girl," said Vandover, smiling; then foreseeing the usual question, he added, "I'll be home about eleven, I guess."

"Got your latch-key?" asked the Old Gentleman, as he always did when Vandover went out.

"Yep," called back Vandover as he opened the door. "I'll not forget it again. Good-night, governor."

Vandover used to call on Turner Ravis about twice a week; people said they were engaged. This was not so.

Vandover had met Miss Ravis some two years before. For a time the two had been sincerely in love with each other, and though there was never any talk of marriage between them, they seemed to have some sort of tacit understanding. But by this time Vandover had somehow outgrown the idea of marrying Turner. He still kept up the fiction, persuaded that Turner must understand the way things had come to be. However, he was still very fond of her; she was a frank, sweet-tempered girl and very pretty, and it was delightful to have her care for him.

Vandover could not shut his eyes to the fact that young Haight was very seriously in love with Turner. But he was sure that Turner preferred him to his chum. She was too sincere, too frank, too conscientious to practise any deception on him.

There was quite a party at the Ravises' house that evening when Vandover arrived. Young Haight was there, of course, and Charlie Geary. Besides Turner herself there was Henrietta Vance, a stout, pretty girl, with pop eyes and a little nose, who laughed all the time and who was very popular. These were all part of Vandover's set; they called each other by their first names and went everywhere together. Almost every Saturday evening they got together at Turner's house and played whist, or euchre, or sometimes even poker. "Just for love," as Turner said.

When Vandover came in they were all talking at the same time, disputing about a little earthquake that had occurred the night before. Henrietta Vance declared that it had happened early in the morning.

"*Wasn't* it just about midnight, Van?" cried Turner.

"I don't know," answered Vandover. "It didn't wake me up. I didn't even know there was one."

"Well, I know I heard our clock strike two just about half an hour afterward," protested young Haight.

"Oh, it was almost five o'clock when it came," cried Henrietta Vance.

"Well, now, you're *all* off," said Charlie Geary. "I know just when she quaked to the fraction of a minute, because it stopped our hall clock at just a little after three."

They were silent. It was an argument which was hard to contradict. By and by, young Haight declared, "There must have been two of them then, because—"

"How about whist or euchre or whatever it is to be?" said Charlie Geary, addressing Turner and interrupting in an annoying way that was peculiar to him. "Can't we start in now that Van has come?" They played euchre for a while, but Geary did not like the game, and by and by suggested poker.

"Well—if it's only just for love," said Turner, "because, you know, mamma doesn't like it any other way."

At ten o'clock Geary said, "Let's quit after this hand round—what do you say?" The rest were willing and so they all took account of their chips after the next deal. Geary was protesting against his poor luck. Honestly he hadn't held better than three tens more than twice during the evening. It was Henrietta Vance who took in everything; did one ever *see* anything to beat her luck? "the funniest thing!"

They began to do tricks with the cards. Young Haight showed them a very good trick by which he could make the pack break every time at the ace of clubs. Vandover exclaimed: "Lend me a silk hat and ninety dollars and I'll show you the queerest trick you ever saw," which sent Henrietta Vance off into shrieks of laughter. Then Geary took the cards out of young Haight's hands, asking them if they knew *this* trick.

Turner said yes, she knew it, but the others did not, and Geary showed it to them. It was interminable. Henrietta Vance chose a card and put it back into the deck. Then the deck was shuffled and divided into three piles. After this Geary made a mental calculation, selected one of these piles, shuffled it, and gave it back to her, asking her if she saw her card in it; then more shuffling and dividing until their interest and patience were quite exhausted. When Geary finally produced a jack of hearts and demanded triumphantly if that was her card, Henrietta began to laugh and declared she had forgotten *what* card she chose. Geary said he would do the trick all over for her. At this, however, they all cried out, and he had to give it up, very irritated at Henrietta's stupidity.

Vexed at the ill success of this first trick, he retired a little from their conversation, puzzling over the cards, thinking out new tricks. Every now and then he came back among them, going about from one to another, holding out the deck and exclaiming, "Choose any card—choose any card."

After a while they all adjourned to the dining-room and Turner and Vandover went out into the kitchen, foraging among the drawers and shelves. They came back bringing with them a box of sardines, a tin of *paté*, three quart bottles of blue-ribbon beer, and what Vandover called "devilish-ham" sandwiches.

"Now do we want *tamales* to go with these?" said Turner, as she spread the lunch on the table. Henrietta Vance cried out joyfully at this, and young Haight volunteered to go out to get them. "Get six," Turner cried out after him. "Henrietta can always eat two. Hurry up, and we won't eat till you get back."

While he was gone Turner got out some half-dozen glasses for their beer. "Do you know," she said as she set the glasses on the table, "the funniest thing happened this morning to mamma. It was at breakfast; she had just drunk a glass of water and was holding the glass in her hand like this"—Turner took one of the thin beer glasses in her hand to show them how—"and was talking to pa, when all at once the glass broke right straight around a ring, just below the brim, you know, and fell all—" On a sudden Turner uttered a shrill exclamation; the others started up; the very glass she held in her hand at the moment cracked and broke in precisely the manner she was describing. A narrow ring snapped from the top, dropping on the floor, breaking into a hundred bits.

Turner drew in a long breath, open-mouthed, her hand in the air still holding the body of the glass that remained in her fingers. They all began to exclaim over the wonder.

"Well, did you ever in all your *life*?" shouted Miss Vance, breaking into a peal of laughter. Geary cried out, "Cæsar's ghost!" and Vandover swore under his breath.

"If that isn't the strangest thing I ever saw!" cried Turner. "*Isn't* that funny—why—oh! I'm going *to try it with another glass*!" But the second glass remained intact. Geary recovered from his surprise and tried to explain how it could happen.

"It was the heat from your fingers and the glass was cold, you know," he said again and again.

But the strangeness of the thing still held them. Turner set down the glass with the others and dropped into a chair, letting her hands fall in her lap, looking into their faces, nodding her head and shutting her lips:

"Ah, *no*," she said after a while. "That *is* funny. It kind of scares one." She was actually pale.

"Oh, there's Dolly Haight!" cried Henrietta Vance as the door bell rang. They all rushed to the door, running and scrambling, eager to tell the news. Young Haight stood bewildered on the door mat in the vestibule, his arms full of brown-paper packages, while they recounted the marvel. They all spoke at once, holding imaginary beer glasses toward him in their outstretched hands. Geary, however, refused to be carried away by their excitement, and one heard him from time to time repeating, between their ejaculations, "It was the heat from her fingers, you know, and the glass was cold."

Young Haight was confused, incredulous; he could not at first make out what *had* happened.

"Well, just come and *look* at the broken *glass* on the *floor*," shouted Turner decisively, dragging him into the dining-room. They waited, breathless, to hear what he would say. He looked at the broken glass and then into their faces. Then he suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah, you're joking me."

"No, honestly," protested Vandover, "that was just the way it happened."

It was some little time before they could get over their impression of queerness, but by and by Geary cried out that the *tamales* were getting cold. They settled down to their lunch, and the first thing young Haight did was to cut his lip on the edge of the broken glass. Turner had set it down with the others and he had inadvertently filled it for himself.

It was a trifling cut. Turner fetched some court-plaster, and his lip was patched up. For all that, it bled quite a little. He was very embarrassed; he kept his handkerchief to his mouth and told them repeatedly to go on with their lunch and not to mind him.

As soon as they were eating and drinking they began to be very jolly, and Vandover was especially good-humoured and entertaining. He made Henrietta Vance shout with laughter by pretending that the olive in his *tamale* was a green hen's egg.

About half-past ten young Haight rose from the table saying he thought it was about time to say good-night. "Don't be in a hurry," said Turner. "It's early yet." After that, however, they broke up very quickly.

Before he left Vandover saw Turner in the dining-room alone for a minute.

"Will I see you at church to-morrow?" he asked, as she held his overcoat for him.

"I don't know, Van," she answered. "You know Henrietta is going to stay all night with me, and I think she will want me to go home with her to-morrow morning and then stay to dinner with her. But I'm going to early communion to-morrow morning; why can't you meet me there?"

"Why, I can," answered Vandover, settling his collar. "I should like to very much."

"Well, then," she replied, "you can meet me in front of the church at half-past seven o'clock."

"Hey, break away there!" cried Geary from the front door. "Come along, Van, if you are going with us."

Turner let Vandover kiss her before they joined the others. "I'll see you at seven-thirty to-morrow morning," he said as he went away.

The three young men went off down the street, arm in arm, smoking their cigars and cigarettes. As soon as they were alone, Charlie Geary began to tell the other two of everything he had been doing since he had last seen them.

