FRANK NORRIS

THE PIT: A STORY OF CHICAGO

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Содержание

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Dedicated to My Brother

Charles Tolman Norris

In memory of certain lamentable tales of the round (dining-room) table heroes; of the epic of the pewter platoons, and the romance-cycle of "Gaston Le Fox," which we invented, maintained, and found marvellous at a time when we both were boys.

Principal Characters in the Novel
CURTIS JADWIN, capitalist and speculator.
SHELDON CORTHELL, an artist.
LANDRY COURT, broker's clerk.
SAMUEL GRETRY, a broker.
CHARLES CRESSLER, a dealer in grain.
MRS. CRESSLER, his wife.
LAURA DEARBORN, protege of Mrs. Cressler.
PAGE DEARBORN, her sister.
MRS. EMILY WESSELS, aunt of Laura and Page.

The Trilogy of The Epic of the Wheat includes the following novels:

THE OCTOPUS, a Story of California.

THE PIT, a Story of Chicago.

THE WOLF, a Story of Europe.

These novels, while forming a series, will be in no way connected with each other save only in their relation to (1) the production, (2) the distribution, (3) the consumption of American wheat. When complete, they will form the story of a crop of wheat from the time of its sowing as seed in California to the time of its consumption as bread in a village of Western Europe.

The first novel, "The Octopus," deals with the war between the wheat grower and the Railroad Trust; the second, "The Pit," is the fictitious narrative of a "deal" in the Chicago wheat pit; while the third, "The Wolf," will probably have for its pivotal episode the relieving of a famine in an Old World community.

The author's most sincere thanks for assistance rendered in the preparation of the following novel are due to Mr. G. D. Moulson of New York, whose unwearied patience and untiring kindness helped him to the better understanding of the technical difficulties of a Very complicated subject. And more especially he herewith acknowledges his unmeasured obligation and gratitude to Her Who Helped the Most of All.

F. N.

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I

At eight o'clock in the inner vestibule of the Auditorium Theatre by the window of the box office, Laura Dearborn, her younger sister Page, and their aunt—Aunt Wess'—were still waiting for the rest of the theatre-party to appear. A great, slow-moving press of men and women in evening dress filled the vestibule from one wall to another. A confused murmur of talk and the shuffling of many feet arose on all sides, while from time to time, when the outside and inside doors of the entrance chanced to be open simultaneously, a sudden draught of air gushed in, damp, glacial, and edged with the penetrating keenness of a Chicago evening at the end of February.

The Italian Grand Opera Company gave one of the most popular pieces of its repertoire on that particular night, and the Cresslers had invited the two sisters and their aunt to share their box with them. It had been arranged that the party should assemble in the Auditorium vestibule at a quarter of eight; but by now the quarter was gone and the Cresslers still failed to arrive.

"I don't see," murmured Laura anxiously for the last time, "what can be keeping them. Are you sure Page that Mrs. Cressler meant here—inside?"

She was a tall young girl of about twenty-two or three, holding herself erect and with fine dignity. Even beneath the opera cloak it was easy to infer that her neck and shoulders were beautiful.

Her almost extreme slenderness was, however, her characteristic; the curves of her figure, the contour of her shoulders, the swell of hip and breast were all low; from head to foot one could discover no pronounced salience. Yet there was no trace, no suggestion of angularity. She was slender as a willow shoot is slender—and equally graceful, equally erect.

Next to this charming tenuity, perhaps her paleness was her most noticeable trait. But it was not a paleness of lack of colour. Laura Dearborn's pallour was in itself a colour. It was a tint rather than a shade, like ivory; a warm white, blending into an exquisite, delicate brownness towards the throat. Set in the middle of this paleness of brow and cheek, her deep brown eyes glowed lambent and intense. They were not large, but in some indefinable way they were important. It was very natural to speak of her eyes, and in speaking to her, her friends always found that they must look squarely into their pupils. And all this beauty of pallid face and brown eyes was crowned by, and sharply contrasted with, the intense blackness of her hair, abundant, thick, extremely heavy, continually coruscating with sombre, murky reflections, tragic, in a sense vaguely portentous,—the coiffure of a heroine of romance, doomed to dark crises.

On this occasion at the side of the topmost coil, a white aigrette scintillated and trembled with her every movement. She was unquestionably beautiful. Her mouth was a little large, the lips firm set, and one would not have expected that she would smile easily; in fact, the general expression of her face was rather

serious.

"Perhaps," continued Laura, "they would look for us outside." But Page shook her head. She was five years younger than Laura, just turned seventeen. Her hair, dressed high for the first time this night, was brown. But Page's beauty was no less marked than her sister's. The seriousness of her expression, however, was more noticeable. At times it amounted to undeniable gravity. She was straight, and her figure, all immature as yet, exhibited hardly any softer outlines than that of a boy.

"No, no," she said, in answer to Laura's question. "They would come in here; they wouldn't wait outside—not on such a cold night as this. Don't you think so, Aunt Wess'?"

But Mrs. Wessels, a lean, middle-aged little lady, with a flat, pointed nose, had no suggestions to offer. She disengaged herself from any responsibility in the situation and, while waiting, found a vague amusement in counting the number of people who filtered in single file through the wicket where the tickets were presented. A great, stout gentleman in evening dress, perspiring, his cravatte limp, stood here, tearing the checks from the tickets, and without ceasing, maintaining a continuous outcry that dominated the murmur of the throng:

"Have your tickets ready, please! Have your tickets ready."

"Such a crowd," murmured Page. "Did you ever see—and every one you ever knew or heard of. And such toilettes!"

With every instant the number of people increased; progress became impossible, except an inch at a time. The women were,

almost without exception, in light-coloured gowns, white, pale blue, Nile green, and pink, while over these costumes were thrown opera cloaks and capes of astonishing complexity and elaborateness. Nearly all were bare-headed, and nearly all wore aigrettes; a score of these, a hundred of them, nodded and vibrated with an incessant agitation over the heads of the crowd and flashed like mica flakes as the wearers moved. Everywhere the eye was arrested by the luxury of stuffs, the brilliance and delicacy of fabrics, laces as white and soft as froth, crisp, shining silks, suave satins, heavy gleaming velvets, and brocades and plushes, nearly all of them white—violently so—dazzling and splendid under the blaze of the electrics. The gentlemen, in long, black overcoats, and satin mufflers, and opera hats; their hands under the elbows of their women-folk, urged or guided them forward, distressed, preoccupied, adjuring their parties to keep together; in their white-gloved fingers they held their tickets ready. For all the icy blasts that burst occasionally through the storm doors, the vestibule was uncomfortably warm, and into this steam-heated atmosphere a multitude of heavy odours exhaled —the scent of crushed flowers, of perfume, of sachet, and even —occasionally—the strong smell of damp seal-skin.

Outside it was bitterly cold. All day a freezing wind had blown from off the Lake, and since five in the afternoon a fine powder of snow had been falling. The coachmen on the boxes of the carriages that succeeded one another in an interminable line before the entrance of the theatre, were swathed to the eyes

in furs. The spume and froth froze on the bits of the horses, and the carriage wheels crunching through the dry, frozen snow gave off a shrill staccato whine. Yet for all this, a crowd had collected about the awning on the sidewalk, and even upon the opposite side of the street, peeping and peering from behind the broad shoulders of policemen—a crowd of miserables, shivering in rags and tattered comforters, who found, nevertheless, an unexplainable satisfaction in watching this prolonged defile of millionaires.

So great was the concourse of teams, that two blocks distant from the theatre they were obliged to fall into line, advancing only at intervals, and from door to door of the carriages thus immobilised ran a score of young men, their arms encumbered with pamphlets, shouting: "Score books, score books and librettos; score books with photographs of all the artists."

However, in the vestibule the press was thinning out. It was understood that the overture had begun. Other people who were waiting like Laura and her sister had been joined by their friends and had gone inside. Laura, for whom this opera night had been an event, a thing desired and anticipated with all the eagerness of a girl who had lived for twenty-two years in a second-class town of central Massachusetts, was in great distress. She had never seen Grand Opera, she would not have missed a note, and now she was in a fair way to lose the whole overture.

"Oh, dear," she cried. "Isn't it too bad. I can't imagine why they don't come."

Page, more metropolitan, her keenness of appreciation a little lost by two years of city life and fashionable schooling, tried to reassure her.

"You won't lose much," she said. "The air of the overture is repeated in the first act—I've heard it once before."

"If we even see the first act," mourned Laura. She scanned the faces of the late comers anxiously. Nobody seemed to mind being late. Even some of the other people who were waiting, chatted calmly among themselves. Directly behind them two men, their faces close together, elaborated an interminable conversation, of which from time to time they could overhear a phrase or two.

"—and I guess he'll do well if he settles for thirty cents on the dollar. I tell you, dear boy, it was a *smash!"*

"Never should have tried to swing a corner. The short interest was too small and the visible supply was too great."

Page nudged her sister and whispered: "That's the Helmick failure they're talking about, those men. Landry Court told me all about it. Mr. Helmick had a corner in corn, and he failed to-day, or will fail soon, or something."

But Laura, preoccupied with looking for the Cresslers, hardly listened. Aunt Wess', whose count was confused by all these figures murmured just behind her, began over again, her lips silently forming the words, "sixty-one, sixty-two, and two is sixty-four." Behind them the voice continued:

"They say Porteous will peg the market at twenty-six."

"Well he ought to. Corn is worth that."

"Never saw such a call for margins in my life. Some of the houses called eight cents."

Page turned to Mrs. Wessels: "By the way, Aunt Wess'; look at that man there by the box office window, the one with his back towards us, the one with his hands in his overcoat pockets. Isn't that Mr. Jadwin? The gentleman we are going to meet to-night. See who I mean?"

"Who? Mr. Jadwin? I don't know. I don't know, child. I never saw him, you know."

"Well I think it is he," continued Page. "He was to be with our party to-night. I heard Mrs. Cressler say she would ask him. That's Mr. Jadwin, I'm sure. He's waiting for them, too."

"Oh, then ask him about it, Page," exclaimed Laura. "We're missing everything."

But Page shook her head:

"I only met him once, ages ago; he wouldn't know me. It was at the Cresslers, and we just said 'How do you do.' And then maybe it isn't Mr. Jadwin."

"Oh, I wouldn't bother, girls," said Mrs. Wessels. "It's all right. They'll be here in a minute. I don't believe the curtain has gone up yet."

But the man of whom they spoke turned around at the moment and cast a glance about the vestibule. They saw a gentleman of an indeterminate age—judged by his face he might as well have been forty as thirty-five. A heavy mustache touched with grey covered his lips. The eyes were twinkling and good-tempered.

Between his teeth he held an unlighted cigar.

"It is Mr. Jadwin," murmured Page, looking quickly away. "But he don't recognise me."

Laura also averted her eyes.

"Well, why not go right up to him and introduce ourself, or recall yourself to him?" she hazarded.

"Oh, Laura, I couldn't," gasped Page. "I wouldn't for worlds."

"Couldn't she, Aunt Wess'?" appealed Laura. "Wouldn't it be all right?"

But Mrs. Wessels, ignoring forms and customs, was helpless. Again she withdrew from any responsibility in the matter.

"I don't know anything about it," she answered. "But Page oughtn't to be bold."

"Oh, bother; it isn't that," protested Page. "But it's just because—I don't know, I don't want to—Laura, I should just die," she exclaimed with abrupt irrelevance, "and besides, how would that help any?" she added.

"Well, we're just going to miss it all," declared Laura decisively. There were actual tears in her eyes. "And I had looked forward to it so."

"Well," hazarded Aunt Wess', "you girls can do just as you please. Only I wouldn't be bold."

"Well, would it be bold if Page, or if—if I were to speak to him? We're going to meet him anyways in just a few minutes."

"Better wait, hadn't you, Laura," said Aunt Wess', "and see. Maybe he'll come up and speak to us."

"Oh, as if!" contradicted Laura. "He don't know us,—just as Page says. And if he did, he wouldn't. He wouldn't think it polite."

"Then I guess, girlie, it wouldn't be polite for you."

"I think it would," she answered. "I think it would be a woman's place. If he's a gentleman, he would feel that he just couldn't speak first. I'm going to do it," she announced suddenly.

"Just as you think best, Laura," said her aunt.

But nevertheless Laura did not move, and another five minutes went by.

Page took advantage of the interval to tell Laura about Jadwin. He was very rich, but a bachelor, and had made his money in Chicago real estate. Some of his holdings in the business quarter of the city were enormous; Landry Court had told her about him. Jadwin, unlike Mr. Cressler, was not opposed to speculation. Though not a member of the Board of Trade, he nevertheless at very long intervals took part in a "deal" in wheat, or corn, or provisions. He believed that all corners were doomed to failure, however, and had predicted Helmick's collapse six months ago. He had influence, was well known to all Chicago people, what he said carried weight, financiers consulted him, promoters sought his friendship, his name on the board of directors of a company was an all-sufficing endorsement; in a word, a "strong" man.

"I can't understand," exclaimed Laura distrait, referring to the delay on the part of the Cresslers. "This was the night, and this was the place, and it is long past the time. We could telephone

to the house, you know," she said, struck with an idea, "and see if they've started, or what has happened."

"I don't know—I don't know," murmured Mrs. Wessels vaguely. No one seemed ready to act upon Laura's suggestion, and again the minutes passed.

"I'm going," declared Laura again, looking at the other two, as if to demand what they had to say against the idea.

"I just couldn't," declared Page flatly.

"Well," continued Laura, "I'll wait just three minutes more, and then if the Cresslers are not here I will speak to him. It seems to me to be perfectly natural, and not at all bold."

She waited three minutes, and the Cresslers still failing to appear, temporised yet further, for the twentieth time repeating:

"I don't see—I can't understand."

Then, abruptly drawing her cape about her, she crossed the vestibule and came up to Jadwin.

As she approached she saw him catch her eye. Then, as he appeared to understand that this young woman was about to speak to him, she noticed an expression of suspicion, almost of distrust, come into his face. No doubt he knew nothing of this other party who were to join the Cresslers in the vestibule. Why should this girl speak to him? Something had gone wrong, and the instinct of the man, no longer very young, to keep out of strange young women's troubles betrayed itself in the uneasy glance that he shot at her from under his heavy eyebrows. But the look faded as quickly as it had come. Laura guessed that he had

decided that in such a place as this he need have no suspicions. He took the cigar from his mouth, and she, immensely relieved, realised that she had to do with a man who was a gentleman. Full of trepidation as she had been in crossing the vestibule, she was quite mistress of herself when the instant came for her to speak, and it was in a steady voice and without embarrassment that she said:

"I beg your pardon, but I believe this is Mr. Jadwin."

He took off his hat, evidently a little nonplussed that she should know his name, and by now she was ready even to browbeat him a little should it be necessary.