"Well, sir," he said as he took an arm of each, "well, sir, I had a fine sleep last night; went to bed at ten and never woke up till half-past eight this morning. Ah, you bet I needed it, though. I've been working like a slave this week. You know I take my law-examinations in about ten days. I'll pass all right. I'm right up to the handle in everything. I don't believe the judge could stick me anywhere in the subject of torts."

"Say, boys," said Vandover, pausing and looking at his watch, "it isn't very late; let's go downtown and have some oysters."

"That's a good idea," answered young Haight. "How about you, Charlie?"

Geary said he was willing. "Ah," he added, "you ought to have seen the beefsteak I had this evening at the Grillroom." And as they rode downtown he told them of the steak in question. "I had a little mug of ale with it, too, and a dish of salad. Ah, it went great."

They decided after some discussion that they would go to the Imperial.

Chapter Four

The Imperial was a resort not far from the corner of Sutter and Kearney streets, a few doors below a certain well-known drug store, in one window of which was a showcase full of live snakes.

The front of the Imperial was painted white, and there was a cigar-stand in the vestibule of the main entrance. At the right of this main entrance was another smaller one, a ladies' entrance, on the frosted pane of which one read, "Oyster Cafe."

The main entrance opened directly into the barroom. It was a handsome room, paved with marble flags. To the left was the bar, whose counter was a single slab of polished redwood. Behind it was a huge, plate-glass mirror, balanced on one side by the cash-register and on the other by a statuette of the Diving Girl in tinted bisque. Between the two were pyramids of glasses and bottles, liqueur flasks in wicker cases, and a great bouquet of sweet-peas.

The three bartenders, in clean linen coats and aprons, moved about here and there, opening bottles, mixing drinks, and occasionally turning to punch the indicator of the register.

On the other side of the room, facing the bar, hung a large copy of a French picture representing a *Sabbath*, witches, goats, and naked girls whirling through the air. Underneath it was the lunch counter, where clam-fritters, the specialty of the place, could be had four afternoons in the week.

Elsewhere were nickel-in-the-slot machines, cigar-lighters, a vase of wax flowers under glass, and a racing chart setting forth the day's odds, weights, and entries. On the end wall over the pantry-slides was a second "barroom" picture, representing the ladies of a harem at their bath.

But its "private rooms" were the chief attraction of the Imperial. These were reached by going in through the smaller door to the right of the main vestibule. Any one coming in through this entrance found himself in a long and narrow passage. On the right of this passage were eight private rooms, very small, and open at the top as the law required. Half-way down its length the passage grew wider. Here the rooms were on both sides and were much larger than those in front.

It was this part of the Imperial that was most frequented, and that had made its reputation. In the smaller rooms in front one had beer and Welsh rabbits; in the larger rooms, champagne and terrapin.

Vandover, Haight, and Geary came in through the ladies' entrance of the Imperial at about eleven o'clock, going slowly down the passage, looking into each of the little rooms, searching for one that was empty. All at once Vandover, who was in the lead, cried out:

"Well, if here isn't that man Ellis, drinking whisky by himself. Bah! a man that will drink whisky all *alone*! Glad to see you just the same, Bandy; move along, will you—give a man some room."

"Hello, hello, Bandy!" cried Geary and young Haight, hitting him in the back, while Geary added: "How long have you been down here? *I've* just come from making a call with the boys. Had a fine time; what are you drinking, whisky? *I'm* going to have something to eat. Didn't have much of a lunch to-day, but you ought to have seen the steak I had at the Grillroom—as thick as that, and tender! Oh, it went great! Here, hang my coat up there on that side, will you?"

Bancroft Ellis was one of the young men of the city with whom the three fellows had become acquainted just after their return from college. For the most part, they met him at downtown restaurants, in the foyers and vestibules of the theatres, on Kearney Street of a Saturday afternoon, or, as now, in the little rooms of the Imperial, where he was a recognized habitué and where he invariably called for whisky, finishing from three to five "ponies" at every sitting. On very rare occasions they saw him in society, at the houses where their "set" was received. At these functions Ellis could never be persuaded to remain in the parlours; he slipped up to the gentlemen's dressing-rooms at the earliest opportunity, and spent the evening silently smoking the cigars and cigarettes furnished by the host. When Vandover and his friends came up between dances, to brush their hair or to rearrange their neckties, they found him enveloped in a blue haze of smoke, his feet on a chair, his shirt bosom broken, and his waistcoat unbuttoned. He would tell them that he was bored and thirsty and ask how

much longer they were going to stay. He knew but few of their friends; his home was in a little town in the interior and he prided himself on being a "Native Son of the Golden West." He was a clerk in an insurance office on California Street, and had never been out of the state.

For the rest he was a good enough fellow and the three others liked him very much. He had a curious passion for facts and statistics, and his pockets were full of little books and cards to which he was constantly referring. He had one of those impossible pocket-diaries, the first half dozen pages loaded with information of every kind printed in blinding type, postal rates to every country in the world, statistics as to population and rates of death, weights and measures, the highest mountains in the world, the greatest depths of the ocean. He kept a little book in his left-hand vest pocket that gave the plan and seating capacity of every theatre in the city, while in the right-hand pocket was a tiny Webster's dictionary which was his especial pride. The calendar for the current year was pasted in the lining of his hat, together with the means to be employed in the resuscitation of a half-drowned person. He also carried about a "Vest Pocket Edition of Popular Information," which had never been of the slightest use to him.

The room in which they were now seated was very small and opened directly upon the passage. On either side of the table was a seat that would hold two, and on the wall opposite the door hung a mirror, its gilt frame enclosed in pink netting. The table itself was covered with a tolerably clean cloth, though it was of coarse linen and rather damp.

There were the usual bottles of olives and pepper sauce, a plate of broken crackers, and a ribbed match-safe of china. The sugar bowl was of plated ware and on it were scratched numberless dates together with the first names of a great many girls, "Nannie," "Ida," "Flossie."

Between the castor bottles was the bill of fare, held by a thin string between two immense leather covers which were stamped with wine merchants' advertisements. Geary reached for this before any of the others, saying at the same time, "Well, what are you going to have? *I'm* going to have a Welsh rabbit and a pint of ale." He looked from one to the other as if demanding whether or no they approved of his choice. He assumed the management of what was going on, advising the others what to have, telling Vandover not to order certain dishes that he liked because it took so long to cook them. He had young Haight ring for the waiter, and when he had come, Geary read off the entire order to him twice over, making sure that he had taken it correctly. "That's what we want all right, all right—isn't it?" he said, looking around at the rest.

The waiter, whose eyes were red from lack of sleep, put down before them a plate of limp, soft shrimps.

"Hello, Toby!" said Vandover.

"Good evening, gentlemen," answered Toby. "Why, good evening, Mr. Vandover; haven't seen you 'round here for some time." He took their order, and as he was going away, Vandover called him back:

"Say, Toby," said he, "has Flossie been around to-night?"

"No," answered Toby, "she hasn't shown up yet. Her running-mate was in about nine, but she went out again right away."

"Well," said Vandover, smiling, "if Flossie comes 'round show her in here, will you?"

The others laughed, and joked him about this, and Vandover settled back in his seat, easing his position.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I like it in here. It's always pleasant and warm and quiet and the service is good and you get such good things to eat."

Now that the young fellows were by themselves, and could relax that restraint, that good breeding and delicacy which had been natural to them in the early part of the evening at the Ravises', their manners changed: they lounged clumsily upon their seats, their legs stretched out, their waistcoats unbuttoned, caring only to be at their ease. Their talk and manners became blunt, rude,

unconstrained, the coarser masculine fibre reasserting itself. With the exception of young Haight they were all profane enough, and it was not very long before their conversation became obscene.

Geary told them how he had spent the afternoon promenading Kearney and Market streets and just where he had gone to get his cocktail and his cigar. "Ah," he added, "you ought to have seen Ida Wade and Bessie Laguna. Oh, Ida was rigged up to beat the band; honestly her *hat* was as broad across as that. You know there's no use talking, she's an awfully handsome girl."

A discussion arose over the girl's virtue. Ellis, Geary, and young Haight maintained that Ida was only fast; Vandover, however, had his doubts.

"For that matter," said Ellis after a while, "I like Bessie Laguna a good deal better than I do Ida."

"Ah, yes," retorted young Haight, "you like Bessie Laguna too much anyhow."

Young Haight had a theory that one should never care in any way for that kind of a girl nor become at all intimate with her.

"The matter of liking her or not liking her," he said, "ought not to enter into the question at all. You are both of you out for a good time and that's all; you have a jolly flirtation with her for an hour or two, and you never see her again. That's the way it ought to be! This idea of getting intimate with that sort of a piece, and trying to get her to care for you, is all wrong."

"Oh," said Vandover deprecatingly, "you take all the pleasure out of it; where does your good time come in if you don't at least pretend that you like the girl and try to make her like you?"

"But don't you see," answered Haight, "what a dreadful thing it would be if a girl like that came to care for you seriously? It isn't the same as if it were a girl of your own class."

"Ah, Dolly, you've got a bean," muttered Ellis, sipping his whisky.

Meanwhile, the Imperial had been filling up; at about eleven the theatres were over, and now the barroom was full of men. They came in by twos and threes and sometimes even by noisy parties of a half dozen or more. The white swing doors of the main entrance flapped back and forth continually, letting out into the street puffs of tepid air tainted with the smell of alcohol. The men entered and ordered their drinks, and leaning their elbows upon the bar continued the conversation they had begun outside. Afterward they passed over to the lunch counter and helped themselves to a plate of stewed tripe or potato salad, eating it in a secluded corner, leaning over so as not to stain their coats. There was a continual clinking of glasses and popping of corks, and at every instant the cash-register clucked and rang its bell.

Between the barroom and the other part of the house was a door hung with blue plush curtains, looped back; the waiters constantly passed back and forth through this, carrying plates of oysters, smoking rarebits, tiny glasses of liqueurs, and goblets of cigars.

All the private rooms opening from either passage were full; the men came in, walking slowly, looking for their friends; but more often, the women and girls passed up and down with a chatter of conversation, a rattle of stiff skirts and petticoats, and a heavy whiff of musk. There was a continual going and coming, a monotonous shuffle of feet and hum of talk. A heavy odorous warmth in which were mingled the smells of sweetened whisky, tobacco, the fumes of cooking, and the scent of perfume, exhaled into the air. A gay and noisy party developed in one of the large back rooms; at every moment one could hear gales of laughter, the rattle of chairs and glassware, mingled with the sounds of men's voices and the little screams and cries of women. Every time the waiter opened the door to deliver an order he let out a momentary torrent of noises.

Girls, habitués of the place, continued to pass the door of the room where Vandover and his friends were seated. Each time a particularly handsome one went by, the four looked out after her, shutting their lips and eyes and nodding their heads.

Young Haight had called for more drinks, ordering, however, mineral water for himself, and Vandover was just telling about posing the female models in a certain life-class to which he belonged, when he looked up and broke off, exclaiming:

"Well, well, here we are at last! How are you, Flossie? Come right in."

Flossie stood in the doorway smiling good-humouredly at them, without a trace of embarrassment or of confusion in her manner. She was an immense girl, quite six feet tall, broad and well-made, in proportion. She was very handsome, full-throated, heavy-eyed, and slow in her movements. Her eyes and mouth, like everything about her, were large, but each time she spoke or smiled, she disclosed her teeth, which were as white, as well-set, and as regular as the rows of kernels on an ear of green corn. In her ears were small yellow diamonds, the only jewellery she wore. There was no perceptible cosmetic on her face, which had a clean and healthy look as though she had just given it a vigorous washing.

She wore a black hat with a great flare to the brim on one side. It was trimmed very dashingly with black feathers, imitation jet, and a little puff of plush—robin's-egg blue. Her dress was of rough, black camel's hair, tailor-made, and but for the immense balloon sleeves, absolutely plain. It was cut in such a way that from neck to waist there was no break, the buttons being on the shoulder and under the arm. The skirt was full and stiff, and without the least trimming. Everything was black—hat, dress, gloves—and the effect was of a simplicity and severity so pronounced as to be very striking.

However, around her waist she wore as a belt a thick rope of oxidized silver, while her shoes, or rather walking slippers, were of white canvas.

She belonged to that class of women who are not to know one's last name or address, and whose hate and love are equally to be dreaded. There was upon her face the unmistakable traces of a ruined virtue and a vanished innocence. Her slightest action suggested her profession; as soon as she removed her veil and gloves it was as though she were partially undressed, and her uncovered face and hands seemed to be only portions of her nudity.

The general conception of women of her class is a painted and broken wreck. Flossie radiated health; her eyes were clear, her nerves steady, her flesh hard and even as a child's. There hung about her an air of cleanliness, of freshness, of good nature, of fine, high spirits, while with every movement she exhaled a delicious perfume that was not only musk, but that seemed to come alike from her dress, her hair, her neck, her very flesh and body.

Vandover was no longer the same as he had been during his college days. He was familiar now with this odour of abandoned women, this foul sweet savour of the great city's vice, that quickened his breath and that sent his heart knocking at his throat. It was the sensitive artist nature in him that responded instantly to anything sensuously attractive. Each kind and class of beautiful women could arouse in Vandover passions of equal force, though of far different kind. Turner Ravis influenced him upon his best side, calling out in him all that was cleanest, finest, and most delicate. Flossie appealed only to the animal and the beast in him, the evil, hideous brute that made instant answer.

"What will you take, Flossie?" asked Vandover, as she settled herself among them. "We are all drinking beer except Ellis. He's filling up with whisky." But Flossie never drank. It was one of the peculiarities for which she was well known.

"I don't want either," she answered, and turning to the waiter, she added, "You can bring me some Apollinaris water, Toby."

Flossie betrayed herself as soon as she spoke, the effect of her appearance was spoiled. Her voice was hoarse, a low-pitched rasp, husky, throaty, and full of brutal, vulgar modulations.

"Smoke, Flossie?" said Geary, pushing his cigarette case across to her. Flossie took a cigarette, rolled it to make it loose, and smoked it while she told them how she had once tried to draw up the smoke through her nose as it came out between her lips.

"And honestly, boys," she growled, "it made me that sick that I just had to go to bed."

"Who is the crowd out back?" asked Geary for the sake of saying something. Flossie embarrassed them all a little, and conversation with girls of her class was difficult.

"Oh, that's May and Nannie with some men from a banquet at the Palace Hotel," she answered.

The talk dragged along little by little and Flossie began badgering young Haight. "Say, you over there," she exclaimed, "what's the matter with you? You don't say anything."

Young Haight blushed and answered very much embarrassed: "Oh, I'm just listening." He was anxious to get away. He got up and reached for his hat and coat, saying with a good-natured smile: "Well, boys and girls, I think I shall have to leave you."

"Don't let me frighten you away," said Flossie, laughing.

"Oh, no," he answered, trying to hide his embarrassment, "I have to go anyhow."

While the others were saying good night to him and asking when they should see him again, Flossie leaned over to him, crying out, "Good night!" All at once, and before he knew what she was about, she kissed him full on the mouth. He started sharply at this, but was not angry, simply pulling away from her, blushing, very embarrassed, and more and more anxious to get away. Toby, the waiter, appeared at their door.

"That last was on me, you know," said young Haight, intercepting Vandover and settling for the round of drinks.

"Hello!" exclaimed Toby, "what's the matter with your lip?"

"I cut it a little while ago on a broken glass," answered young Haight. "Is it bleeding again?" he added, putting two fingers on his lips.

"It is sure enough," said Geary. "Here," he went on, wetting the corner of a napkin from the water bottle, "hold that on it."

The others began to laugh. "Flossie did that," Vandover explained to Toby. Ellis was hastily looking through his pockets, fumbling about among his little books.

"I had something here," he kept muttering, "if I can only *find* it, that told just what to do when you cut yourself with glass. There may be glass *in* it, you know."

"Oh, that's all right, that's all right," exclaimed young Haight, now altogether disconcerted. "It don't amount to anything."

"I tell you what," observed Geary; "get some court-plaster at the snake doctor's just above here."

"No, no, that's all right," returned young Haight, moving off. "Good night. I'll see you again pretty soon."

He went away. Ellis, who was still searching through his little books, suddenly uttered an exclamation. He leaned out into the passage, crying: "The half of a hot onion; tie it right on the cut." But Haight had already gone. "You see," explained Ellis, "that draws out any little particles of glass. Look at this," he added, reading an item just below the one he had found. "You can use cigar ashes for eczema."

Flossie nodded her head at him, smiling and saying: "Well, the next time I have eczema I will remember that."

Flossie left them a little after this, joining Nannie and May in the larger room that held the noisy party. The three fellows had another round of drinks.

All the evening Ellis had been drinking whisky. Now he astonished the others by suddenly calling for beer. He persisted in drinking it out of the celery glass, which he emptied at a single pull. Then Vandover had claret-punches all round, protesting that his mouth felt dry as a dust-bin. Geary at length declared that he felt pretty far gone, adding that he was in the humour for having "a high old time."

"Say, boys," he exclaimed, bringing his hand down on the table, "what do you say that we all go to every joint in town, and wind up at the Turkish baths? We'll have a regular *time*. Let's see now how much money I have."