"Yes, yes," he answered, now much more confused than she, "my name is Jadwin."

"I believe," continued Laura steadily, "we were all to be in the same party to-night with the Cresslers. But they don't seem to come, and we—my sister and my aunt and I—don't know what to do."

She saw that he was embarrassed, convinced, and the knowledge that she controlled the little situation, that she could command him, restored her all her equanimity.

"My name is Miss Dearborn," she continued. "I believe you know my sister Page."

By some trick of manner she managed to convey to him the impression that if he did not know her sister Page, that if for one instant he should deem her to be bold, he would offer a mortal affront. She had not yet forgiven him that stare of suspicion when

first their eyes had met; he should pay her for that yet.

"Miss Page,—your sister,—Miss Page Dearborn? Certainly I know her," he answered. "And you have been waiting, too? What a pity!" And he permitted himself the awkwardness of adding: "I did not know that you were to be of our party."

"No," returned Laura upon the instant, "I did not know you were to be one of us to-night—until Page told me." She accented the pronouns a little, but it was enough for him to know that he had been rebuked. How, he could not just say; and for what it was impossible for him at the moment to determine; and she could see that he began to experience a certain distress, was beating a retreat, was ceding place to her. Who was she, then, this tall and pretty young woman, with the serious, unsmiling face, who was so perfectly at ease, and who hustled him about and made him feel as though he were to blame for the Cresslers' non-appearance; as though it was his fault that she must wait in the draughty vestibule. She had a great air with her; how had he offended her? If he had introduced himself to her, had forced himself upon her, she could not be more lofty, more reserved.

"I thought perhaps you might telephone," she observed.

"They haven't a telephone, unfortunately," he answered.

"Oh!"

This was quite the last slight, the Cresslers had not a telephone! He was to blame for that, too, it seemed. At his wits' end, he entertained for an instant the notion of dashing out into the street in a search for a messenger boy, who would take a

note to Cressler and set him right again; and his agitation was not allayed when Laura, in frigid tones, declared:

"It seems to me that something might be done."

"I don't know," he replied helplessly. "I guess there's nothing to be done but just wait. They are sure to be along."

In the background, Page and Mrs. Wessels had watched the interview, and had guessed that Laura was none too gracious. Always anxious that her sister should make a good impression, the little girl was now in great distress.

"Laura is putting on her 'grand manner,'" she lamented. "I just know how she's talking. The man will hate the very sound of her name all the rest of his life." Then all at once she uttered a joyful exclamation: "At last, at last," she cried, "and about time, too!"

The Cresslers and the rest of the party—two young men—had appeared, and Page and her aunt came up just in time to hear Mrs. Cressler—a fine old lady, in a wonderful ermine-trimmed cape, whose hair was powdered—exclaim at the top of her voice, as if the mere declaration of fact was final, absolutely the last word upon the subject, "The bridge was turned!"

The Cresslers lived on the North Side. The incident seemed to be closed with the abruptness of a slammed door.

Page and Aunt Wess' were introduced to Jadwin, who was particular to announce that he remembered the young girl perfectly. The two young men were already acquainted with the Dearborn sisters and Mrs. Wessels. Page and Laura knew one of them well enough to address him familiarly by his Christian

name.

This was Landry Court, a young fellow just turned twenty-three, who was "connected with" the staff of the great brokerage firm of Gretry, Converse and Co. He was astonishingly good-looking, small-made, wiry, alert, nervous, debonair, with blond hair and dark eyes that snapped like a terrier's. He made friends almost at first sight, and was one of those fortunate few who were favoured equally of men and women. The healthiness of his eye and skin persuaded to a belief in the healthiness of his mind; and, in fact, Landry was as clean without as within. He was frank, open-hearted, full of fine sentiments and exaltations and enthusiasms. Until he was eighteen he had cherished an ambition to become the President of the United States.

"Yes, yes," he said to Laura, "the bridge was turned. It was an imposition. We had to wait while they let three tows through. I think two at a time is as much as is legal. And we had to wait for three. Yes, sir; three, think of that! I shall look into that to-morrow. Yes, sir; don't you be afraid of that. I'll look into it." He nodded his head with profound seriousness.

"Well," announced Mr. Cressler, marshalling the party, "shall we go in? I'm afraid, Laura, we've missed the overture."

Smiling, she shrugged her shoulders, while they moved to the wicket, as if to say that it could not be helped now.

Cressler, tall, lean, bearded, and stoop-shouldered, belonging to the same physical type that includes Lincoln—the type of the Middle West—was almost a second father to the parentless

Dearborn girls. In Massachusetts, thirty years before this time, he had been a farmer, and the miller Dearborn used to grind his grain regularly. The two had been boys together, and had always remained fast friends, almost brothers. Then, in the years just before the War, had come the great movement westward, and Cressler had been one of those to leave an "abandoned" New England farm behind him, and with his family emigrate toward the Mississippi. He had come to Sangamon County in Illinois. For a time he tried wheat-raising, until the War, which skied the prices of all food-stuffs, had made him—for those days—a rich man. Giving up farming, he came to live in Chicago, bought a seat on the Board of Trade, and in a few years was a millionaire. At the time of the Turco-Russian War he and two Milwaukee men had succeeded in cornering all the visible supply of spring wheat. At the end of the thirtieth day of the corner the clique figured out its profits at close upon a million; a week later it looked like a million and a half. Then the three lost their heads; they held the corner just a fraction of a month too long, and when the time came that the three were forced to take profits, they found that they were unable to close out their immense holdings without breaking the price. In two days wheat that they had held at a dollar and ten cents collapsed to sixty. The two Milwaukee men were ruined, and two-thirds of Cressler's immense fortune vanished like a whiff of smoke.

But he had learned his lesson. Never since then had he speculated. Though keeping his seat on the Board, he

had confined himself to commission trading, uninfluenced by fluctuations in the market. And he was never wearied of protesting against the evil and the danger of trading in margins. Speculation he abhorred as the small-pox, believing it to be impossible to corner grain by any means or under any circumstances. He was accustomed to say: "It can't be done; first, for the reason that there is a great harvest of wheat somewhere in the world for every month in the year; and, second, because the smart man who runs the corner has every other smart man in the world against him. And, besides, it's wrong; the world's food should not be at the mercy of the Chicago wheat pit."

As the party filed in through the wicket, the other young man who had come with Landry Court managed to place himself next to Laura. Meeting her eyes, he murmured:

"Ah, you did not wear them after all. My poor little flowers."

But she showed him a single American Beauty, pinned to the shoulder of her gown beneath her cape.

"Yes, Mr. Corthell," she answered, "one. I tried to select the prettiest, and I think I succeeded—don't you? It was hard to choose."

"Since you have worn it, it is the prettiest," he answered.

He was a slightly built man of about twenty-eight or thirty; dark, wearing a small, pointed beard, and a mustache that he brushed away from his lips like a Frenchman. By profession he was an artist, devoting himself more especially to the designing of stained windows. In this, his talent was indisputable. But he

was by no means dependent upon his profession for a living, his parents—long since dead—having left him to the enjoyment of a very considerable fortune. He had a beautiful studio in the Fine Arts Building, where he held receptions once every two months, or whenever he had a fine piece of glass to expose. He had travelled, read, studied, occasionally written, and in matters pertaining to the colouring and fusing of glass was cited as an authority. He was one of the directors of the new Art Gallery that had taken the place of the old Exposition Building on the Lake Front.

Laura had known him for some little time. On the occasion of her two previous visits to Page he had found means to see her two or three times each week. Once, even, he had asked her to marry him, but she, deep in her studies at the time, consumed with vague ambitions to be a great actress of Shakespearian roles, had told him she could care for nothing but her art. He had smiled and said that he could wait, and, strangely enough, their relations had resumed again upon the former footing. Even after she had gone away they had corresponded regularly, and he had made and sent her a tiny window—a veritable jewel—illustrative of a scene from "Twelfth Night."

In the foyer, as the gentlemen were checking their coats, Laura overheard Jadwin say to Mr. Cressler:

"Well, how about Helmick?"

The other made an impatient movement of his shoulders.

"Ask me, what was the fool thinking of—a corner! Pshaw!"

There were one or two other men about, making their overcoats and opera hats into neat bundles preparatory to checking them; and instantly there was a flash of a half-dozen eyes in the direction of the two men. Evidently the collapse of the Helmick deal was in the air. All the city seemed interested.

But from behind the heavy curtains that draped the entrance to the theatre proper, came a muffled burst of music, followed by a long salvo of applause. Laura's cheeks flamed with impatience, she hurried after Mrs. Cressler; Corthell drew the curtains for her to pass, and she entered.

Inside it was dark, and a prolonged puff of hot air, thick with the mingled odours of flowers, perfume, upholstery, and gas, enveloped her upon the instant. It was the unmistakable, unforgettable, entrancing aroma of the theatre, that she had known only too seldom, but that in a second set her heart galloping.

Every available space seemed to be occupied. Men, even women, were standing up, compacted into a suffocating pressure, and for the moment everybody was applauding vigorously. On all sides Laura heard:

"Bravo!"

"Good, good!"

"Very well done!"

"Encore! Encore!"

Between the peoples' heads and below the low dip of the overhanging balcony—a brilliant glare in the surrounding

darkness—she caught a glimpse of the stage. It was set for a garden; at the back and in the distance a chateau; on the left a bower, and on the right a pavilion. Before the footlights, a famous contralto, dressed as a boy, was bowing to the audience, her arms full of flowers.

"Too bad," whispered Corthell to Laura, as they followed the others down the side-aisle to the box. "Too bad, this is the second act already; you've missed the whole first act—and this song. She'll sing it over again, though, just for you, if I have to lead the applause myself. I particularly wanted you to hear that."

Once in the box, the party found itself a little crowded, and Jadwin and Cressler were obliged to stand, in order to see the stage. Although they all spoke in whispers, their arrival was the signal for certain murmurs of "Sh! Sh!" Mrs. Cressler made Laura occupy the front seat. Jadwin took her cloak from her, and she settled herself in her chair and looked about her. She could see but little of the house or audience. All the lights were lowered; only through the gloom the swaying of a multitude of fans, pale coloured, like night-moths balancing in the twilight, defined itself.

But soon she turned towards the stage. The applause died away, and the contralto once more sang the aria. The melody was simple, the tempo easily followed; it was not a very high order of music. But to Laura it was nothing short of a revelation.

She sat spell-bound, her hands clasped tight, her every faculty of attention at its highest pitch. It was wonderful, such music

as that; wonderful, such a voice; wonderful, such orchestration; wonderful, such exaltation inspired by mere beauty of sound. Never, never was this night to be forgotten, this her first night of Grand Opera. All this excitement, this world of perfume, of flowers, of exquisite costumes, of beautiful women, of fine, brave men. She looked back with immense pity to the narrow little life of her native town she had just left forever, the restricted horizon, the petty round of petty duties, the rare and barren pleasures—the library, the festival, the few concerts, the trivial plays. How easy it was to be good and noble when music such as this had become a part of one's life; how desirable was wealth when it could make possible such exquisite happiness as hers of the moment. Nobility, purity, courage, sacrifice seemed much more worth while now than a few moments ago. All things not positively unworthy became heroic, all things and all men. Landry Court was a young chevalier, pure as Galahad. Corthell was a beautiful artist-priest of the early Renaissance. Even Jadwin was a merchant prince, a great financial captain. And she herself—ah, she did not know; she dreamed of another Laura, a better, gentler, more beautiful Laura, whom everybody, everybody loved dearly and tenderly, and who loved everybody, and who should die beautifully, gently, in some garden far away—die because of a great love—beautifully, gently in the midst of flowers, die of a broken heart, and all the world should be sorry for her, and would weep over her when they found her dead and beautiful in her garden, amid the flowers and the birds, in some

far-off place, where it was always early morning and where there was soft music. And she was so sorry for herself, and so hurt with the sheer strength of her longing to be good and true, and noble and womanly, that as she sat in the front of the Cresslers' box on that marvellous evening, the tears ran down her cheeks again and again, and dropped upon her tight-shut, white-gloved fingers.

But the contralto had disappeared, and in her place the tenor held the stage—a stout, short young man in red plush doublet and grey silk tights. His chin advanced, an arm extended, one hand pressed to his breast, he apostrophised the pavilion, that now and then swayed a little in the draught from the wings.

The aria was received with furor; thrice he was obliged to repeat it. Even Corthell, who was critical to extremes, approved, nodding his head. Laura and Page clapped their hands till the very last. But Landry Court, to create an impression, assumed a certain disaffection.

"He's not in voice to-night. Too bad. You should have heard him Friday in 'Aida.'"

The opera continued. The great soprano, the prima donna, appeared and delivered herself of a song for which she was famous with astonishing eclat. Then in a little while the stage grew dark, the orchestration lapsed to a murmur, and the tenor and the soprano reentered. He clasped her in his arms and sang a half-dozen bars, then holding her hand, one arm still about her waist, withdrew from her gradually, till she occupied the front-centre of the stage. He assumed an attitude of adoration

and wonderment, his eyes uplifted as if entranced, and she, very softly, to the accompaniment of the sustained, dreamy chords of the orchestra, began her solo.

Laura shut her eyes. Never had she felt so soothed, so cradled and lulled and languid. Ah, to love like that! To love and be loved. There was no such love as that to-day. She wished that she could loose her clasp upon the sordid, material modern life that, perforce, she must hold to, she knew not why, and drift, drift off into the past, far away, through rose-coloured mists and diaphanous veils, or resign herself, reclining in a silver skiff drawn by swans, to the gentle current of some smooth-flowing river that ran on forever and forever.

But a discordant element developed. Close by—the lights were so low she could not tell where—a conversation, kept up in low whispers, began by degrees to intrude itself upon her attention. Try as she would, she could not shut it out, and now, as the music died away fainter and fainter, till voice and orchestra blended together in a single, barely audible murmur, vibrating with emotion, with romance, and with sentiment, she heard, in a hoarse, masculine whisper, the words:

"The shortage is a million bushels at the very least. Two hundred carloads were to arrive from Milwaukee last night."

She made a little gesture of despair, turning her head for an instant, searching the gloom about her. But she could see no one not interested in the stage. Why could not men leave their business outside, why must the jar of commerce spoil all the

harmony of this moment.

However, all sounds were drowned suddenly in a long burst of applause. The tenor and soprano bowed and smiled across the footlights. The soprano vanished, only to reappear on the balcony of the pavilion, and while she declared that the stars and the night-bird together sang "He loves thee," the voices close at hand continued:

"—one hundred and six carloads—"

"—paralysed the bulls—"

"—fifty thousand dollars—"

Then all at once the lights went up. The act was over.