Thereat they all took account of their money. Vandover had fourteen dollars, but he owed for materials at his art dealer's, and so put away eight of it in an inside pocket. The others followed his example, each one reserving five dollars for immediate use.

"That will be one dollar for the Hammam," said Geary, "and four dollars apiece for drinks. You can get all we want on four dollars." They had a last claret-punch and, having settled with Toby, went out.

Coming out into the cold night air from the warm interior of the Imperial affected Vandover and Geary in a few minutes. But apparently nothing could affect Ellis, neither whisky, claret-punch nor beer. He walked steadily between Vandover and Geary, linking an arm in each of theirs.

These two became very drunk almost at once. At every minute Vandover would cry out, "Yee-ee-*ow*! Thash way I feel, jush like that." Geary made a "Josh" that was a masterpiece, the success of the occasion. It consisted in exclaiming from time to time, "Cherries are ripe!" This was funny. It seemed to have some ludicrous, hidden double-meaning that was irresistible. It stuck to them all the evening; when a girl passed them on Kearney Street and Geary cried out at her that "Cherries were ripe!" it threw them all into spasms of laughter.

They went first to the Palace Garden near the Tivoli Theatre, where Geary and Vandover had beer and Ellis a whisky cocktail. The performance was just finishing, and they voted that they were not at all amused at a lean, overworked girl whom they saw performing a song and dance through a blue haze of tobacco smoke; so they all exclaimed, "Cherries are ripe!" and tramped out again to visit the Luxembourg. The beer began to go against Vandover's stomach by this time, but he forced it down his throat, shutting his eyes. Then they said they would go to the toughest place in town, "Steve Casey's"; this was on a side-street. The walls were covered with yellowed photographs of once-famous pugilists and old-time concert-hall singers. There was sand on the floor, and in the dancing room at the back, where nobody danced, a jaded young man was banging out polkas and quick-steps at a cheap piano.

At the Crystal Palace, where they all had shandy-gaff, they met one of Ellis's friends, a young fellow of about twenty. He was stone deaf, and in consequence had become dumb; but for all that he was very eager to associate with the young men of the city and would not hear of being separated and set apart with the other deaf mutes. He was very pleased to meet them and joined them at once. They all knew him pretty well and called him the "Dummy."

In the course of the evening the patty was seen at nearly every bar and saloon in the neighbourhood of Market and Kearney streets. Geary and Vandover were very drunk indeed. Vandover was having a glorious time; he was not silent a minute, talking, laughing, and singing, and crying out continually, "Cherries are ripe!" When he could think of nothing else to say he would exclaim, "Yee-ee-*ow*! Thash way I feel."

For two hours they drank steadily. Vandover was in a dreadful condition; the Dummy got so drunk that he could talk, a peculiarity which at times had been known to occur to him. As will sometimes happen, Geary sobered up a little and at the "Grotto" bathed his head and face in the washroom. After this he became pretty steady, he stopped drinking, and tried to assume the management of the party, ordering their drinks for them, and casting up the amount of the check.

About two o'clock they returned toward the Luxembourg, staggering and swaying. The Luxembourg was a sort of German restaurant under a theatre where one could get some very good German dishes. There Vandover had beer and sauerkraut, but Ellis took more whisky. The Dummy continued to make peculiar sounds in his throat, half-noise, half-speech, and Geary gravely informed the waiter that cherries were ripe.

All at once Ellis was drunk, collapsing in a moment. The skin around his eyes was purple and swollen, the pupils themselves were contracted, and their range of vision seemed to stop at about a yard in front of his face. Suddenly he swept glasses, plates, castor, knives, forks, and all from off the table with a single movement of his arm.

They all jumped up, sober in a minute, knowing that a scene was at hand. The waiter rushed at Ellis, but Ellis knocked him down and tried to stamp on his face. Vandover and the Dummy tried to hold his arms and pull him off. He turned on the Dummy in a silent frenzy of rage and brought his knuckles down upon his head again and again. For the moment Ellis could neither hear, nor see, nor speak; he was blind, dumb, fighting drunk, and his fighting was not the fighting of Vandover.

"Get in here and help, will you?" panted Vandover to Geary, as he struggled with Ellis. "He can kill people when he's like this. Oh, damn the whisky anyhow! Look out—don't let him get that knife! Grab his other arm, there! now, kick his feet from under him! Oh, kick hard! Sit on his legs; there now. Ah! Hell! he's bitten me! Look out! here comes the bouncer!"

The bouncer and three other waiters charged into them while they were struggling on the floor. Vandover was twice knocked down and the Dummy had his lip split. Ellis struggled to his feet again and, still silent, fought them all alike, a fine line of froth gathering at the corners of his lips.

When they were finally ejected, and pulled themselves together in the street outside, Geary had disappeared. He had left them during the struggle with Ellis and had gone home. Ah, you bet he wasn't going to stay any longer with the crowd when they got like that. If Ellis was fool enough to get as drunk as that it was his own lookout. *He* wasn't going to stay and get thrown out of any saloon; ah, no, you bet he was too clever for that. He was sober enough now and would go home to bed and get a good sleep.

The fight in the saloon had completely sobered the rest of them. Ellis was tractable enough again, and very sorry for having got them into such a row. Vandover was horribly sick at his stomach.

The three locked arms and started slowly toward the Turkish baths. On their way they stopped at an all-night drug store and had some seltzer.

Vandover had about three hours' sleep that night. He was awakened by the attendant shaking his arm and crying:

"Half-past six, sir."

"Huh!" he exclaimed, starting up. "What about half-past six? I don't want to get up."

"Told me to call you, sir, at half-past six; quarter to seven now."

"Oh, all right, very well," answered Vandover. He turned away his face on the pillow, while a wretched feeling of nausea crept over him; every movement of his head made it ache to bursting. Behind his temples the blood throbbed and pumped like the knocking of hammers. His mouth would have been dry but for a thick slime that filled it and that tasted of oil. He felt weak, his hands trembled, his forehead was cold and seemed wet and sticky.

He could recall hardly anything of the previous night. He remembered, however, of going to the Imperial and of seeing Flossie, and he *did* remember at last of leaving word to be called at half-past six.

He got up without waking the other two fellows and took a plunge in the cold tank, dressed very slowly, and went out. The stores were all closed, the streets were almost deserted. He walked to the nearest uptown car-line and took an outside seat, feeling better and steadier for every moment of the sharp morning air.

Van Ness Avenue was very still. It was about half-past seven. The curtains were down in all the houses; here and there a servant could be seen washing down the front steps. In the vestibules of some of the smaller houses were loaves of French bread and glass jars of cream, while near them lay the damp twisted roll of the morning's paper. There was everywhere a great chittering of sparrows, and the cable-cars, as yet empty, trundled down the cross streets, the conductors cleaning the windows and metal work. From far down at one end of the avenue came the bells of the Catholic Cathedral ringing for early mass; and a respectable-looking second girl hurried past him carrying her prayer-book. At the other end of the avenue was a blue vista of the bay, the great bulk of Mount Tamalpais rearing itself out of the water like a waking lion.

In front of the little church Turner was waiting for him. She was dressed very prettily and the cold morning air had given her a fine colour.

"You don't look more than half awake," she said, as Vandover came up. "It was awfully good of you to come. Oh, Van, you look dreadfully. It is too bad to make you get up so early."

"No, no," protested Vandover. "I was only too glad to come. I didn't sleep well last night. I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"I've only just come," answered Turner. "But I think it is time to go in."

The little organ was muttering softly to itself as they entered. It was very still otherwise. The morning sun struck through the stained windows and made pretty lights about the altar; besides themselves there were some half dozen other worshippers. The little organ ceased with a long droning sigh, and the minister in his white robes turned about, facing his auditors, and in the midst of a great silence opened the communion service with the words: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbours—"

As Vandover rose with the rest the blood rushed to his head and a feeling of nausea and exhaustion, the dregs of his previous night's debauch, came over him again for a moment, so that he took hold of the back of the pew in front of him to steady himself.

Chapter Five

In the afternoons Vandover worked in his studio, which was on Sacramento Street, but in the mornings he was accustomed to study in the life-class at the School of Design.

This was on California Street over the Market, an immense room partitioned by enormous wooden screens into alcoves, where the still-life classes worked, painting carrots, grapes, and dusty brown stone-jugs.

All about were a multitude of casts, the fighting gladiator, the discobulus, the Venus of Milo, and hundreds of smaller pieces, masks, torsos, and the heads of the Parthenon horses. Flattened paint-tubes and broken bits of charcoal littered the floor and cluttered the chairs and shelves. A strong odour of turpentine and fixative was in the air, mingled with the stronger odours of linseed oil and sour, stale French bread.