Laura seemed only to come to herself some five minutes later. She and Corthell were out in the foyer behind the boxes. Everybody was promenading. The air was filled with the staccato chatter of a multitude of women. But she herself seemed far away —she and Sheldon Corthell. His face, dark, romantic, with the silky beard and eloquent eyes, appeared to be all she cared to see, while his low voice, that spoke close to her ear, was in a way a mere continuation of the melody of the duet just finished.

Instinctively she knew what he was about to say, for what he was trying to prepare her. She felt, too, that he had not expected to talk thus to her to-night. She knew that he loved her, that inevitably, sooner or later, they must return to a subject that for long had been excluded from their conversations, but it was to have been when they were alone, remote, secluded, not in the midst of a crowd, brilliant electrics dazzling their

eyes, the humming of the talk of hundreds assaulting their ears. But it seemed as if these important things came of themselves, independent of time and place, like birth and death. There was nothing to do but to accept the situation, and it was without surprise that at last, from out the murmur of Corthell's talk, she was suddenly conscious of the words:

"So that it is hardly necessary, is it, to tell you once more that I love you?"

She drew a long breath.

"I know. I know you love me."

They had sat down on a divan, at one end of the promenade; and Corthell, skilful enough in the little arts of the drawing-room, made it appear as though they talked of commonplaces; as for Laura, exalted, all but hypnotised with this marvellous evening, she hardly cared; she would not even stoop to maintain appearances.

"Yes, yes," she said; "I know you love me."

"And is that all you can say?" he urged. "Does it mean nothing to you that you are everything to me?"

She was coming a little to herself again. Love was, after all, sweeter in the actual—even in this crowded foyer, in this atmosphere of silk and jewels, in this show-place of a great city's society—than in a mystic garden of some romantic dreamland. She felt herself a woman again, modern, vital, and no longer a maiden of a legend of chivalry.

"Nothing to me?" she answered. "I don't know. I should rather

have you love me than—not."

"Let me love you then for always," he went on. "You know what I mean. We have understood each other from the very first. Plainly, and very simply, I love you with all my heart. You know now that I speak the truth, you know that you can trust me. I shall not ask you to share your life with mine. I ask you for the great happiness"—he raised his head sharply, suddenly proud —"the great honour of the opportunity of giving you all that I have of good. God give me humility, but that is much since I have known you. If I were a better man because of myself, I would not presume to speak of it, but if I am in anything less selfish, if I am more loyal, if I am stronger, or braver, it is only something of you that has become a part of me, and made me to be born again. So when I offer myself to you, I am only bringing back to you the gift you gave me for a little while. I have tried to keep it for you, to keep it bright and sacred and un-spotted. It is yours again now if you will have it."

There was a long pause; a group of men in opera hats and white gloves came up the stairway close at hand. The tide of promenaders set towards the entrances of the theatre. A little electric bell shrilled a note of warning.

Laura looked up at length, and as their glances met, he saw that there were tears in her eyes. This declaration of his love for her was the last touch to the greatest exhilaration of happiness she had ever known. Ah yes, she was loved, just as that young girl of the opera had been loved. For this one evening, at least, the

beauty of life was unmarred, and no cruel word of hers should spoil it. The world was beautiful. All people were good and noble and true. To-morrow, with the material round of duties and petty responsibilities and cold, calm reason, was far, far away.

Suddenly she turned to him, surrendering to the impulse, forgetful of consequences.

"Oh, I am glad, glad," she cried, "glad that you love me!"

But before Corthell could say anything more Landry Court and Page came up.

"We've been looking for you," said the young girl quietly. Page was displeased. She took herself and her sister—in fact, the whole scheme of existence—with extraordinary seriousness. She had no sense of humour. She was not tolerant; her ideas of propriety and the amenities were as immutable as the fixed stars. A fine way for Laura to act, getting off into corners with Sheldon Corthell. It would take less than that to make talk. If she had no sense of her obligations to Mrs. Cressler, at least she ought to think of the looks of things.

"They're beginning again," she said solemnly. "I should think you'd feel as though you had missed about enough of this opera."

They returned to the box. The rest of the party were reassembling.

"Well, Laura," said Mrs. Cressler, when they had sat down, "do you like it?"

"I don't want to leave it—ever," she answered. "I could stay here always."

"I like the young man best," observed Aunt Wess'. "The one who seems to be the friend of the tall fellow with a cloak. But why does he seem so sorry? Why don't he marry the young lady? Let's see, I don't remember his name."

"Beastly voice," declared Landry Court. "He almost broke there once. Too bad. He's not what he used to be. It seems he's terribly dissipated—drinks. Yes, sir, like a fish. He had delirium tremens once behind the scenes in Philadelphia, and stabbed a scene shifter with his stage dagger. A bad lot, to say the least."

"Now, Landry," protested Mrs. Cressler, "you're making it up as you go along." And in the laugh that followed Landry himself joined.

"After all," said Corthell, "this music seems to be just the right medium between the naive melody of the Italian school and the elaborate complexity of Wagner. I can't help but be carried away with it at times—in spite of my better judgment."

Jadwin, who had been smoking a cigar in the vestibule during the entr'acte, rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Well," he said, "it's all very fine. I've no doubt of that, but I give you my word I would rather hear my old governor take his guitar and sing 'Father, oh father, come home with me now,' than all the fiddle-faddle, tweedle-deedle opera business in the whole world."

But the orchestra was returning, the musicians crawling out one by one from a little door beneath the stage hardly bigger than the entrance of a rabbit hutch. They settled themselves in

front of their racks, adjusting their coat-tails, fingering their sheet music. Soon they began to tune up, and a vague bourdon of many sounds—the subdued snarl of the cornets, the dull mutter of the bass viols, the liquid gurgling of the flageolets and wood-wind instruments, now and then pierced by the strident chirps and cries of the violins, rose into the air dominating the incessant clamour of conversation that came from all parts of the theatre.

Then suddenly the house lights sank and the footlights rose. From all over the theatre came energetic whispers of "Sh! Sh!" Three strokes, as of a great mallet, sepulchral, grave, came from behind the wings; the leader of the orchestra raised his baton, then brought it slowly down, and while from all the instruments at once issued a prolonged minor chord, emphasised by a muffled roll of the kettle-drum, the curtain rose upon a mediaeval public square. The soprano was seated languidly upon a bench. Her grande scene occurred in this act. Her hair was un-bound; she wore a loose robe of cream white, with flowing sleeves, which left the arms bare to the shoulder. At the waist it was caught in by a girdle of silk rope.

"This is the great act," whispered Mrs. Cressler, leaning over Laura's shoulder. "She is superb later on. Superb."

"I wish those men would stop talking," murmured Laura, searching the darkness distressfully, for between the strains of the music she had heard the words:

"—Clearing House balance of three thousand dollars."

Meanwhile the prima donna, rising to her feet, delivered

herself of a lengthy recitative, her chin upon her breast, her eyes looking out from under her brows, an arm stretched out over the footlights. The baritone entered, striding to the left of the footlights, apostrophising the prima donna in a rage. She clasped her hands imploringly, supplicating him to leave her, exclaiming from time to time:

"Va via, va via—
Vel chieco per pieta."

Then all at once, while the orchestra blared, they fell into each other's arms.

"Why do they do that?" murmured Aunt Wess' perplexed. "I thought the gentleman with the beard didn't like her at all."

"Why, that's the duke, don't you see, Aunt Wess'?" said Laura trying to explain. "And he forgives her. I don't know exactly. Look at your libretto."

"—a conspiracy of the Bears … seventy cents … and naturally he busted."

The mezzo-soprano, the confidante of the prima donna, entered, and a trio developed that had but a mediocre success. At the end the baritone abruptly drew his sword, and the prima donna fell to her knees, chanting:

"Io tremo, ahime!"

"And now he's mad again," whispered Aunt Wess', consulting

her libretto, all at sea once more. "I can't understand. She says—the opera book says she says, 'I tremble.' I don't see why."

"Look now," said Page, "here comes the tenor. Now they're going to have it out."

The tenor, hatless, debouched suddenly upon the scene, and furious, addressed himself to the baritone, leaning forward, his hands upon his chest. Though the others sang in Italian, the tenor, a Parisian, used the French book continually, and now villified the baritone, crying out:

> "O traitre infame
> O lache et coupable"

"I don't see why he don't marry the young lady and be done with it," commented Aunt Wess'.

The act drew to its close. The prima donna went through her "great scene," wherein her voice climbed to C in alt, holding the note so long that Aunt Wess' became uneasy. As she finished, the house rocked with applause, and the soprano, who had gone out supported by her confidante, was recalled three times. A duel followed between the baritone and tenor, and the latter, mortally wounded, fell into the arms of his friends uttering broken, vehement notes. The chorus—made up of the city watch and town's people—crowded in upon the back of the stage. The soprano and her confidante returned. The basso, a black-bearded, bull necked man, sombre, mysterious, parted the chorus

to right and left, and advanced to the footlights. The contralto, dressed as a boy, appeared. The soprano took stage, and abruptly the closing scene of the act developed.

The violins raged and wailed in unison, all the bows moving together like parts of a well-regulated machine. The kettle-drums, marking the cadences, rolled at exact intervals. The director beat time furiously, as though dragging up the notes and chords with the end of his baton, while the horns and cornets blared, the bass viols growled, and the flageolets and piccolos lost themselves in an amazing complication of liquid gurgles and modulated roulades.

On the stage every one was singing. The soprano in the centre, vocalised in her highest register, bringing out the notes with vigorous twists of her entire body, and tossing them off into the air with sharp flirts of her head. On the right, the basso, scowling, could be heard in the intervals of the music repeating

"Il perfido, l'ingrato"

while to the left of the soprano, the baritone intoned indistinguishable, sonorous phrases, striking his breast and pointing to the fallen tenor with his sword. At the extreme left of the stage the contralto, in tights and plush doublet, turned to the audience, extending her hands, or flinging back her arms. She raised her eyebrows with each high note, and sunk her chin into her ruff when her voice descended. At certain intervals her notes

blended with those of the soprano's while she sang:

"Addio, felicita del ciel!"

The tenor, raised upon one hand, his shoulders supported by his friends, sustained the theme which the soprano led with the words:

"Je me meurs
Ah malheur
Ah je souffre
Mon ame s'envole."

The chorus formed a semi-circle just behind him. The women on one side, the men on the other. They left much to be desired; apparently scraped hastily together from heaven knew what sources, after the manner of a management suddenly become economical. The women were fat, elderly, and painfully homely; the men lean, osseous, and distressed, in misfitting hose. But they had been conscientiously drilled. They made all their gestures together, moved in masses simultaneously, and, without ceasing, chanted over and over again:

"O terror, O blasfema."

The finale commenced. Everybody on the stage took a step forward, beginning all over again upon a higher key. The

soprano's voice thrilled to the very chandelier. The orchestra redoubled its efforts, the director beating time with hands, head, and body.

"Il perfido, l'ingrato"

thundered the basso.

"Ineffabil mistero,"

answered the baritone, striking his breast and pointing with his sword; while all at once the soprano's voice, thrilling out again, ran up an astonishing crescendo that evoked veritable gasps from all parts of the audience, then jumped once more to her famous C in alt, and held it long enough for the chorus to repeat

"O terror, O blasfema"

four times.

Then the director's baton descended with the violence of a blow. There was a prolonged crash of harmony, a final enormous chord, to which every voice and every instrument contributed. The singers struck tableau attitudes, the tenor fell back with a last wail:

"Je me meurs,"

and the soprano fainted into the arms of her confidante. The curtain fell.

The house roared with applause. The scene was recalled again and again. The tenor, scrambling to his feet, joined hands with the baritone, soprano, and other artists, and all bowed repeatedly. Then the curtain fell for the last time, the lights of the great chandelier clicked and blazed up, and from every quarter of the house came the cries of the programme sellers:

"Opera books. Books of the opera. Words and music of the opera."

During this, the last entr'acte, Laura remained in the box with Mrs. Cressler, Corthell, and Jadwin. The others went out to look down upon the foyer from a certain balcony.

In the box the conversation turned upon stage management, and Corthell told how, in "L'Africaine," at the Opera, in Paris, the entire superstructure of the stage—wings, drops, and backs—turned when Vasco da Gama put the ship about. Jadwin having criticised the effect because none of the actors turned with it, was voted a Philistine by Mrs. Cressler and Corthell. But as he was about to answer, Mrs. Cressler turned to the artist, passing him her opera glasses, and asking:

"Who are those people down there in the third row of the parquet—see, on the middle aisle—the woman is in red. Aren't those the Gretrys?"

This left Jadwin and Laura out of the conversation, and the capitalist was quick to seize the chance of talking to her. Soon she

was surprised to notice that he was trying hard to be agreeable, and before they had exchanged a dozen sentences, he had turned an awkward compliment. She guessed by his manner that paying attention to young girls was for him a thing altogether unusual. Intuitively she divined that she, on this, the very first night of their acquaintance, had suddenly interested him.

She had had neither opportunity nor inclination to observe him closely during their interview in the vestibule, but now, as she sat and listened to him talk, she could not help being a little attracted. He was a heavy-built man, would have made two of Corthell, and his hands were large and broad, the hands of a man of affairs, who knew how to grip, and, above all, how to hang on. Those broad, strong hands, and keen, calm eyes would enfold and envelop a Purpose with tremendous strength, and they would persist and persist and persist, unswerving, unwavering, untiring, till the Purpose was driven home. And the two long, lean, fibrous arms of him; what a reach they could attain, and how wide and huge and even formidable would be their embrace of affairs. One of those great manoeuvres of a fellow money-captain had that very day been concluded, the Helmick failure, and between the chords and bars of a famous opera men talked in excited whispers, and one great leader lay at that very moment, broken and spent, fighting with his last breath for bare existence. Jadwin had seen it all. Uninvolved in the crash, he had none the less been close to it, watching it, in touch with it, foreseeing each successive collapse by which it reeled fatally to the final catastrophe. The

voices of the two men that had so annoyed her in the early part of the evening were suddenly raised again:

"—It was terrific, there on the floor of the Board this morning. By the Lord! they fought each other when the Bears began throwing the grain at 'em—in carload lots."

And abruptly, midway between two phases of that music-drama, of passion and romance, there came to Laura the swift and vivid impression of that other drama that simultaneously —even at that very moment—was working itself out close at hand, equally picturesque, equally romantic, equally passionate; but more than that, real, actual, modern, a thing in the very heart of the very life in which she moved. And here he sat, this Jadwin, quiet, in evening dress, listening good-naturedly to this beautiful music, for which he did not care, to this rant and fustian, watching quietly all this posing and attitudinising. How small and petty it must all seem to him!

Laura found time to be astonished. What! She had first met this man haughtily, in all the panoply of her "grand manner," and had promised herself that she would humble him, and pay him for that first mistrustful stare at her. And now, behold, she was studying him, and finding the study interesting. Out of harmony though she knew him to be with those fine emotions of hers of the early part of the evening, she nevertheless found much in him to admire. It was always just like that. She told herself that she was forever doing the unexpected thing, the inconsistent thing. Women were queer creatures, mysterious even to themselves.

"I am so pleased that you are enjoying it all," said Corthell's voice at her shoulder. "I knew you would. There is nothing like music such as this to appeal to the emotions, the heart—and with your temperament."

Straightway he made her feel her sex. Now she was just a woman again, with all a woman's limitations, and her relations with Corthell could never be—so she realised—any other than sex-relations. With Jadwin somehow it had been different. She had felt his manhood more than her womanhood, her sex side. And between them it was more a give-and-take affair, more equality, more companionship. Corthell spoke only of her heart and to her heart. But Jadwin made her feel—or rather she made herself feel when he talked to her—that she had a head as well as a heart.

And the last act of the opera did not wholly absorb her attention. The artists came and went, the orchestra wailed and boomed, the audience applauded, and in the end the tenor, fired by a sudden sense of duty and of stern obligation, tore himself from the arms of the soprano, and calling out upon remorseless fate and upon heaven, and declaiming about the vanity of glory, and his heart that broke yet disdained tears, allowed himself to be dragged off the scene by his friend the basso. For the fifth time during the piece the soprano fainted into the arms of her long-suffering confidante. The audience, suddenly remembering hats and wraps, bestirred itself, and many parties were already upon their feet and filing out at the time the curtain fell.

The Cresslers and their friends were among the last to regain the vestibule. But as they came out from the foyer, where the first draughts of outside air began to make themselves felt, there were exclamations:

"It's raining."

"Why, it's raining right down."

It was true. Abruptly the weather had moderated, and the fine, dry snow that had been falling since early evening had changed to a lugubrious drizzle. A wave of consternation invaded the vestibule for those who had not come in carriages, or whose carriages had not arrived. Tempers were lost; women, cloaked to the ears, their heads protected only by fichus or mantillas, quarrelled with husbands or cousins or brothers over the question of umbrellas. The vestibules were crowded to suffocation, and the aigrettes nodded and swayed again in alternate gusts, now of moist, chill atmosphere from without, and now of stale, hot air that exhaled in long puffs from the inside doors of the theatre itself. Here and there in the press, footmen, their top hats in rubber cases, their hands full of umbrellas, searched anxiously for their masters.

Outside upon the sidewalks and by the curbs, an apparently inextricable confusion prevailed; policemen with drawn clubs laboured and objurgated: anxious, preoccupied young men, their opera hats and gloves beaded with rain, hurried to and fro, searching for their carriages. At the edge of the awning, the caller, a gigantic fellow in gold-faced uniform, shouted

the numbers in a roaring, sing-song that dominated every other sound. Coachmen, their wet rubber coats reflecting the lamplight, called back and forth, furious quarrels broke out between hansom drivers and the police officers, steaming horses with jingling bits, their backs covered with dark green cloths, plunged and pranced, carriage doors banged, and the roll of wheels upon the pavement was as the reverberation of artillery caissons.

"Get your carriage, sir?" cried a ragged, half-grown arab at Cressler's elbow.

"Hurry up, then," said Cressler. Then, raising his voice, for the clamour was increasing with every second: "What's your number, Laura? You girls first. Ninety-three? Get that, boy? Ninety-three. Quick now."

The carriage appeared. Hastily they said good-by; hastily Laura expressed to Mrs. Cressler her appreciation and enjoyment. Corthell saw them to the carriage, and getting in after them shut the door behind him. They departed.

Laura sank back in the cool gloom of the carriage's interior redolent of damp leather and upholstery.

"What an evening! What an evening!" she murmured.

On the way home both she and Page appealed to the artist, who knew the opera well, to hum or whistle for them the arias that had pleased them most. Each time they were enthusiastic. Yes, yes, that was the air. Wasn't it pretty, wasn't it beautiful?

But Aunt Wess' was still unsatisfied.

"I don't see yet," she complained, "why the young man, the one with the pointed beard, didn't marry that lady and be done with it. Just as soon as they'd seem to have it all settled, he'd begin to take on again, and strike his breast and go away. I declare, I think it was all kind of foolish."

"Why, the duke—don't you see. The one who sang bass—" Page laboured to explain.

"Oh, I didn't like him at all," said Aunt Wess'. "He stamped around so." But the audience itself had interested her, and the decollete gowns had been particularly impressing.

"I never saw such dressing in all my life," she declared. "And that woman in the box next ours. Well! did you notice that!" She raised her eyebrows and set her lips together. "Well, I don't want to say anything."

The carriage rolled on through the darkened downtown streets, towards the North Side, where the Dearborns lived. They could hear the horses plashing through the layer of slush—mud, half-melted snow and rain—that encumbered the pavement. In the gloom the girls' wraps glowed pallid and diaphanous. The rain left long, slanting parallels on the carriage windows. They passed on down Wabash Avenue, and crossed over to State Street and Clarke Street, dark, deserted.

Laura, after a while, lost in thought, spoke but little. It had been a great evening—because of other things than mere music. Corthell had again asked her to marry him, and she, carried away by the excitement of the moment, had answered him

encouragingly. On the heels of this she had had that little talk with the capitalist Jadwin, and somehow since then she had been steadied, calmed. The cold air and the rain in her face had cooled her flaming cheeks and hot temples. She asked herself now if she did really, honestly love the artist. No, she did not; really and honestly she did not; and now as the carriage rolled on through the deserted streets of the business districts, she knew very well that she did not want to marry him. She had done him an injustice; but in the matter of righting herself with him, correcting his false impression, she was willing to procrastinate. She wanted him to love her, to pay her all those innumerable little attentions which he managed with such faultless delicacy. To say: "No, Mr. Corthell, I do not love you, I will never be your wife," would—this time—be final. He would go away, and she had no intention of allowing him to do that.

But abruptly her reflections were interrupted. While she thought it all over she had been looking out of the carriage window through a little space where she had rubbed the steam from the pane. Now, all at once, the strange appearance of the neighbourhood as the carriage turned north from out Jackson Street into La Salle, forced itself upon her attention. She uttered an exclamation.

The office buildings on both sides of the street were lighted from basement to roof. Through the windows she could get glimpses of clerks and book-keepers in shirt-sleeves bending over desks. Every office was open, and every one of them full

of a feverish activity. The sidewalks were almost as crowded as though at noontime. Messenger boys ran to and fro, and groups of men stood on the corners in earnest conversation. The whole neighbourhood was alive, and this, though it was close upon one o'clock in the morning!

"Why, what is it all?" she murmured.

Corthell could not explain, but all at once Page cried:

"Oh, oh, I know. See this is Jackson and La Salle streets. Landry was telling me. The 'commission district,' he called it. And these are the brokers' offices working overtime—that Helmick deal, you know."

Laura looked, suddenly stupefied. Here it was, then, that other drama, that other tragedy, working on there furiously, fiercely through the night, while she and all those others had sat there in that atmosphere of flowers and perfume, listening to music. Suddenly it loomed portentous in the eye of her mind, terrible, tremendous. Ah, this drama of the "Provision Pits," where the rush of millions of bushels of grain, and the clatter of millions of dollars, and the tramping and the wild shouting of thousands of men filled all the air with the noise of battle! Yes, here was drama in deadly earnest—drama and tragedy and death, and the jar of mortal fighting. And the echoes of it invaded the very sanctuary of art, and cut athwart the music of Italy and the cadence of polite conversation, and the shock of it endured when all the world should have slept, and galvanised into vivid life all these sombre piles of office buildings. It was dreadful, this labour

through the night. It had all the significance of field hospitals after the battle—hospitals and the tents of commanding generals. The wounds of the day were being bound up, the dead were being counted, while, shut in their headquarters, the captains and the commanders drew the plans for the grapple of armies that was to recommence with daylight.

"Yes, yes, that's just what it is," continued Page. "See, there's the Rookery, and there's the Constable Building, where Mr. Helmick has his offices. Landry showed me it all one day. And, look back." She raised the flap that covered the little window at the back of the carriage. "See, down there, at the end of the street. There's the Board of Trade Building, where the grain speculating is done,—where the wheat pits and corn pits are."

Laura turned and looked back. On either side of the vista in converging lines stretched the blazing office buildings. But over the end of the street the lead-coloured sky was rifted a little. A long, faint bar of light stretched across the prospect, and silhouetted against this rose a sombre mass, unbroken by any lights, rearing a black and formidable facade against the blur of light behind it.

And this was her last impression of the evening. The lighted office buildings, the murk of rain, the haze of light in the heavens, and raised against it the pile of the Board of Trade Building, black, grave, monolithic, crouching on its foundations, like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes, silent, grave,—crouching there without a sound, without sign of life

under the night and the drifting veil of rain.

II

Laura Dearborn's native town was Barrington, in Worcester County, Massachusetts. Both she and Page had been born there, and there had lived until the death of their father, at a time when Page was ready for the High School. The mother, a North Carolina girl, had died long before.

Laura's education had been unusual. After leaving the High School her father had for four years allowed her a private tutor (an impecunious graduate from the Harvard Theological School). She was ambitious, a devoted student, and her instructor's task was rather to guide than to enforce her application. She soon acquired a reading knowledge of French, and knew her Racine in the original almost as well as her Shakespeare. Literature became for her an actual passion. She delved into Tennyson and the Victorian poets, and soon was on terms of intimacy with the poets and essayists of New England. The novelists of the day she ignored almost completely, and voluntarily. Only occasionally, and then as a concession, she permitted herself a reading of Mr. Howells.

Moderately prosperous while he himself was conducting his little mill, Dearborn had not been able to put by any money to speak of, and when Laura and the local lawyer had come to close up the business, to dispose of the mill, and to settle the claims against what the lawyer grandiloquently termed "the

estate," there was just enough money left to pay for Page's tickets to Chicago and a course of tuition for her at a seminary.

The Cresslers on the event of Dearborn's death had advised both sisters to come West, and had pledged themselves to look after Page during the period of her schooling. Laura had sent the little girl on at once, but delayed taking the step herself.

Fortunately, the two sisters were not obliged to live upon their inheritance. Dearborn himself had a sister—a twin of Aunt Wess'—who had married a wealthy woollen merchant of Boston, and this one, long since, had provided for the two girls. A large sum had been set aside, which was to be made over to them when the father died. For years now this sum had been accumulating interest. So that when Laura and Page faced the world, alone, upon the steps of the Barrington cemetery, they had the assurance that, at least, they were independent.

For two years, in the solidly built colonial dwelling, with its low ceilings and ample fireplaces, where once the minute-men had swung their kettles, Laura, alone, thought it all over. Mother and father were dead; even the Boston aunt was dead. Of all her relations, Aunt Wess' alone remained. Page was at her finishing school at Geneva Lake, within two hours of Chicago. The Cresslers were the dearest friends of the orphan girls. Aunt Wess', herself a widow, living also in Chicago, added her entreaties to Mrs. Cressler's. All things seemed to point her westward, all things seemed to indicate that one phase of her life was ended.

Then, too, she had her ambitions. These hardly took definite shape in her mind; but vaguely she chose to see herself, at some far-distant day, an actress, a tragedienne, playing the roles of Shakespeare's heroines. This idea of hers was more a desire than an ambition, but it could not be realised in Barrington, Massachusetts. For a year she temporised, procrastinated, loth to leave the old home, loth to leave the grave in the cemetery back of the Methodist-Episcopal chapel. Twice during this time she visited Page, and each time the great grey city threw the spell of its fascination about her. Each time she returned to Barrington the town dwindled in her estimation. It was picturesque, but lamentably narrow. The life was barren, the "New England spirit" prevailed in all its severity; and this spirit seemed to her a veritable cult, a sort of religion, wherein the Old Maid was the priestess, the Spinster the officiating devotee, the thing worshipped the Great Unbeautiful, and the ritual unremitting, unrelenting Housework. She detested it.

That she was an Episcopalian, and preferred to read her prayers rather than to listen to those written and memorised by the Presbyterian minister, seemed to be regarded as a relic of heathenish rites—a thing almost cannibalistic. When she elected to engage a woman and a "hired man" to manage her house, she felt the disapprobation of the entire village, as if she had sunk into some decadent and enervating Lower-Empire degeneracy.

The crisis came when Laura travelled alone to Boston to hear Modjeska in "Marie Stuart" and "Macbeth," and upon returning

full of enthusiasm, allowed it to be understood that she had a half-formed desire of emulating such an example. A group of lady-deaconesses, headed by the Presbyterian minister, called upon her, with some intention of reasoning and labouring with her.

They got no farther than the statement of the cause of this visit. The spirit and temper of the South, that she had from her mother, flamed up in Laura at last, and the members of the "committee," before they were well aware, came to themselves in the street outside the front gate, dazed and bewildered, staring at each other, all confounded and stunned by the violence of an outbreak of long-repressed emotion and long-restrained anger, that like an actual physical force had swept them out of the house.

At the same moment Laura, thrown across her bed, wept with a vehemence that shook her from head to foot. But she had not the least compunction for what she had said, and before the month was out had said good-by to Barrington forever, and was on her way to Chicago, henceforth to be her home.

A house was bought on the North Side, and it was arranged that Aunt Wess' should live with her two nieces. Pending the installation Laura and Page lived at a little family hotel in the same neighbourhood. The Cresslers' invitation to join the theatre party at the Auditorium had fallen inopportunely enough, squarely in the midst of the ordeal of moving in. Indeed the two girls had already passed one night in the new home, and they must dress for the affair by lamplight in their unfurnished quarters and under inconceivable difficulties. Only the lure of Italian opera,

heard from a box, could have tempted them to have accepted the invitation at such a time and under such circumstances.

The morning after the opera, Laura woke in her bed—almost the only article of furniture that was in place in the whole house—with the depressing consciousness of a hard day's work at hand. Outside it was still raining, the room was cold, heated only by an inadequate oil stove, and through the slats of the inside shutters, which, pending the hanging of the curtains they had been obliged to close, was filtering a gloomy light of a wet Chicago morning.

It was all very mournful, and she regretted now that she had not abided by her original decision to remain at the hotel until the new house was ready for occupancy. But it had happened that their month at the hotel was just up, and rather than engage the rooms for another four weeks she had thought it easier as well as cheaper to come to the house. It was all a new experience for her, and she had imagined that everything could be moved in, put in place, and the household running smoothly in a week's time.