Every afternoon a portrait class of some thirty-odd assembled in one of the larger alcoves near the door. Several of the well-known street characters of the city had posed for this class, and at one time Father Elphick, the white-haired, bare-headed vegetarian, with his crooked stick and white clothes, had sat to it for his head.

Vandover was probably the most promising member of the school. His style was sketchy, conscientious, and full of strength and decision. He worked in large lines, broad surfaces and masses of light or shade. His colour was good, running to purples, reds, and admirable greens, full of bitumen and raw sienna.

Though he had no idea of composition, he was clever enough to acknowledge it. His finished pictures were broad reaches of landscape, deserts, shores, and moors in which he placed solitary figures of men or animals in a way that was very effective—as, for instance, a great strip of shore and in the foreground the body of a drowned sailor; a lion drinking in the midst of an immense Sahara; or, one that he called "The Remnant of an Army," a dying war horse wandering on an empty plain, the saddle turned under his belly, his mane and tail snarled with burrs.

Some time before there had come to him the idea for a great picture. It was to be his first masterpiece, his salon picture when he should get to Paris. A British cavalryman and his horse, both dying of thirst and wounds, were to be lost on a Soudanese desert, and in the middle distance on a ridge of sand a lion should be drawing in upon them, crouched on his belly, his tail stiff, his lower jaw hanging. The melodrama of the old English "Home Book of Art" still influenced Vandover. He was in love with this idea for a picture and had determined to call it "The Last Enemy." The effects he wished to produce were isolation and intense heat; as to the soldier, he was as yet undecided whether to represent him facing death resignedly, calmly, or grasping the barrel of his useless rifle, determined to fight to the last.

Vandover loved to paint and to draw. He was perfectly contented when his picture was "coming right," and when he felt sure he was doing good work. He often did better than he thought he would, but never so well as he thought he *could*.

However, it bored him to work very hard, and when he did not enjoy his work he stopped it at once. He would tell himself on these occasions that one had to be in the mood and that he should wait for the inspiration, although he knew very well how absurd such excuses were, how false and how pernicious.

That certain little weakness of Vandover's character, his self-indulgence, *had* brought him to such a point that he thought he had to be amused. If his painting amused him, very good; if not, he found something else that would.

On the following Monday as he worked in the life-class, Vandover was thinking, or, rather, trying not to think, of what he had done the Sunday morning previous when he had gone to communion with Turner Ravis. For a long time he evaded the thought because he knew that if he

allowed it to come into his mind it would worry and harass him. But by and by the effort of dodging the enemy became itself too disagreeable, so he gave it up and allowed himself to look the matter squarely in the face.

Ah, yes; it was an ugly thing he had done there, a really awful thing. He must have been still drunk when he had knelt in the chancel. Vandover shuddered as he thought of this, and told himself that one could hardly commit a worse sacrilege, and that some time he would surely be called to account for it. But here he checked himself suddenly, not daring to go further. One would have no peace of mind left if one went on brooding over such things in this fashion. He realized the enormity of what he had done. He had tried to be sorry for it. It was perhaps the worst thing he had ever done, but now he had reached the lowest point. He would take care never to do such a thing again. After this he would be better.

But this was not so. Unconsciously, Vandover had shut a door behind him; he would never again be exactly the same, and the keeping of his appointment with Turner Ravis that Sunday morning was, as it were, a long step onward in his progress of ruin and pollution.

He shook himself as though relieving his shoulders of a weight. The model in the life-class had just been posed for the week, and the others had begun work. The model for that week was a woman, a fact that pleased Vandover, for he drew these nude women better than any one in the school, perhaps better than any one in the city. Portrait work and the power to catch subtle intellectual distinctions in a face were sometimes beyond him, but his feeling for the flesh, and for the movement and character of a pose, was admirable.

He set himself to work. Holding his stick of charcoal toward the model at arm's-length, he measured off the heads, five in all, and laid off an equal number of spaces upon his paper. After this, by aid of his mirror, he studied the general character of the pose for nearly half an hour. Then, with a few strokes of his charcoal he laid off his larger construction lines with a freedom and a precision that were excellent. Upon these lines he made a second drawing a little more detailed, though as yet everything was blocked in, angularly and roughly. Then, putting a thin flat edge upon his charcoal, he started the careful and finished outline.

By the end of an hour the first sketch of his drawing was complete. It was astonishingly good, vigorous and solid; better than all, it had that feeling for form that makes just the difference between the amateur and the genuine artist.

By this time Vandover's interest began to flag. Four times he had drawn and redrawn the articulation of the model's left shoulder. As she stood, turned sideways to him, one hand on her hip, the deltoid muscle was at once contracted and foreshortened. It was a difficult bit of anatomy to draw. Vandover was annoyed at his ill success—such close attention and continued effort wearied him a little—the room was overheated and close, and the gas stove, which was placed near the throne to warm the model, leaked and filled the room with a nasty brassy smell. Vandover remembered that the previous week he had been looking over some old bound copies of *l'Art* in the Mechanics Library and had found them of absorbing interest. There was a pleasant corner and a huge comfortable chair near where they were in the reading-room, and from the window one could occasionally look out upon the street. It was a quiet spot, and he would not be disturbed all the morning. The idea was so attractive that he put away his portfolio and drawing things and went out.

For an hour he gave himself up to the enjoyment of *l'Art*, excusing his indolence by telling himself that it was all in his profession and was not time lost. A reproduction of a picture by Gérome gave him some suggestions for the "Last Enemy," which he noted very carefully.

He was interrupted by a rustle of starched skirts and a voice that said:

"Why, hello, Van!"

He looked up quickly to see a young girl of about twenty dressed in a black close-fitting bolero jacket of imitation astrakhan with big leg-of-mutton sleeves, a striped silk skirt, and a very broad hat

tilted to one side. Her hair was very blond, though coarse and dry from being bleached, and a little flat curl of it lay very low on her forehead. She was marvellously pretty. Vandover was delighted.

"Why, *Ida*!" he exclaimed, holding her hand; "*it's* awfully nice to see you here; won't you sit down?" and he pushed his chair toward her.

But Ida Wade said no, she had just come in after a new book, and of course it had to be out. But where had he kept himself so long? That was the way he threw off on her; ah, yes, he was going with Miss Ravis now and wouldn't look at any one else.

Vandover protested against this, and Ida Wade went on to ask him why he couldn't come up to call on her that very night, adding:

"We might go to the Tivoli or somewhere." All at once she interrupted herself, laughing, "Oh, I heard all about you the other night. *'Cherries are ripe*!' You and the boys painted the town red, didn't you? Ah, Van, I'm right on to *you*!"

She would not tell him how she heard, but took herself off, laughing and reminding him to come up early.

Ida Wade belonged to a certain type of young girl that was very common in the city. She was what men, among each other, called "gay," though that was the worst that could be said of her. She was virtuous, but the very fact that it was necessary to say so was enough to cause the statement to be doubted. When she was younger and had been a pupil at the Girls' High School, she had known and had even been the companion of such girls as Turner Ravis and Henrietta Vance, but since that time girls of that class had ignored her. Now, almost all of her acquaintances were men, and to half of these she had never been introduced. They had managed to get acquainted with her on Kearney Street, at theatres, at the Mechanics' Fair, and at baseball games. She loved to have a "gay" time, which for her meant to drink California champagne, to smoke cigarettes, and to kick at the chandelier. She was still virtuous and meant to stay so; there was nothing vicious about her, and she was as far removed from Flossie's class as from that of Turner Ravis.

She was very clever; half of her acquaintances, even the men, did not know how very "gay" she was. Only those—like Vandover—who knew her best, knew her for what she was, for Ida was morbidly careful of appearances, and as jealous of her reputation as only fast girls are.

Bessie Laguna was her counterpart. Bessie was "the girl she went with," just as Henrietta Vance was Turner's "chum" and Nannie was Flossie's "running-mate."

Ida lived with her people on Golden Gate Avenue not far from Larkin Street. Her father had a three-fourths interest in a carpet-cleaning establishment on Howard Street, and her mother gave lessons in painting on china and on velvet. Ida had just been graduated from the normal school, and often substituted at various kindergartens in the city. She hoped soon to get a permanent place.

Vandover arrived at Ida's house that night at about eight o'clock in the midst of a drenching fog. The parlour and front room on the second floor were furnished with bay windows decorated with some meaningless sort of millwork. The front door stood at the right of the parlour windows. Two Corinthian pillars on either side of the vestibule supported a balcony; these pillars had iron capitals which were painted to imitate the wood of the house, which in its turn was painted to imitate stone. The house was but two stories high, and the roof was topped with an iron cresting. There was a microscopical front yard in which one saw a tiny gravel walk, two steps long, that led to a door under the front steps, where the gas-meter was kept. A few dusty and straggling calla-lilies grew about.

Ida opened the door for Vandover almost as soon as he rang, and pulled him into the entry, exclaiming: "Come in out of the wet, as the whale said to Jonah. *Isn't* it a nasty night?" Vandover noticed as he came in that the house smelt of upholstery, cooking, and turpentine. He did not take off his overcoat, but went with her into the parlour.

The parlour was a little room with tinted plaster walls shut off from the "back-parlour" by sliding doors. A ply carpet covered the floor, a cheap piano stood across one corner of the room, and a greenish sofa across another. The mantelpiece was of white marble with gray spots; on one side of it

stood an Alaskan "grass basket" full of photographs, and on the other an inverted section of a sewer-pipe painted with daisies and full of gilded cat-tails tied with a blue ribbon. Near the piano straddled a huge easel of imitation brass up-holding the crayon picture of Ida's baby sister enlarged from a photograph. Across one corner of this picture was a yellow "drape." There were a great many of these "drapes" all about the room, hanging over the corners of the chairs, upon an edge of the mantelpiece, and even twisted about the chandelier. In the exact middle of the mantelpiece itself was the clock, one of the chief ornaments of the room, almost the first thing one saw upon entering; it was a round-faced timepiece perversely set in one corner of an immense red plush palette; the palette itself was tilted to one side, and was upheld by an easel of twisted brass wire. Out of the thumb-hole stuck half a dozen brushes wired together in a round bunch and covered with gilt paint. The clock never was wound. It went so fast that it was useless as a timepiece. Over it, however, hung a large and striking picture, a species of cheap photogravure, a lion lying in his cage, looking mildly at the spectator over his shoulder. In front of the picture were real iron bars, with real straw tucked in behind them.

Ida sat down on the piano stool, twisting back and forth, leaning her elbows on the keys.

"All the folks have gone out to a whist-party, and I'm left all alone in the house with Maggie," she said. Then she added: "Bessie and Bandy Ellis said they would come down to-night, and I thought we could all go downtown to the Tivoli or somewhere, in the open-air boxes, you know, way up at the top." Hardly had she spoken the words when Bessie and Ellis arrived.

Ida went upstairs to get on her hat at once, because it was so late, and Bessie went with her.

Ellis and Vandover laughed as soon as they saw each other, and Ellis exclaimed mockingly, "Ye-e-ow, thash jush way I feel." Vandover grinned:

"That's so," he answered. "I *do* remember now of having made that remark several times. But *you*—oh, you were fearful. Do you remember the row in the Luxembourg? Look there where you bit me."

Ellis was incensed with Geary because he had forsaken their party.

"Oh, that's Charlie Geary, all over," answered Vandover.

As they were speaking there came a sudden outburst of bells in various parts of the city and simultaneously they heard the hoarse croaking of a whistle down by the waterfront.

"Fire," said Vandover indifferently.

Ellis was already fumbling in his pockets, keeping count of the strokes.

"That's one," he exclaimed, pulling out and studying his list of alarm-boxes, "and one-two-three, that's three and one-two-three-*four*, one thirty-four. Let's see now! That's Bush and Hyde streets, not very far off," and he returned his card to the inside pocket of his coat as though he had accomplished a duty.

He lit a cigar. "I wonder now," he said, hesitating. "I guess I better not smoke in here. I'll go outside and get a mouthful of smoke before the girls come down." He went out and Vandover sat down to the cheap piano and played his three inevitable pieces, the two polkas and the air of the topical song; but he was interrupted by Ellis, who opened the door, crying out:

"Oh, come out here and see the *fire*, will you? Devil of a blaze!" Vandover ran out and saw a great fan-shaped haze of red through the fog over the roofs of the houses.

"Oh, say, girls," he shouted, jumping back to the foot of the stairs; "Ida, Bessie, there's a fire. Just look out of your windows. Hark, there go the engines."

Bessie came tearing down the stairs and out on the front steps, where the two fellows were standing hatless.

"Where? Oh, show me where! O-o-oh, sure enough! That's a *big* fire. Just hear the engines. *Oh, let's go*!"

"Sure; come on, let's go!" exclaimed Vandover. "Tell Ida to hurry up."

"Oh, Ida," cried Bessie up the stairs, "there's an awful big fire right near here, and we're going."

"Oh, wait!" shouted Ida, her mouth full of pins. "I had to change my waist. Oh, *do* wait for me. Where is it *at*? Please wait; I'm coming right down in just a minute."

"Hurry up, hurry up!" cried Vandover. "It will be all out by the time we get there. I'm coming up to help."

"No, no, no!" she screamed. "Don't; you rattle me. I'm all mixed up. Oh, *darn* it, I can't find my czarina!"

But at last she came running down, breathless, shrugging herself into her bolero jacket. They all hurried into the street and turned in the direction of the blaze. Other people were walking rapidly in the same direction, and there was an opening and shutting of windows and front doors. A steamer thundered past, clanging and smoking, followed by a score of half-exhausted boys. It took them longer to reach the fire than they expected, and by the time they had come within two blocks of it they were quite out of breath. Here the excitement was lively; the sidewalks were full of people going in the same direction; on all sides there were guesses as to where the fire was. On the front steps of many houses stood middle-aged gentlemen, still holding their evening papers and cigars, very amused and interested in watching the crowd go past. One heard them from time to time calling to their little sons, who were dancing on the sidewalks, forbidding them to go; in the open windows above could be seen the other members of the family, their faces faintly tinged with the glow, looking and pointing, or calling across the street to their friends in the opposite houses. Every one was in good humour; it was an event, a fête for the entire neighbourhood.

Vandover and his party came at last to the first engines violently pumping and coughing, the huge gray horses standing near by, already unhitched and blanketed, indifferently feeding in their nosebags. Some of the crowd preferred to watch the engines rather than the fire, and there were even some who were coming away from it, exclaiming "false alarm" or "all out now."

The party had come up quite close; they could smell the burning wood and could see the roofs of the nearer houses beginning to stand out sharp and black against the red glow beyond. It was a barn behind a huge frame house that was afire, the dry hay burning like powder, and by the time they reached it the flames were already dwindling. The hose was lying like a python all about the streets, while upon the neighbouring roofs were groups of firemen with helmets and axes; some were shouting into the street below, and others were holding the spouting nozzles of the hose. "Ah," exclaimed an old man, standing near to Ida and Vandover, "ah, *I* was here when it first broke out; you ought to have seen the flames then! Look, there's a tree catching!"

The crowd became denser; policemen pushed it back and stretched a rope across the street. There was a world of tumbling yellow smoke that made one's eyes smart, and a great crackling and snapping of flames. Terribly excited little boys were about everywhere whistling and calling for each other as the crowd separated them.

They watched the fire for some time, standing on a pile of boards in front of a half-built house, but as it dwindled they wearied of it.

"Want to go?" asked Vandover at last.

"Yes," answered Ida, "we might as well. Oh, where's Bessie and Ellis?" They were nowhere to be seen. Vandover whistled and Ida even called, but in vain. The little boys in the crowd mimicked Ida, crying back, "Hey! Bessie! Oh, *Bes-see*, mommer wants you!" The men who stood near laughed at this, but it annoyed Vandover much more than it did Ida.

"Ah, well, never mind," she said at length. "Let them go. Now shall *we* go?"

It was too late for the theatre, but to return home was out of the question. They started off aimlessly downtown.

While he talked Vandover was perplexed. Ida was gayly dressed and was one of those girls who cannot open their mouths nor raise a finger in the street without attracting attention. Vandover was not at all certain that he cared to be seen on Kearney Street as Ida Wade's escort; one never knew who one was going to meet. Ida was not a bad girl, she was not notorious, but, confound it, it would

look queer; and at the same time, while Ida was the kind of girl that one did not want to be seen with, she was not the kind of girl that could be told so. In an upper box at the Tivoli it would have been different—one could keep in the background; but to appear on Kearney Street with a girl who wore a hat like that and who would not put on her gloves—ah, no, it was out of the question.

Ida was talking away endlessly about a kindergarten in which she had substituted the last week.

She told him about the funny little nigger girl, and about the games and songs and how they played birds and hopped around and cried, "Twit, twit," and the game of the butterflies visiting the flowers. She even sang part of a song about the waves.

"Every little wave had its night-cap on;
Its white-cap, night-cap, white-cap on."

"It's more *fun* than enough," she said.

"Say, Ida," interrupted Vandover at length, "I'm pretty hungry. Can't we go somewhere and eat something? I'd like a Welsh rabbit."

"All right," she answered. "Where do you want to go?"