She sat up in bed, hugging her shoulders against the chill of the room and looking at her theatre gown, that—in default of a clean closet—she had hung from the gas fixture the night before. From the direction of the kitchen came the sounds of the newly engaged "girl" making the fire for breakfast, while through the register a thin wisp of blue smoke curled upward to prove that the "hired man" was tinkering with the unused furnace. The room itself was in lamentable confusion. Crates and packing boxes

encumbered the uncarpeted floor; chairs wrapped in excelsior and jute were piled one upon another; a roll of carpet leaned in one corner and a pile of mattresses occupied another.

As Laura considered the prospect she realised her blunder.

"Why, and oh, why," she murmured, "didn't we stay at the hotel till all this was straightened out?"

But in an adjoining room she heard Aunt Wess' stirring. She turned to Page, who upon the pillows beside her still slept, her stocking around her neck as a guarantee against draughts.

"Page, Page! Wake up, girlie. It's late, and there's worlds to do."

Page woke blinking.

"Oh, it's freezing cold, Laura. Let's light the oil stove and stay in bed till the room gets warm. Oh, dear, aren't you sleepy, and, oh, wasn't last night lovely? Which one of us will get up to light the stove? We'll count for it. Lie down, sissie, dear," she begged, "you're letting all the cold air in."

Laura complied, and the two sisters, their noses all but touching, the bedclothes up to their ears, put their arms about each other to keep the warmer.

Amused at the foolishness, they "counted" to decide as to who should get up to light the oil stove, Page beginning:

"Eeny—meeny—myny—mo—"

But before the "count" was decided Aunt Wess' came in, already dressed, and in a breath the two girls implored her to light the stove. While she did so, Aunt Wess' remarked, with the

alacrity of a woman who observes the difficulties of a proceeding in which she has no faith:

"I don't believe that hired girl knows her business. She says now she can't light a fire in that stove. My word, Laura, I do believe you'll have enough of all this before you're done. You know I advised you from the very first to take a flat."

"Nonsense, Aunt Wess'," answered Laura, good-naturedly. "We'll work it out all right. I know what's the matter with that range. I'll be right down and see to it so soon as I'm dressed."

It was nearly ten o'clock before breakfast, such as it was, was over. They ate it on the kitchen table, with the kitchen knives and forks, and over the meal, Page having remarked: "Well, what will we do first?" discussed the plan of campaign.

"Landry Court does not have to work to-day—he told me why, but I've forgotten—and he said he was coming up to help," observed Laura, and at once Aunt Wess' smiled. Landry Court was openly and strenuously in love with Laura, and no one of the new household ignored the fact. Aunt Wess' chose to consider the affair as ridiculous, and whenever the subject was mentioned spoke of Landry as "that boy."

Page, however, bridled with seriousness as often as the matter came up. Yes, that was all very well, but Landry was a decent, hard-working young fellow, with all his way to make and no time to waste, and if Laura didn't mean that it should come to anything it wasn't very fair to him to keep him dangling along like that.

"I guess," Laura was accustomed to reply, looking

significantly at Aunt Wess', "that our little girlie has a little bit of an eye on a certain hard-working young fellow herself." And the answer invariably roused Page.

"Now, Laura," she would cry, her eyes snapping, her breath coming fast. "Now, Laura, that isn't right at all, and you know I don't like it, and you just say it because you know it makes me cross. I won't have you insinuate that I would run after any man or care in the least whether he's in love or not. I just guess I've got some self-respect; and as for Landry Court, we're no more nor less than just good friends, and I appreciate his business talents and the way he rustles 'round, and he merely respects me as a friend, and it don't go any farther than that. 'An eye on him,' I do declare! As if I hadn't yet to see the man I'd so much as look at a second time."

And Laura, remembering her "Shakespeare," was ever ready with the words:

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

Just after breakfast, in fact, Landry did appear.

"Now," he began, with a long breath, addressing Laura, who was unwrapping the pieces of cut glass and bureau ornaments as Page passed them to her from the depths of a crate. "Now, I've done a lot already. That's what made me late. I've ordered your newspaper sent here, and I've telephoned the hotel to forward any mail that comes for you to this address, and I sent word to the gas company to have your gas turned on—"

"Oh, that's good," said Laura.

"Yes, I thought of that; the man will be up right away to fix it, and I've ordered a cake of ice left here every day, and told the telephone company that you wanted a telephone put in. Oh, yes, and the bottled-milk man—I stopped in at a dairy on the way up. Now, what do we do first?"

He took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and plunged into the confusion of crates and boxes that congested the rooms and hallways on the first floor of the house. The two sisters could hear him attacking his task with tremendous blows of the kitchen hammer. From time to time he called up the stairway:

"Hey, what do you want done with this jardiniere thing? … Where does this hanging lamp go, Laura?"

Laura, having unpacked all the cut-glass ornaments, came down-stairs, and she and Landry set about hanging the parlour curtains.

Landry fixed the tops of the window mouldings with a piercing eye, his arms folded.

"I see, I see," he answered to Laura's explanations. "I see. Now where's a screw-driver, and a step-ladder? Yes, and I'll have to have some brass nails, and your hired man must let me have that hammer again."

He sent the cook after the screw-driver, called the hired man from the furnace, shouted upstairs to Page to ask for the whereabouts of the brass nails, and delegated Laura to steady the step-ladder.

"Now, Landry," directed Laura, "those rods want to be about

three inches from the top."

"Well," he said, climbing up, "I'll mark the place with the screw and you tell me if it is right."

She stepped back, her head to one side.

"No; higher, Landry. There, that's about it—or a *little* lower—so. That's just right. Come down now and help me put the hooks in."

They pulled a number of sofa cushions together and sat down on the floor side by side, Landry snapping the hooks in place where Laura had gathered the pleats. Inevitably his hands touched hers, and their heads drew close together. Page and Mrs. Wessels were unpacking linen in the upstairs hall. The cook and hired man raised a great noise of clanking stove lids and grates as they wrestled with the range in the kitchen.

"Well," said Landry, "you are going to have a pretty home." He was meditating a phrase of which he purposed delivering himself when opportunity afforded. It had to do with Laura's eyes, and her ability of understanding him. She understood him; she was to know that he thought so, that it was of immense importance to him. It was thus he conceived of the manner of love making. The evening before that palavering artist seemed to have managed to monopolise her about all of the time. Now it was his turn, and this day of household affairs, of little domestic commotions, appeared to him to be infinitely more desirous than the pomp and formality of evening dress and opera boxes. This morning the relations between himself and Laura seemed

charming, intimate, unconventional, and full of opportunities. Never had she appeared prettier to him. She wore a little pink flannel dressing-sack with full sleeves, and her hair, carelessly twisted into great piles, was in a beautiful disarray, curling about her cheeks and ears. "I didn't see anything of you at all last night," he grumbled.

"Well, you didn't try."

"Oh, it was the Other Fellow's turn," he went on. "Say," he added, "how often are you going to let me come to see you when you get settled here? Twice a week—three times?"

"As if you wanted to see me as often as that. Why, Landry, I'm growing up to be an old maid. You can't want to lose your time calling on old maids."

He was voluble in protestations. He was tired of young girls. They were all very well to dance with, but when a man got too old for that sort of thing, he wanted some one with sense to talk to. Yes, he did. Some one with sense. Why, he would rather talk five minutes with her—

"Honestly, Landry?" she asked, as though he were telling a thing incredible.

He swore to her it was true. His eyes snapped. He struck his palm with his fist.

"An old maid like me?" repeated Laura.

"Old maid nothing!" he vociferated. "Ah," he cried, "you seem to understand me. When I look at you, straight into your eyes—"

From the doorway the cook announced that the man with the last load of furnace coal had come, and handed Laura the voucher to sign. Then needs must that Laura go with the cook to see if the range was finally and properly adjusted, and while she was gone the man from the gas company called to turn on the meter, and Landry was obliged to look after him. It was half an hour before he and Laura could once more settle themselves on the cushions in the parlour.

"Such a lot of things to do," she said; "and you are such a help, Landry. It was so dear of you to want to come."

"I would do anything in the world for you, Laura," he exclaimed, encouraged by her words; "anything. You know I would. It isn't so much that I want you to care for me—and I guess I want that bad enough—but it's because I love to be with you, and be helping you, and all that sort of thing. Now, all this," he waved a hand at the confusion of furniture, "all this to-day—I just feel," he declared with tremendous earnestness, "I just feel as though I were entering into your life. And just sitting here beside you and putting in these curtain hooks, I want you to know that it's inspiring to me. Yes, it is, inspiring; it's elevating. You don't know how it makes a man feel to have the companionship of a good and lovely woman."

"Landry, as though I were all that. Here, put another hook in here."

She held the fold towards him. But he took her hand as their fingers touched and raised it to his lips and kissed it. She did

not withdraw it, nor rebuke him, crying out instead, as though occupied with quite another matter:

"Landry, careful, my dear boy; you'll make me prick my fingers. Ah—there, you did."

He was all commiseration and self-reproach at once, and turned her hand palm upwards, looking for the scratch.

"Um!" she breathed. "It hurts."

"Where now," he cried, "where was it? Ah, I was a beast; I'm so ashamed." She indicated a spot on her wrist instead of her fingers, and very naturally Landry kissed it again.

"How foolish!" she remonstrated. "The idea! As if I wasn't old enough to be—"

"You're not so old but what you're going to marry me some day," he declared.

"How perfectly silly, Landry!" she retorted. "Aren't you done with my hand yet?"

"No, indeed," he cried, his clasp tightening over her fingers. "It's mine. You can't have it till I say—or till you say that—some day—you'll give it to me for good—for better or for worse."

"As if you really meant that," she said, willing to prolong the little situation. It was very sweet to have this clean, fine-fibred young boy so earnestly in love with her, very sweet that the lifting of her finger, the mere tremble of her eyelid should so perturb him.

"Mean it! Mean it!" he vociferated. "You don't know how much I do mean it. Why, Laura, why—why, I can't think of

anything else."

"You!" she mocked. "As if I believed that. How many other girls have you said it to this year?"

Landry compressed his lips.

"Miss Dearborn, you insult me."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Laura, at last withdrawing her hand.

"And now you're mocking me. It isn't kind. No, it isn't; it isn't kind."

"I never answered your question yet," she observed.

"What question?"

"About your coming to see me when we were settled. I thought you wanted to know."

"How about lunch?" said Page, from the doorway. "Do you know it's after twelve?"

"The girl has got something for us," said Laura. "I told her about it. Oh, just a pick-up lunch—coffee, chops. I thought we wouldn't bother to-day. We'll have to eat in the kitchen."

"Well, let's be about it," declared Landry, "and finish with these curtains afterward. Inwardly I'm a ravening wolf."

It was past one o'clock by the time that luncheon, "picked up" though it was, was over. By then everybody was very tired. Aunt Wess' exclaimed that she could not stand another minute, and retired to her room. Page, indefatigable, declaring they never would get settled if they let things dawdle along, set to work unpacking her trunk and putting her clothes away. Her fox terrier, whom the family, for obscure reasons, called the Pig,

arrived in the middle of the afternoon in a crate, and shivering with the chill of the house, was tied up behind the kitchen range, where, for all the heat, he still trembled and shuddered at long intervals, his head down, his eyes rolled up, bewildered and discountenanced by so much confusion and so many new faces.

Outside the weather continued lamentable. The rain beat down steadily upon the heaps of snow on the grass-plats by the curbstones, melting it, dirtying it, and reducing it to viscid slush. The sky was lead grey; the trees, bare and black as though built of iron and wire, dripped incessantly. The sparrows, huddling under the house-eaves or in interstices of the mouldings, chirped feebly from time to time, sitting disconsolate, their feathers puffed out till their bodies assumed globular shapes. Delivery wagons trundled up and down the street at intervals, the horses and drivers housed in oil-skins.

The neighborhood was quiet. There was no sound of voices in the streets. But occasionally, from far away in the direction of the river or the Lake Front, came the faint sounds of steamer and tug whistles. The sidewalks in either direction were deserted. Only a solitary policeman, his star pinned to the outside of his dripping rubber coat, his helmet shedding rivulets, stood on the corner absorbed in the contemplation of the brown torrent of the gutter plunging into a sewer vent.

Landry and Laura were in the library at the rear of the house, a small room, two sides of which were occupied with book-cases. They were busy putting the books in place. Laura stood half-way

up the step-ladder taking volume after volume from Landry as he passed them to her.

"Do you wipe them carefully, Landry?" she asked.

He held a strip of cloth torn from an old sheet in his hand, and rubbed the dust from each book before he handed it to her.

"Yes, yes; very carefully," he assured her. "Say," he added, "where are all your modern novels? You've got Scott and Dickens and Thackeray, of course, and Eliot—yes, and here's Hawthorne and Poe. But I haven't struck anything later than Oliver Wendell Holmes."

Laura put up her chin. "Modern novels—no indeed. When I've yet to read 'Jane Eyre,' and have only read 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Newcomes' once."

She made a point of the fact that her taste was the extreme of conservatism, refusing to acknowledge hardly any fiction that was not almost classic. Even Stevenson aroused her suspicions.

"Well, here's 'The Wrecker,'" observed Landry, handing it up to her. "I read it last summer-vacation at Waukesha. Just about took the top of my head off."

"I tried to read it," she answered. "Such an outlandish story, no love story in it, and so coarse, so brutal, and then so improbable. I couldn't get interested."

But abruptly Landry uttered an exclamation:

"Well, what do you call this? 'Wanda,' by Ouida. How is this for modern?"

She blushed to her hair, snatching the book from him.

"Page brought it home. It's hers."

But her confusion betrayed her, and Landry shouted derisively.

"Well, I did read it then," she suddenly declared defiantly. "No, I'm not ashamed. Yes, I read it from cover to cover. It made me cry like I haven't cried over a book since I was a little tot. You can say what you like, but it's beautiful—a beautiful love story—and it does tell about noble, unselfish people. I suppose it has its faults, but it makes you feel better for reading it, and that's what all your 'Wreckers' in the world would never do."

"Well," answered Landry, "I don't know much about that sort of thing. Corthell does. He can talk you blind about literature. I've heard him run on by the hour. He says the novel of the future is going to be the novel without a love story."

But Laura nodded her head incredulously.

"It will be long after I am dead—that's one consolation," she said.

"Corthell is full of crazy ideas anyhow," Landry went on, still continuing to pass the books up to her. "He's a good sort, and I like him well enough, but he's the kind of man that gets up a reputation for being clever and artistic by running down the very one particular thing that every one likes, and cracking up some book or picture or play that no one has ever heard of. Just let anything get popular once and Sheldon Corthell can't speak of it without shuddering. But he'll go over here to some Archer Avenue pawn shop, dig up an old brass stewpan, or coffee-pot

that some greasy old Russian Jew has chucked away, and he'll stick it up in his studio and regularly kow-tow to it, and talk about the 'decadence of American industrial arts.' I've heard him. I say it's pure affectation, that's what it is, pure affectation."