"Well," replied Vandover, running over in his mind the places he might reach by unfrequented streets. "There's Marchand's or Tortoni's or the Poodle Dog."

"Suits *me*," she answered, "any one you like. Say, Van," she added, "weren't you boys at the Imperial the other night? What kind of a place is that?"

On the instant Vandover wondered what she could mean. Was it possible that Ida would go to a place like that with him?

"The Imperial?" he answered. "Oh, I don't know; the Imperial is a sort of a nice place. It has private rooms, like all of these places. The cooking is simply out of sight. I think there is a bar connected with it." Then he went on to talk indifferently about the kindergarten, though his pulse was beating fast, and his nerves were strung taut. By and by Ida said:

"I didn't know there was a bar at the Imperial. I thought it was just some kind of an oyster joint. Why, I heard of a very nice girl, a swell girl, going in there."

"Oh, yes," said Vandover, "they do. I say, Ida," he went on, "what's the matter with going down *there*?"

"The *Imperial*?" exclaimed Ida. "Well, I guess *not*!"

"Why, it's all right, if I'm with you," retorted Vandover, "but if you don't like it we can go anywhere else."

"Well, I guess we *will* go anywhere else," returned Ida, and for the time the subject was dropped.

They took a Sutter Street car and got off at Grant Avenue, having decided to go to Marchand's.

"That's the Imperial down there, isn't it?" asked Ida as they reached the sidewalk. Vandover made a last attempt:

"I say, Ida, come on, let's go there. It's all right if I'm with you. Ah, come along; what's the odds?"

"*No*—*no*—NO," she answered decisively. "What kind of a girl do you think I am, anyway?"

"Well, I tell you what," answered Vandover, "just come down *by* the place, and if you don't like the looks of it you needn't go in. I want to get some cigarettes, anyhow. You can walk down with me till I do *that*."

"I'll walk down with you," replied Ida, "but I shan't go in."

They drew near to the Imperial. The street about was deserted, even the usual hacks that had their stand there were gone.

"You see," explained Vandover as they passed slowly in front of the doors, "this is all quiet enough. If you pulled down your veil no one would know the difference, and here's the ladies' entrance, you see, right at the side."

"All right, come along, let's go in," exclaimed Ida suddenly, and before he knew it they had swung open the little door of the ladies' entrance with its frosted pane of glass and had stepped inside.

It was between nine and ten o'clock, and the Imperial was quiet as yet; a few men were drinking in the barroom outside, and Toby, the red-eyed waiter, was talking in low tones to a girl under one of the electric lights.

Vandover and Ida went into one of the larger rooms in the rear passage and shut the door. Ida pushed her bolero jacket from her shoulders, saying, "This seems nice and quiet enough."

"Well, of course," answered Vandover, as though dismissing the question for good. "Now, what are we going to have? I say we have champagne and oysters."

"Let's have Cliquot, then," exclaimed Ida, which was the only champagne she had ever heard of besides the California brands.

She was very excited. This was the kind of "gay" time she delighted in, tête-à-tête champagne suppers with men late at night. She had never been in such a place as the Imperial before, and the daring and novelty of what she had done, the whiff of the great city's vice caught in this manner, sent a little tremor of pleasure and excitement over all her nerves.

They did not hurry over their little supper, but ate and drank slowly, and had more oysters to go with the last half of their bottle. Ida's face was ablaze, her eyes flashing, her blond hair disordered and falling about her cheeks.

Vandover put his arm about her neck and drew her toward him, and as she sank down upon him, smiling and complaisant, her hair tumbling upon her shoulders and her head and throat bent back, he leaned his cheek against hers, speaking in a low voice.

"No—no," she murmured, smiling; "never—ah, if I hadn't come—no, Van—please—" And then with a long breath she abandoned herself.

About midnight he left her at the door of her house on Golden Gate Avenue. On their way home Ida had grown more serious than he had ever known her to be. Now she began to cry softly to herself. "Oh, Van," she said, putting her head down upon his shoulder, "oh, I am so *sorry*. You don't think any less of me, do you? Oh, Van, you must be true to me now!"

Chapter Six

Everybody in San Francisco knew of the Ravises and always made it a point to speak of them as one of the best families of the city. They were not new and they were not particularly rich. They had lived in the same house on California Street for nearly twenty years and had always been comfortably well off. As things go in San Francisco, they were old-fashioned. They had family traditions and usages and time-worn customs. Their library had been in process of collection for the past half century and the pictures on the walls were oil paintings of steel engravings and genuine old-fashioned chromos, beyond price to-day.

Their furniture and ornaments were of the preceding generation, solid, conservative. They were not chosen with reference to any one style, nor all bought at the same time. Each separate piece had an individuality of its own. The Ravises kept their old things, long after the fashion had gone out, preferring them to the smarter "art" objects on account of their associations.

There were six in the family, Mr. and Mrs. Ravis, Turner, and her older brother, Stanley, Yale '88, a very serious young gentleman of twenty-seven, continually professing an interest in economics and finance. Besides these were the two children, Howard, nine years old, and his sister, aged fourteen, who had been christened Virginia.

They were a home-loving race. Mr. Ravis, senior, belonged to the Bohemian Club, but was seldom seen there. Stanley was absorbed in his law business, and Turner went out but little. They much preferred each other's society to that of three fourths of their acquaintances, most of their friends being "friends of the family," who came to dinner three or four times a year.

It was a custom of theirs to spend the evenings in the big dining-room at the back of the house, after the table had been cleared away, Mr. Ravis and Stanley reading the papers, the one smoking his cigar, the other his pipe; Mrs. Ravis, with the magazines and Turner with the *Chautauquan*. Howard and Virginia appropriated the table to themselves where they played with their soldiers and backgammon board.

The family kept two servants, June the "China boy," who had been with them since the beginning of things, and Delphine the cook, a more recent acquisition. June was, in a way, butler and second boy combined; he did all the downstairs work and the heavy sweeping, but it was another time-worn custom for Mrs. Ravis and Turner to spend part of every morning in putting the bedrooms to rights, dusting and making up the beds. Besides this, Turner exercised a sort of supervision over Howard and Virginia, who were too old for a nurse but too young to take care of themselves. She had them to bed at nine, mended some of their clothes, made them take their baths regularly, reëstablished peace between them in their hourly quarrels, and, most arduous task of all, saw that Howard properly washed himself every morning, and on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons that he was suitably dressed in time for dancing school.

It was Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Ravis was reading to her husband, who lay on the sofa in the back-parlour smoking a cigar. Stanley had gone out to make a call, while Howard and Virginia had forgathered in the bathroom to sail their boats and cigar boxes in the tub. Toward half-past three, as Turner was in her room writing letters, the door-bell rang. She stopped, with her pen in the air, wondering if it might be Vandover. It was June's afternoon out. In a few minutes the bell rang again, and Turner ran down to answer it herself, intercepting Delphine, who took June's place on these occasions, but who was hopelessly stupid.

Mrs. Ravis had peered out through the curtains of the parlour window to see who it was, and Turner met her and Mr. Ravis coming upstairs, abandoning the parlour to Turner's caller.

"Mamma and I are going upstairs to read," explained Mr. Ravis. "It's some one of your young men. You can bring him right in the parlour."

"I think it's Mr. Haight," said Turner's mother. "Ask him to stay to tea."

"Well," said Turner doubtfully, as she paused at the foot of the stairs, "I will, but you know we never have anything to speak of for Sunday evening tea. June is out, and you know how clumsy and stupid Delphine is when she waits on the table."

It *was* young Haight. Turner was very glad to see him, for next to Vandover she liked him better than any of the others. She was never bored by being obliged to entertain him, and he always had something to say and some clever way of saying it.

About half-past five, as they were talking about amateur photography, Mrs. Ravis came in and called them to tea.

Tea with the Ravises was the old-fashioned tea of twenty years ago. One never saw any of the modern "delicacies" on their Sunday evening table, no enticing cold lunch, no spices, not even catsups or pepper sauces. The turkey or chicken they had had for dinner was served cold in slices; there was canned fruit, preserves, tea, crackers, bread and butter, a large dish of cold pork and beans, and a huge glass pitcher of ice-water.

In the absence of June, Delphine the cook went through the agony of waiting on the table, very nervous and embarrassed in her clean calico gown and starched apron. Her hands were red and knotty, smelling of soap, and they touched the chinaware with an over-zealous and constraining tenderness as if the plates and dishes had been delicate glass butterflies. She stood off at a distance from the table making sudden and awkward dabs at it. When it came to passing the plates, she passed them on the wrong side and remembered herself at the wrong moment with a stammering apology. In her excess of politeness she kept up a constant murmur as she attended to their wants. Another fork? Yes, sir. She'd get it right away, sir. Did Mrs. Ravis want another cuppa tea? No? No more tea? Well, she'd pass the bread. Some bread, Master Howard? Nice French bread, he always liked that. Some more preserved pears, Miss Ravis? Yes, miss, she'd get them right away; they were just over here on the sideboard. Yes, here they were. No more? Now she'd go and put them back. And at last when she had set the nerves of all of them in a jangle, was dismissed to the kitchen and retired with a gasp of unspeakable relief.

Somewhat later in the evening young Haight was alone with Turner, and their conversation had taken a very unusual and personal turn. All at once Turner exclaimed:

"I often wonder what good I am in the world to anybody. I don't *know* a thing, I can't *do* a thing. I couldn't cook the plainest kind of a meal to *save* me, and it took me all of two hours yesterday to do just a little buttonhole stitching. I'm not good for anything. I'm not a help to anybody."

Young Haight looked into the blue flame of the gas-log, almost the only modern innovation throughout the entire house, and was silent for a moment; then he leaned his elbows on his knees and, still looking at the flame, replied:

"I don't know about that. You have been a considerable help to *me*."

"To *you*!" exclaimed Turner, surprised. "A help to *you*? Why, how do you mean?"

"Well," he answered, still without looking at her, "one always has one's influence, you know."

"Ah, lots of influence *I* have over anybody," retorted Turner, incredulously.

"Yes, you have," he insisted. "You have plenty of influence over the people that care for you. You have plenty of influence over me."

Turner, very much embarrassed, and not knowing how to answer, bent down to the side of the mantelpiece and turned up the flame of the gas-log a little. Young Haight continued, almost as embarrassed as she:

"I suppose I'm a bad lot, perhaps a little worse than most others, but I think—I hope—there's some good in me. I know all this sounds absurd and affected, but *really* I'm not posing; you won't mind if I speak just as I think, for this once. I promise," he went on with a half smile, "not to do it again. You know my mother died when I was little and I have lived mostly with men. You have been to me what the society of women has been to other fellows. You see, you are the only girl I ever knew very well—the only one I ever wanted to know. I have cared for you the way other men have cared

for the different women that come into their lives; as they have cared for their mothers, their sisters —and their wives. You have already influenced me as a mother or sister should have done; what if I should ever ask you to be—to be the *other* to me, the one that's best of all?"

Young Haight turned toward her as he finished and looked at her for the first time. Turner was still very much embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm very glad if I've been a help to—to anybody—to you," she said, confusedly. "But I never knew that you cared—that you thought about me—in that way. But you mustn't, you know, you mustn't care for me in that way. I ought to tell you right away that I never could care for you more than—I always have done; I mean care for you only as a very, very good friend. You don't know, Dolly," she went on eagerly, "how it hurts me to tell you so, because I care so much for you in every other way that I wouldn't hurt your feelings for anything; but then you know at the same time it would hurt you a great deal more if I *shouldn't* tell you, but encourage you, and let you go on thinking that perhaps I liked you more than any one else, when I *didn't*. Now wouldn't that be wrong? You don't know how glad it makes me feel that I have been of some good to you, and that is just why I want to be sincere *now* and not make you think any less of me—think any worse of me."

"Oh, I know," answered young Haight. "I know I shouldn't have said anything about it. I knew beforehand, or thought I knew, that you didn't care in that way."

"Maybe I have been wrong," she replied, "in not seeing that you cared so much, and have given you a wrong impression. I thought you knew how it was all the time."

"Knew how what was?" he asked, looking up.

"Why," she said, "knew how Van and I were."

"I knew that Van cared for you a great deal."

"Yes, but you know," she went on, hesitating and confused, "you know we are engaged. We have been engaged for nearly two years."

"But *he* don't consider himself as engaged!" The words were almost out of Haight's mouth, but he shut his teeth against them and kept silence—he hardly knew why.

"Suppose Vandover were out of the question," he said, getting up and smiling in order not to seem as serious as he really was.

"Ah," she said, smiling back at him. "I don't know; that's a hard question to answer. I've never *asked* myself *that* question."

"Well, I'm saving you the trouble, you see," he answered, still smiling. "I am asking it *for* you."

"But I don't want to answer such a question off-hand like that; how can I tell? It would only be *perhaps*, just now."

Young Haight answered quickly that "just now" he would be contented with that "perhaps"; but Turner did not hear this. She had spoken at the same time as he, exclaiming, "But what is the good of talking of that? Because no matter what happened I feel as though I could not break my promise to Van, even if I should want to. Because I have talked like this, Dolly," she went on more seriously, "you must not be deceived or get a wrong impression. You understand how things are, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, still trying to carry it off with a laugh. "I know, I know. But now I hope you won't let anything I have said bother you, and that things will go on just as if I hadn't spoken, just as if nothing had happened."

"Why, of course," she said, laughing with him again. "Of *course*, why shouldn't they?"

They were both at their ease again by the time young Haight stood at the door with his hat in his hand ready to go.

He raised his free hand over her head, and said, with burlesque, dramatic effect, trying to keep down a smile:

"Bless you both; go, go marry Vandover and be happy; I forgive you."

"Ah—don't be so *utterly* absurd," she cried, beginning to laugh.

Chapter Seven

On a certain evening about four months later Ellis and Vandover had a "date" with Ida Wade and Bessie Laguna at the Mechanics' Fair. Ellis, Bessie, and Ida were to meet Vandover there in the Art Gallery, as he had to make a call with his father, and could not get there until half-past nine. They were all to walk about the Fair until ten, after which the two men proposed to take the girls out to the Cliff House in separate coupés. The whole thing had been arranged by Ellis and Bessie, and Vandover was irritated. Ellis ought to have had more sense; rushing the girls was all very well, but everybody went to the Mechanics' Fair, and he didn't like to have nice girls like Turner or Henrietta Vance see him with chippies like that. It was all very well for Ellis, who had no social position, but for *him*, Vandover, it would look too confounded queer. Of course he was in for it now, and would have to face the music. You can't tell a girl like that that you're ashamed to be seen with her, but very likely he would get himself into a regular box with it all.

When he arrived at the Mechanics' Pavilion, it was about twenty minutes of ten, and as he pushed through the wicket he let himself into a huge amphitheatre full of colour and movement.

There was a vast shuffling of thousands of feet and a subdued roar of conversation like the noise of a great mill; mingled with these were the purring of distant machinery, the splashing of a temporary fountain and the rhythmic clamour of a brass band, while in the piano exhibit the hired performer was playing a concert-grand with a great flourish. Nearer at hand one could catch ends of conversation and notes of laughter, the creaking of boots, and the rustle of moving dresses and stiff skirts. Here and there groups of school children elbowed their way through the crowd, crying shrilly, their hands full of advertisement pamphlets, fans, picture cards, and toy whips with pewter whistles on the butts, while the air itself was full of the smell of fresh popcorn.

Ellis and Bessie were in the Art Gallery upstairs. Mrs. Wade, Ida's mother, who gave lessons in hand painting, had an exhibit there which they were interested to find; a bunch of yellow poppies painted on velvet and framed in gilt. They stood before it some little time hazarding their opinions and then moved on from one picture to another; Ellis bought a catalogue and made it a duty to find the title of every picture. Bessie professed to be very fond of painting; she had 'taken it up' at one time and had abandoned it, only because the oil or turpentine or something was unhealthy for her. "Of course," she said, "I'm no critic, I only know what I like. Now that one over there, I like *that*. I think those ideal heads like that are lovely, don't you, Bandy? Oh, there's Van!"

"Hello!" said Vandover, coming up. "Where's Ida?"

"Hello, Van!" answered Bessie. "Ida wouldn't come. Isn't it too mean? She said she couldn't come because she had a cold, but she was just talking through her face, I know. She's just got kind of a streak on and you can't get anything out of her. You two haven't had a row, have you? Well, I didn't *think* you had. But she's worried about something or other. I don't believe she's been out of the house this week. But isn't it mean of her to throw cold water on the procession like this? She's been giving me a lecture, too, and says she's going to reform."

"Well," said Vandover, greatly relieved, "that's too bad. We could have had a lot of fun to-night. I'm awfully sorry. Well, what are you two going to do?"

"Oh, I guess we'll follow out our part of the programme," said Ellis. "You are kind of left out, though."

"I don't know," answered Vandover. "Maybe I'll go downtown, and see if I can find some of the boys."

"Oh, Dolly Haight is around here somewheres," said Ellis. "We saw him just now over by the chess machine."

"I guess I'll try and find him, then," responded Vandover. "Well, I hope you two enjoy yourselves." As he was turning away Bessie Laguna came running back, and taking him a little to one side said:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.