But the book-case meanwhile had been filling up, and now Laura remarked:

"No more, Landry. That's all that will go here."

She prepared to descend from the ladder. In filling the higher shelves she had mounted almost to the topmost step.

"Careful now," said Landry, as he came forward. "Give me your hand."

She gave it to him, and then, as she descended, Landry had the assurance to put his arm around her waist as if to steady her. He was surprised at his own audacity, for he had premeditated nothing, and his arm was about her before he was well aware. He yet found time to experience a qualm of apprehension. Just how would Laura take it? Had he gone too far?

But Laura did not even seem to notice, all her attention apparently fixed upon coming safely down to the floor. She descended and shook out her skirts.

"There," she said, "that's over with. Look, I'm all dusty."

There was a knock at the half-open door. It was the cook.

"What are you going to have for supper, Miss Dearborn?" she inquired. "There's nothing in the house."

"Oh, dear," said Laura with sudden blankness, "I never thought of supper. Isn't there anything?"

"Nothing but some eggs and coffee." The cook assumed an air of aloofness, as if the entire affair were totally foreign to any interest or concern of hers. Laura dismissed her, saying that she would see to it.

"We'll have to go out and get some things," she said. "We'll all go. I'm tired of staying in the house."

"No, I've a better scheme," announced Landry. "I'll invite you all out to dine with me. I know a place where you can get the best steak in America. It has stopped raining. See," he showed her the window.

"But, Landry, we are all so dirty and miserable."

"We'll go right now and get there early. There will be nobody there, and we can have a room to ourselves. Oh, it's all right," he declared. "You just trust me."

"We'll see what Page and Aunt Wess' say. Of course Aunt Wess' would have to come."

"Of course," he said. "I wouldn't think of asking you unless she could come."

A little later the two sisters, Mrs. Wessels, and Landry came out of the house, but before taking their car they crossed to the opposite side of the street, Laura having said that she wanted to note the effect of her parlour curtains from the outside.

"I think they are looped up just far enough," she declared. But Landry was observing the house itself.

"It is the best-looking place on the block," he answered.

In fact, the house was not without a certain attractiveness. It

occupied a corner lot at the intersection of Huron and North State streets. Directly opposite was St. James' Church, and at one time the house had served as the rectory. For the matter of that, it had been built for just that purpose. Its style of architecture was distantly ecclesiastic, with a suggestion of Gothic to some of the doors and windows. The material used was solid, massive, the walls thick, the foundation heavy. It did not occupy the entire lot, the original builder seeming to have preferred garden space to mere amplitude of construction, and in addition to the inevitable "back yard," a lawn bordered it on three sides. It gave the place a certain air of distinction and exclusiveness. Vines grew thick upon the southern walls; in the summer time fuchsias, geraniums, and pansies would flourish in the flower beds by the front stoop. The grass plat by the curb boasted a couple of trees. The whole place was distinctive, individual, and very homelike, and came as a grateful relief to the endless lines of houses built of yellow Michigan limestone that pervaded the rest of the neighbourhood in every direction.

"I love the place," exclaimed Laura. "I think it's as pretty a house as I have seen in Chicago."

"Well, it isn't so spick and span," commented Page. "It gives you the idea that we're not new-rich and showy and all."

But Aunt Wess' was not yet satisfied.

"*You* may see, Laura," she remarked, "how you are going to heat all that house with that one furnace, but I declare I don't."

Their car, or rather their train of cars, coupled together in

threes, in Chicago style, came, and Landry escorted them down town. All the way Laura could not refrain from looking out of the windows, absorbed in the contemplation of the life and aspects of the streets.

"You will give yourself away," said Page. "Everybody will know you're from the country."

"I am," she retorted. "But there's a difference between just mere 'country' and Massachusetts, and I'm not ashamed of it."

Chicago, the great grey city, interested her at every instant and under every condition. As yet she was not sure that she liked it; she could not forgive its dirty streets, the unspeakable squalor of some of its poorer neighbourhoods that sometimes developed, like cancerous growths, in the very heart of fine residence districts. The black murk that closed every vista of the business streets oppressed her, and the soot that stained linen and gloves each time she stirred abroad was a never-ending distress.

But the life was tremendous. All around, on every side, in every direction the vast machinery of Commonwealth clashed and thundered from dawn to dark and from dark till dawn. Even now, as the car carried her farther into the business quarter, she could hear it, see it, and feel in her every fibre the trepidation of its motion. The blackened waters of the river, seen an instant between stanchions as the car trundled across the State Street bridge, disappeared under fleets of tugs, of lake steamers, of lumber barges from Sheboygan and Mackinac, of grain boats from Duluth, of coal scows that filled the air with

impalpable dust, of cumbersome schooners laden with produce, of grimy rowboats dodging the prows and paddles of the larger craft, while on all sides, blocking the horizon, red in color and designated by Brobdignag letters, towered the hump-shouldered grain elevators.

Just before crossing the bridge on the north side of the river she had caught a glimpse of a great railway terminus. Down below there, rectilinear, scientifically paralleled and squared, the Yard disclosed itself. A system of grey rails beyond words complicated opened out and spread immeasurably. Switches, semaphores, and signal towers stood here and there. A dozen trains, freight and passenger, puffed and steamed, waiting the word to depart. Detached engines hurried in and out of sheds and roundhouses, seeking their trains, or bunted the ponderous freight cars into switches; trundling up and down, clanking, shrieking, their bells filling the air with the clangour of tocsins. Men in visored caps shouted hoarsely, waving their arms or red flags; drays, their big dappled horses, feeding in their nose bags, stood backed up to the open doors of freight cars and received their loads. A train departed roaring. Before midnight it would be leagues away boring through the Great Northwest, carrying Trade—the life blood of nations—into communities of which Laura had never heard. Another train, reeking with fatigue, the air brakes screaming, arrived and halted, debouching a flood of passengers, business men, bringing Trade—a galvanising elixir —from the very ends and corners of the continent.

Or, again, it was South Water Street—a jam of delivery wagons and market carts backed to the curbs, leaving only a tortuous path between the endless files of horses, suggestive of an actual barrack of cavalry. Provisions, market produce, "garden truck" and fruits, in an infinite welter of crates and baskets, boxes, and sacks, crowded the sidewalks. The gutter was choked with an overflow of refuse cabbage leaves, soft oranges, decaying beet tops. The air was thick with the heavy smell of vegetation. Food was trodden under foot, food crammed the stores and warehouses to bursting. Food mingled with the mud of the highway. The very dray horses were gorged with an unending nourishment of snatched mouthfuls picked from backboard, from barrel top, and from the edge of the sidewalk. The entire locality reeked with the fatness of a hundred thousand furrows. A land of plenty, the inordinate abundance of the earth itself emptied itself upon the asphalt and cobbles of the quarter. It was the Mouth of the City, and drawn from all directions, over a territory of immense area, this glut of crude subsistence was sucked in, as if into a rapacious gullet, to feed the sinews and to nourish the fibres of an immeasurable colossus.

Suddenly the meaning and significance of it all dawned upon Laura. The Great Grey City, brooking no rival, imposed its dominion upon a reach of country larger than many a kingdom of the Old World. For, thousands of miles beyond its confines was its influence felt. Out, far out, far away in the snow and shadow of Northern Wisconsin forests, axes and saws bit the

bark of century-old trees, stimulated by this city's energy. Just as far to the southward pick and drill leaped to the assault of veins of anthracite, moved by her central power. Her force turned the wheels of harvester and seeder a thousand miles distant in Iowa and Kansas. Her force spun the screws and propellers of innumerable squadrons of lake steamers crowding the Sault Sainte Marie. For her and because of her all the Central States, all the Great Northwest roared with traffic and industry; sawmills screamed; factories, their smoke blackening the sky, clashed and flamed; wheels turned, pistons leaped in their cylinders; cog gripped cog; beltings clasped the drums of mammoth wheels; and converters of forges belched into the clouded air their tempest breath of molten steel.

It was Empire, the resistless subjugation of all this central world of the lakes and the prairies. Here, mid-most in the land, beat the Heart of the Nation, whence inevitably must come its immeasurable power, its infinite, infinite, inexhaustible vitality. Here, of all her cities, throbbed the true life—the true power and spirit of America; gigantic, crude with the crudity of youth, disdaining rivalry; sane and healthy and vigorous; brutal in its ambition, arrogant in the new-found knowledge of its giant strength, prodigal of its wealth, infinite in its desires. In its capacity boundless, in its courage indomitable; subduing the wilderness in a single generation, defying calamity, and through the flame and the debris of a commonwealth in ashes, rising suddenly renewed, formidable, and Titanic.

Laura, her eyes dizzied, her ears stunned, watched tirelessly.

"There is something terrible about it," she murmured, half to herself, "something insensate. In a way, it doesn't seem human. It's like a great tidal wave. It's all very well for the individual just so long as he can keep afloat, but once fallen, how horribly quick it would crush him, annihilate him, how horribly quick, and with such horrible indifference! I suppose it's civilisation in the making, the thing that isn't meant to be seen, as though it were too elemental, too—primordial; like the first verses of Genesis."

The impression remained long with her, and not even the gaiety of their little supper could altogether disperse it. She was a little frightened—frightened of the vast, cruel machinery of the city's life, and of the men who could dare it, who conquered it. For a moment they seemed, in a sense, more terrible than the city itself—men for whom all this crash of conflict and commerce had no terrors. Those who could subdue it to their purposes, must they not be themselves more terrible, more pitiless, more brutal? She shrank a little. What could women ever know of the life of men, after all? Even Landry, extravagant as he was, so young, so exuberant, so seemingly innocent—she knew that he was spoken of as a good business man. He, too, then had his other side. For him the Battle of the Street was an exhilaration. Beneath that boyish exterior was the tough coarseness, the male hardness, the callousness that met the brunt and withstood the shock of onset.

Ah, these men of the city, what could women ever know of them, of their lives, of that other existence through which—

freed from the influence of wife or mother, or daughter or sister —they passed every day from nine o'clock till evening? It was a life in which women had no part, and in which, should they enter it, they would no longer recognise son or husband, or father or brother. The gentle-mannered fellow, clean-minded, clean-handed, of the breakfast or supper table was one man. The other, who and what was he? Down there in the murk and grime of the business district raged the Battle of the Street, and therein he was a being transformed, case hardened, supremely selfish, asking no quarter; no, nor giving any. Fouled with the clutchings and grapplings of the attack, besmirched with the elbowing of low associates and obscure allies, he set his feet toward conquest, and mingled with the marchings of an army that surged forever forward and back; now in merciless assault, beating the fallen enemy under foot, now in repulse, equally merciless, trampling down the auxiliaries of the day before, in a panic dash for safety; always cruel, always selfish, always pitiless.

To contrast these men with such as Corthell was inevitable. She remembered him, to whom the business district was an unexplored country, who kept himself far from the fighting, his hands unstained, his feet unsullied. He passed his life gently, in the calm, still atmosphere of art, in the cult of the beautiful, unperturbed, tranquil; painting, reading, or, piece by piece, developing his beautiful stained glass. Him women could know, with him they could sympathise. And he could enter fully into their lives and help and stimulate them. Of the two existences

which did she prefer, that of the business man, or that of the artist?

Then suddenly Laura surprised herself. After all, she was a daughter of the frontier, and the blood of those who had wrestled with a new world flowed in her body. Yes, Corthell's was a beautiful life; the charm of dim painted windows, the attraction of darkened studios with their harmonies of color, their orientalisms, and their arabesques was strong. No doubt it all had its place. It fascinated her at times, in spite of herself. To relax the mind, to indulge the senses, to live in an environment of pervading beauty was delightful. But the men to whom the woman in her turned were not those of the studio. Terrible as the Battle of the Street was, it was yet battle. Only the strong and the brave might dare it, and the figure that held her imagination and her sympathy was not the artist, soft of hand and of speech, elaborating graces of sound and color and form, refined, sensitive, and temperamental; but the fighter, unknown and un-knowable to women as he was; hard, rigorous, panoplied in the harness of the warrior, who strove among the trumpets, and who, in the brunt of conflict, conspicuous, formidable, set the battle in a rage around him, and exulted like a champion in the shoutings of the captains.

They were not long at table, and by the time they were ready to depart it was about half-past five. But when they emerged into the street, it was discovered that once more the weather had abruptly changed. It was snowing thickly. Again a bitter wind

from off the Lake tore through the streets. The slush and melted snow was freezing, and the north side of every lamp post and telegraph pole was sheeted with ice.

To add to their discomfort, the North State Street cars were blocked. When they gained the corner of Washington Street they could see where the congestion began, a few squares distant.

"There's nothing for it," declared Landry, "but to go over and get the Clarke Street cars—and at that you may have to stand up all the way home, at this time of day."

They paused, irresolute, a moment on the corner. It was the centre of the retail quarter. Close at hand a vast dry goods house, built in the old "iron-front" style, towered from the pavement, and through its hundreds of windows presented to view a world of stuffs and fabrics, upholsteries and textiles, kaleidoscopic, gleaming in the fierce brilliance of a multitude of lights. From each street doorway was pouring an army of "shoppers," women for the most part; and these—since the store catered to a rich clientele—fashionably dressed. Many of them stood for a moment on the threshold of the storm-doorways, turning up the collars of their sealskins, settling their hands in their muffs, and searching the street for their coupes and carriages.

Among the number of those thus engaged, one, suddenly catching sight of Laura, waved a muff in her direction, then came quickly forward. It was Mrs. Cressler.

"Laura, my dearest girl! Of all the people. I am so glad to see you!" She kissed Laura on the cheek, shook hands all around,

and asked about the sisters' new home. Did they want anything, or was there anything she could do to help? Then interrupting herself, and laying a glove on Laura's arm:

"I've got more to tell you."

She compressed her lips and stood off from Laura, fixing her with a significant glance.

"Me? To tell me?"

"Where are you going now?"

"Home; but our cars are stopped. We must go over to—"

"Fiddlesticks! You and Page and Mrs. Wessels—all of you are coming home and dine with me."

"But we've had dinner already," they all cried, speaking at once.

Page explained the situation, but Mrs. Cressler would not be denied.

"The carriage is right here," she said. "I don't have to call for Charlie. He's got a man from Cincinnati in tow, and they are going to dine at the Calumet Club."

It ended by the two sisters and Mrs. Wessels getting into Mrs. Cressler's carriage. Landry excused himself. He lived on the South Side, on Michigan Avenue, and declaring that he knew they had had enough of him for one day, took himself off.

But whatever Mrs. Cressler had to tell Laura, she evidently was determined to save for her ears only. Arrived at the Dearborns' home, she sent her footman in to tell the "girl" that the family would not be home that night. The Cresslers lived

hard by on the same street, and within ten minutes' walk of the Dearborns. The two sisters and their aunt would be back immediately after breakfast.

When they had got home with Mrs. Cressler, this latter suggested hot tea and sandwiches in the library, for the ride had been cold. But the others, worn out, declared for bed as soon as Mrs. Cressler herself had dined.

"Oh, bless you, Carrie," said Aunt Wess'; "I couldn't think of tea. My back is just about broken, and I'm going straight to my bed."

Mrs. Cressler showed them to their rooms. Page and Mrs. Wessels elected to sleep together, and once the door had closed upon them the little girl unburdened herself.

"I suppose Laura thinks it's all right, running off like this for the whole blessed night, and no one to look after the house but those two servants that nobody knows anything about. As though there weren't heaven knows what all to tend to there in the morning. I just don't see," she exclaimed decisively, "how we're going to get settled at all. That Landry Court! My goodness, he's more hindrance than help. Did you ever see! He just dashes in as though he were doing it all, and messes everything up, and loses things, and gets things into the wrong place, and forgets this and that, and then he and Laura sit down and spoon. I never saw anything like it. First it's Corthell and then Landry, and next it will be somebody else. Laura regularly mortifies me; a great, grown-up girl like that, flirting, and letting every man she meets

think that he's just the one particular one of the whole earth. It's not good form. And Landry—as if he didn't know we've got more to do now than just to dawdle and dawdle. I could slap him. I like to see a man take life seriously and try to amount to something, and not waste the best years of his life trailing after women who are old enough to be his grandmother, and don't mean that it will ever come to anything."

In her room, in the front of the house, Laura was partly undressed when Mrs. Cressler knocked at her door. The latter had put on a wrapper of flowered silk, and her hair was bound in "invisible nets."

"I brought you a dressing-gown," she said. She hung it over the foot of the bed, and sat down on the bed itself, watching Laura, who stood before the glass of the bureau, her head bent upon her breast, her hands busy with the back of her hair. From time to time the hairpins clicked as she laid them down in the silver trays close at hand. Then putting her chin in the air, she shook her head, and the great braids, unlooped, fell to her waist.

"What pretty hair you have, child," murmured Mrs. Cressler. She was settling herself for a long talk with her protege. She had much to tell, but now that they had the whole night before them, could afford to take her time.

Between the two women the conversation began slowly, with detached phrases and observations that did not call necessarily for answers—mere beginnings that they did not care to follow up.

"They tell me," said Mrs. Cressler, "that that Gretry girl

smokes ten cigarettes every night before she goes to bed. You know the Gretrys—they were at the opera the other night."

Laura permitted herself an indefinite murmur of interest. Her head to one side, she drew the brush in slow, deliberate movements downward underneath the long, thick strands of her hair. Mrs. Cressler watched her attentively.

"Why don't you wear your hair that new way, Laura," she remarked, "farther down on your neck? I see every one doing it now."

The house was very still. Outside the double windows they could hear the faint murmuring click of the frozen snow. A radiator in the hallway clanked and strangled for a moment, then fell quiet again.

"What a pretty room this is," said Laura. "I think I'll have to do our guest room something like this—a sort of white and gold effect. My hair? Oh, I don't know. Wearing it low that way makes it catch so on the hooks of your collar, and, besides, I was afraid it would make my head look so flat."

There was a silence. Laura braided a long strand, with quick, regular motions of both hands, and letting it fall over her shoulder, shook it into place with a twist of her head. She stepped out of her skirt, and Mrs. Cressler handed her her dressing-gown, and brought out a pair of quilted slippers of red satin from the wardrobe.

In the grate, the fire that had been lighted just before they had come upstairs was crackling sharply. Laura drew up an armchair

and sat down in front of it, her chin in her hand. Mrs. Cressler stretched herself upon the bed, an arm behind her head.

"Well, Laura," she began at length, "I have some real news for you. My dear, I believe you've made a conquest."

"I!" murmured Laura, looking around. She feigned a surprise, though she guessed at once that Mrs. Cressler had Corthell in mind.

"That Mr. Jadwin—the one you met at the opera."

Genuinely taken aback, Laura sat upright and stared wide-eyed.

"Mr. Jadwin!" she exclaimed. "Why, we didn't have five minutes' talk. Why, I hardly know the man. I only met him last night."

But Mrs. Cressler shook her head, closing her eyes and putting her lips together.

"That don't make any difference, Laura. Trust me to tell when a man is taken with a girl. My dear, you can have him as easy as that." She snapped her fingers.

"Oh, I'm sure you're mistaken, Mrs. Cressler."

"Not in the least. I've known Curtis Jadwin now for fifteen years—nobody better. He's as old a family friend as Charlie and I have. I know him like a book. And I tell you the man is in love with you."

"Well, I hope he didn't tell you as much," cried Laura, promising herself to be royally angry if such was the case. But Mrs. Cressler hastened to reassure her.

"Oh my, no. But all the way home last night—he came home with us, you know—he kept referring to you, and just so soon as the conversation got on some other subject he would lose interest. He wanted to know all about you—oh, you know how a man will talk," she exclaimed. "And he said you had more sense and more intelligence than any girl he had ever known."

"Oh, well," answered Laura deprecatingly, as if to say that that did not count for much with her.

"And that you were simply beautiful. He said that he never remembered to have seen a more beautiful woman."

Laura turned her head away, a hand shielding her cheek. She did not answer immediately, then at length:

"Has he—this Mr. Jadwin—has he ever been married before?"

"No, no. He's a bachelor, and rich! He could buy and sell us. And don't think, Laura dear, that I'm jumping at conclusions. I hope I'm woman of the world enough to know that a man who's taken with a pretty face and smart talk isn't going to rush right into matrimony because of that. It wasn't so much what Curtis Jadwin said—though, dear me suz, he talked enough about you—as what he didn't say. I could tell. He was thinking hard. He was hit, Laura. I know he was. And Charlie said he spoke about you again this morning at breakfast. Charlie makes me tired sometimes," she added irrelevantly.

"Charlie?" repeated Laura.

"Well, of course I spoke to him about Jadwin, and how taken

he seemed with you, and the man roared at me."

"*He* didn't believe it, then."

"Yes he did—when I could get him to talk seriously about it, and when I made him remember how Mr. Jadwin had spoken in the carriage coming home."

Laura curled her leg under her and sat nursing her foot and looking into the fire. For a long time neither spoke. A little clock of brass and black marble began to chime, very prettily, the half hour of nine. Mrs. Cressler observed:

"That Sheldon Corthell seems to be a very agreeable kind of a young man, doesn't he?"

"Yes," replied Laura thoughtfully, "he is agreeable."

"And a talented fellow, too," continued Mrs. Cressler. "But somehow it never impressed me that there was very much to him."

"Oh," murmured Laura indifferently, "I don't know."

"I suppose," Mrs. Cressler went on, in a tone of resignation, "I suppose he thinks the world and all of *you?*"

Laura raised a shoulder without answering.

"Charlie can't abide him," said Mrs. Cressler. "Funny, isn't it what prejudices men have? Charlie always speaks of him as though he were a higher order of glazier. Curtis Jadwin seems to like him.... What do you think of him, Laura—of Mr. Jadwin?"

"I don't know," she answered, looking vaguely into the fire. "I thought he was a strong man—mentally I mean, and that he would be kindly and—and—generous. Somehow," she said,

musingly, "I didn't think he would be the sort of man that women would take to, at first—but then I don't know. I saw very little of him, as I say. He didn't impress me as being a woman's man."

"All the better," said the other. "Who would want to marry a woman's man? I wouldn't. Sheldon Corthell is that. I tell you one thing, Laura, and when you are as old as I am, you'll know it's true: the kind of a man that men like—not women—is the kind of a man that makes the best husband."

Laura nodded her head.

"Yes," she answered, listlessly, "I suppose that's true."

"You said Jadwin struck you as being a kindly man, a generous man. He's just that, and that charitable! You know he has a Sunday-school over on the West Side, a Sunday-school for mission children, and I do believe he's more interested in that than in his business. He wants to make it the biggest Sunday-school in Chicago. It's an ambition of his. I don't want you to think that he's good in a goody-goody way, because he's not. Laura," she exclaimed, "he's a fine man. I didn't intend to brag him up to you, because I wanted you to like him. But no one knows—as I say—no one knows Curtis Jadwin better than Charlie and I, and we just *love* him. The kindliest, biggest-hearted fellow—oh, well, you'll know him for yourself, and then you'll see. He passes the plate in our church."

"Dr. Wendell's church?" asked Laura.

"Yes you know—the Second Presbyterian."

"I'm Episcopalian myself," observed Laura, still thoughtfully

gazing into the fire.

"I know, I know. But Jadwin isn't the blue-nosed sort. And now see here, Laura, I want to tell you. J.—that's what Charlie and I call Jadwin—J. was talking to us the other day about supporting a ward in the Children's Hospital for the children of his Sunday-school that get hurt or sick. You see he has nearly eight hundred boys and girls in his school, and there's not a week passes that he don't hear of some one of them who has been hurt or taken sick. And he wants to start a ward at the Children's Hospital, that can take care of them. He says he wants to get other people interested, too, and so he wants to start a contribution. He says he'll double any amount that's raised in the next six months—that is, if there's two thousand raised, he'll make it four thousand; understand? And so Charlie and I and the Gretrys are going to get up an amateur play—a charity affair—and raise as much money as we can. J. thinks it's a good idea, and—here's the point—we were talking about it coming home in the carriage, and J. said he wondered if that Miss Dearborn wouldn't take part. And we are all wild to have you. You know you do that sort of thing so well. Now don't say yes or no to-night. You sleep over it. J. is crazy to have you in it."

"I'd love to do it," answered Laura. "But I would have to see—it takes so long to get settled, and there's so much to do about a big house like ours, I might not have time. But I will let you know."

Mrs. Cressler told her in detail about the proposed play.

Landry Court was to take part, and she enlisted Laura's influence to get Sheldon Corthell to undertake a role. Page, it appeared, had already promised to help. Laura remembered now that she had heard her speak of it. However, the plan was so immature as yet, that it hardly admitted of very much discussion, and inevitably the conversation came back to its starting-point.

"You know," Laura had remarked in answer to one of Mrs. Cressler's observations upon the capabilities and business ability of "J.," "you know I never heard of him before you spoke of our theatre party. I don't know anything about him."

But Mrs. Cressler promptly supplied the information. Curtis Jadwin was a man about thirty-five, who had begun life without a sou in his pockets. He was a native of Michigan. His people were farmers, nothing more nor less than hardy, honest fellows, who ploughed and sowed for a living. Curtis had only a rudimentary schooling, because he had given up the idea of finishing his studies in the High School in Grand Rapids, on the chance of going into business with a livery stable keeper. Then in time he had bought out the business and had run it for himself. Some one in Chicago owed him money, and in default of payment had offered him a couple of lots on Wabash Avenue. That was how he happened to come to Chicago. Naturally enough as the city grew the Wabash Avenue property—it was near Monroe Street—increased in value. He sold the lots and bought other real estate, sold that and bought somewhere else, and so on, till he owned some of the best business sites in the city. Just

his ground rent alone brought him, heaven knew how many thousands a year. He was one of the largest real estate owners in Chicago. But he no longer bought and sold. His property had grown so large that just the management of it alone took up most of his time. He had an office in the Rookery, and perhaps being so close to the Board of Trade Building, had given him a taste for trying a little deal in wheat now and then. As a rule, he deplored speculation. He had no fixed principles about it, like Charlie. Only he was conservative; occasionally he hazarded small operations. Somehow he had never married. There had been affairs. Oh, yes, one or two, of course. Nothing very serious, He just didn't seem to have met the right girl, that was all. He lived on Michigan Avenue, near the corner of Twenty-first Street, in one of those discouraging eternal yellow limestone houses with a basement dining-room. His aunt kept house for him, and his nieces and nephews overran the place. There was always a raft of them there, either coming or going; and the way they exploited him! He supported them all; heaven knew how many there were; such drabs and gawks, all elbows and knees, who soaked themselves with cologne and made companions of the servants. They and the second girls were always squabbling about their things that they found in each other's rooms.

It was growing late. At length Mrs. Cressler rose.

"My goodness, Laura, look at the time; and I've been keeping you up when you must be killed for sleep."

She took herself away, pausing at the doorway long enough

to say:

"Do try to manage to take part in the play. J. made me promise that I would get you."

"Well, I think I can," Laura answered. "Only I'll have to see first how our new regime is going to run—the house I mean."

When Mrs. Cressler had gone Laura lost no time in getting to bed. But after she turned out the gas she remembered that she had not "covered" the fire, a custom that she still retained from the daily round of her life at Barrington. She did not light the gas again, but guided by the firelight, spread a shovelful of ashes over the top of the grate. Yet when she had done this, she still knelt there a moment, looking wide-eyed into the glow, thinking over the events of the last twenty-four hours. When all was said and done, she had, after all, found more in Chicago than the clash and trepidation of empire-making, more than the reverberation of the thunder of battle, more than the piping and choiring of sweet music.

First it had been Sheldon Corthell, quiet, persuasive, eloquent. Then Landry Court with his exuberance and extravagance and boyishness, and now—unexpectedly—behold, a new element had appeared—this other one, this man of the world, of affairs, mature, experienced, whom she hardly knew. It was charming she told herself, exciting. Life never had seemed half so delightful. Romantic, she felt Romance, unseen, intangible, at work all about her. And love, which of all things knowable was dearest to her, came to her unsought.

Her first aversion to the Great Grey City was fast disappearing. She saw it now in a kindlier aspect.

"I think," she said at last, as she still knelt before the fire, looking deep into the coals, absorbed, abstracted, "I think that I am going to be very happy here."

III

On a certain Monday morning, about a month later, Curtis Jadwin descended from his office in the Rookery Building, and turning southward, took his way toward the brokerage and commission office of Gretry, Converse and Co., on the ground floor of the Board of Trade Building, only a few steps away.

It was about nine o'clock; the weather was mild, the sun shone. La Salle Street swarmed with the multitudinous life that seethed about the doors of the innumerable offices of brokers and commission men of the neighbourhood. To the right, in the peristyle of the Illinois Trust Building, groups of clerks, of messengers, of brokers, of clients, and of depositors formed and broke incessantly. To the left, where the facade of the Board of Trade blocked the street, the activity was astonishing, and in and out of the swing doors of its entrance streamed an incessant tide of coming and going. All the life of the neighbourhood seemed to centre at this point—the entrance of the Board of Trade. Two currents that trended swiftly through La Salle and Jackson streets, and that fed, or were fed by, other tributaries that poured in through Fifth Avenue and through Clarke and Dearborn streets, met at this point—one setting in, the other out. The nearer the currents the greater their speed. Men—mere flotsam in the flood—as they turned into La Salle Street from Adams or from Monroe, or even from as far as Madison, seemed

to accelerate their pace as they approached. At the Illinois Trust the walk became a stride, at the Rookery the stride was almost a trot. But at the corner of Jackson Street, the Board of Trade now merely the width of the street away, the trot became a run, and young men and boys, under the pretence of escaping the trucks and wagons of the cobbles, dashed across at a veritable gallop, flung themselves panting into the entrance of the Board, were engulfed in the turmoil of the spot, and disappeared with a sudden fillip into the gloom of the interior.

Often Jadwin had noted the scene, and, unimaginative though he was, had long since conceived the notion of some great, some resistless force within the Board of Trade Building that held the tide of the streets within its grip, alternately drawing it in and throwing it forth. Within there, a great whirlpool, a pit of roaring waters spun and thundered, sucking in the life tides of the city, sucking them in as into the mouth of some tremendous cloaca, the maw of some colossal sewer; then vomiting them forth again, spewing them up and out, only to catch them in the return eddy and suck them in afresh.

Thus it went, day after day. Endlessly, ceaselessly the Pit, enormous, thundering, sucked in and spewed out, sending the swirl of its mighty central eddy far out through the city's channels. Terrible at the centre, it was, at the circumference, gentle, insidious and persuasive, the send of the flowing so mild, that to embark upon it, yielding to the influence, was a pleasure that seemed all devoid of risk. But the circumference was not

bounded by the city. All through the Northwest, all through the central world of the Wheat the set and whirl of that innermost Pit made itself felt; and it spread and spread and spread till grain in the elevators of Western Iowa moved and stirred and answered to its centripetal force, and men upon the streets of New York felt the mysterious tugging of its undertow engage their feet, embrace their bodies, overwhelm them, and carry them bewildered and unresisting back and downwards to the Pit itself.

Nor was the Pit's centrifugal power any less. Because of some sudden eddy spinning outward from the middle of its turmoil, a dozen bourses of continental Europe clamoured with panic, a dozen Old-World banks, firm as the established hills, trembled and vibrated. Because of an unexpected caprice in the swirling of the inner current, some far-distant channel suddenly dried, and the pinch of famine made itself felt among the vine dressers of Northern Italy, the coal miners of Western Prussia. Or another channel filled, and the starved moujik of the steppes, and the hunger-shrunken coolie of the Ganges' watershed fed suddenly fat and made thank offerings before ikon and idol.

There in the centre of the Nation, midmost of that continent that lay between the oceans of the New World and the Old, in the heart's heart of the affairs of men, roared and rumbled the Pit. It was as if the Wheat, Nourisher of the Nations, as it rolled gigantic and majestic in a vast flood from West to East, here, like a Niagara, finding its flow impeded, burst suddenly into the appalling fury of the Maelstrom, into the chaotic spasm of a

world-force, a primeval energy, blood-brother of the earthquake and the glacier, raging and wrathful that its power should be braved by some pinch of human spawn that dared raise barriers across its courses.

Small wonder that Cressler laughed at the thought of cornering wheat, and even now as Jadwin crossed Jackson Street, on his way to his broker's office on the lower floor of the Board of Trade Building, he noted the ebb and flow that issued from its doors, and remembered the huge river of wheat that rolled through this place from the farms of Iowa and ranches of Dakota to the mills and bakeshops of Europe.

"There's something, perhaps, in what Charlie says," he said to himself. "Corner this stuff—my God!"

Gretry, Converse & Co. was the name of the brokerage firm that always handled Jadwin's rare speculative ventures. Converse was dead long since, but the firm still retained its original name. The house was as old and as well established as any on the Board of Trade. It had a reputation for conservatism, and was known more as a Bear than a Bull concern. It was immensely wealthy and immensely important. It discouraged the growth of a clientele of country customers, of small adventurers, knowing well that these were the first to go in a crash, unable to meet margin calls, and leaving to their brokers the responsibility of their disastrous trades. The large, powerful Bears were its friends, the Bears strong of grip, tenacious of jaw, capable of pulling down the strongest Bull. Thus the firm had no consideration for

the "outsiders," the "public"—the Lambs. The Lambs! Such a herd, timid, innocent, feeble, as much out of place in La Salle Street as a puppy in a cage of panthers; the Lambs, whom Bull and Bear did not so much as condescend to notice, but who, in their mutual struggle of horn and claw, they crushed to death by the mere rolling of their bodies.

Jadwin did not go directly into Gretry's main office, but instead made his way in at the entrance of the Board of Trade Building, and going on past the stairways that on either hand led up to the "Floor" on the second story, entered the corridor beyond, and thence gained the customers' room of Gretry, Converse & Co. All the more important brokerage firms had offices on the ground floor of the building, offices that had two entrances, one giving upon the street, and one upon the corridor of the Board. Generally the corridor entrance admitted directly to the firm's customers' room. This was the case with the Gretry-Converse house.

Once in the customers' room, Jadwin paused, looking about him.

He could not tell why Gretry had so earnestly desired him to come to his office that morning, but he wanted to know how wheat was selling before talking to the broker. The room was large, and but for the lighted gas, burning crudely without globes, would have been dark. All one wall opposite the door was taken up by a great blackboard covered with chalked figures in columns, and illuminated by a row of overhead gas

jets burning under a tin reflector. Before this board files of chairs were placed, and these were occupied by groups of nondescripts, shabbily dressed men, young and old, with tired eyes and unhealthy complexions, who smoked and expectorated, or engaged in interminable conversations.

In front of the blackboard, upon a platform, a young man in shirt-sleeves, his cuffs caught up by metal clamps, walked up and down. Screwed to the blackboard itself was a telegraph instrument, and from time to time, as this buzzed and ticked, the young man chalked up cabalistic, and almost illegible figures under columns headed by initials of certain stocks and bonds, or by the words "Pork," "Oats," or, larger than all the others, "May Wheat." The air of the room was stale, close, and heavy with tobacco fumes. The only noises were the low hum of conversations, the unsteady click of the telegraph key, and the tapping of the chalk in the marker's fingers.

But no one in the room seemed to pay the least attention to the blackboard. One quotation replaced another, and the key and the chalk clicked and tapped incessantly. The occupants of the room, sunk in their chairs, seemed to give no heed; some even turned their backs; one, his handkerchief over his knee, adjusted his spectacles, and opening a newspaper two days old, began to read with peering deliberation, his lips forming each word. These nondescripts gathered there, they knew not why. Every day found them in the same place, always with the same fetid, unlighted cigars, always with the same frayed newspapers two days old.

There they sat, inert, stupid, their decaying senses hypnotised and soothed by the sound of the distant rumble of the Pit, that came through the ceiling from the floor of the Board overhead.

One of these figures, that of a very old man, blear-eyed, decrepit, dirty, in a battered top hat and faded frock coat, discoloured and weather-stained at the shoulders, seemed familiar to Jadwin. It recalled some ancient association, he could not say what. But he was unable to see the old man's face distinctly; the light was bad, and he sat with his face turned from him, eating a sandwich, which he held in a trembling hand.

Jadwin, having noted that wheat was selling at 94, went away, glad to be out of the depressing atmosphere of the room.

Gretry was in his office, and Jadwin was admitted at once. He sat down in a chair by the broker's desk, and for the moment the two talked of trivialities. Gretry was a large, placid, smooth-faced man, stolid as an ox; inevitably dressed in blue serge, a quill tooth-pick behind his ear, a Grand Army button in his lapel. He and Jadwin were intimates. The two had come to Chicago almost simultaneously, and had risen together to become the wealthy men they were at the moment. They belonged to the same club, lunched together every day at Kinsley's, and took each other driving behind their respective trotters on alternate Saturday afternoons. In the middle of summer each stole a fortnight from his business, and went fishing at Geneva Lake in Wisconsin.

"I say," Jadwin observed, "I saw an old fellow outside in your customers' room just now that put me in mind of Hargus. You

remember that deal of his, the one he tried to swing before he died. Oh—how long ago was that? Bless my soul, that must have been fifteen, yes twenty years ago."

The deal of which Jadwin spoke was the legendary operation of the Board of Trade—a mammoth corner in September wheat, manipulated by this same Hargus, a millionaire, who had tripled his fortune by the corner, and had lost it by some chicanery on the part of his associate before another year. He had run wheat up to nearly two dollars, had been in his day a king all-powerful. Since then all deals had been spoken of in terms of the Hargus affair. Speculators said, "It was almost as bad as the Hargus deal." "It was like the Hargus smash." "It was as big a thing as the Hargus corner." Hargus had become a sort of creature of legends, mythical, heroic, transfigured in the glory of his millions.

"Easily twenty years ago," continued Jadwin. "If Hargus could come to life now, he'd be surprised at the difference in the way we do business these days. Twenty years. Yes, it's all of that. I declare, Sam, we're getting old, aren't we?"

"I guess that was Hargus you saw out there," answered the broker. "He's not dead. Old fellow in a stove-pipe and greasy frock coat? Yes, that's Hargus."

"What!" exclaimed Jadwin. "*That* Hargus?"

"Of course it was. He comes 'round every day. The clerks give him a dollar every now and then."

"And he's not dead? And that was Hargus, that wretched, broken—whew! I don't want to think of it, Sam!" And Jadwin,

taken all aback, sat for a moment speechless.

"Yes, sir," muttered the broker grimly, "that was Hargus."

There was a long silence. Then at last Gretry exclaimed briskly:

"Well, here's what I want to see you about."

He lowered his voice: "You know I've got a correspondent or two at Paris—all the brokers have—and we make no secret as to who they are. But I've had an extra man at work over there for the last six months, very much on the quiet. I don't mind telling you this much—that he's not the least important member of the United States Legation. Well, now and then he is supposed to send me what the reporters call "exclusive news"—that's what I feed him for, and I could run a private steam yacht on what it costs me. But news I get from him is a day or so in advance of everybody else. He hasn't sent me anything very important till this morning. This here just came in."

He picked up a despatch from his desk and read:

"'Utica—headquarters—modification—organic—concomitant—within one month,' which means," he added, "this. I've just deciphered it," and he handed Jadwin a slip of paper on which was written:

"Bill providing for heavy import duties on foreign grains certain to be introduced in French Chamber of Deputies within one month."

"Have you got it?" he demanded of Jadwin, as he took the slip back. "Won't forget it?" He twisted the paper into a roll and

burned it carefully in the office cuspidor.

"Now," he remarked, "do you come in? It's just the two of us, J., and I think we can make that Porteous clique look very sick."

"Hum!" murmured Jadwin surprised. "That does give you a twist on the situation. But to tell the truth, Sam, I had sort of made up my mind to keep out of speculation since my last little deal. A man gets into this game, and into it, and into it, and before you know he can't pull out—and he don't want to. Next he gets his nose scratched, and he hits back to make up for it, and just hits into the air and loses his balance—and down he goes. I don't want to make any more money, Sam. I've got my little pile, and before I get too old I want to have some fun out of it."

"But lord love you, J.," objected the other, "this ain't speculation. You can see for yourself how sure it is. I'm not a baby at this business, am I? You'll let me know something of this game, won't you? And I tell you, J., it's found money. The man that sells wheat short on the strength of this has as good as got the money in his vest pocket already. Oh, nonsense, of course you'll come in. I've been laying for that Bull gang since long before the Helmick failure, and now I've got it right where I want it. Look here, J., you aren't the man to throw money away. You'd buy a business block if you knew you could sell it over again at a profit. Now here's the chance to make really a fine Bear deal. Why, as soon as this news gets on the floor there, the price will bust right down, and down, and down. Porteous and his crowd couldn't keep it up to save 'em from the receiver's hand one single

minute."

"I know, Sam," answered Jadwin, "and the trouble is, not that I don't want to speculate, but that I do—too much. That's why I said I'd keep out of it. It isn't so much the money as the fun of playing the game. With half a show, I would get in a little more and a little more, till by and by I'd try to throw a big thing, and instead, the big thing would throw me. Why, Sam, when you told me that that wreck out there mumbling a sandwich was Hargus, it made me turn cold."

"Yes, in your feet," retorted Gretry. "I'm not asking you to risk all your money, am I, or a fifth of it, or a twentieth of it? Don't be an ass, J. Are we a conservative house, or aren't we? Do I talk like this when I'm not sure? Look here. Let me sell a million bushels for you. Yes, I know it's a bigger order than I've handled for you before. But this time I want to go right into it, head down and heels up, and get a twist on those Porteous buckoes, and raise 'em right out of their boots. We get a crop report this morning, and if the visible supply is as large as I think it is, the price will go off and unsettle the whole market. I'll sell short for you at the best figures we can get, and you can cover on the slump any time between now and the end of May."

Jadwin hesitated. In spite of himself he felt a Chance had come. Again that strange sixth sense of his, the inexplicable instinct, that only the born speculator knows, warned him. Every now and then during the course of his business career, this intuition came to him, this flair, this intangible, vague

premonition, this presentiment that he must seize Opportunity or else Fortune, that so long had stayed at his elbow, would desert him. In the air about him he seemed to feel an influence, a sudden new element, the presence of a new force. It was Luck, the great power, the great goddess, and all at once it had stooped from out the invisible, and just over his head passed swiftly in a rush of glittering wings.

"The thing would have to be handled like glass," observed the broker thoughtfully, his eyes narrowing "A tip like this is public property in twenty-four hours, and it don't give us any too much time. I don't want to break the price by unloading a million or more bushels on 'em all of a sudden. I'll scatter the orders pretty evenly. You see," he added, "here's a big point in our favor. We'll be able to sell on a strong market. The Pit traders have got some crazy war rumour going, and they're as flighty over it as a young ladies' seminary over a great big rat. And even without that, the market is top-heavy. Porteous makes me weary. He and his gang have been bucking it up till we've got an abnormal price. Ninety-four for May wheat! Why, it's ridiculous. Ought to be selling way down in the eighties. The least little jolt would tip her over. Well," he said abruptly, squaring himself at Jadwin, "do we come in? If that same luck of yours is still in working order, here's your chance, J., to make a killing. There's just that gilt-edged, full-morocco chance that a report of big 'visible' would give us."

Jadwin laughed. "Sam," he said, "I'll flip a coin for it."

"Oh, get out," protested the broker; then suddenly—the

gambling instinct that a lifetime passed in that place had cultivated in him—exclaimed:

"All right. Flip a coin. But give me your word you'll stay by it. Heads you come in; tails you don't. Will you give me your word?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," replied Jadwin, amused at the foolishness of the whole proceeding. But as he balanced the half-dollar on his thumb-nail, he was all at once absolutely assured that it would fall heads. He flipped it in the air, and even as he watched it spin, said to himself, "It will come heads. It could not possibly be anything else. I know it will be heads."

And as a matter of course the coin fell heads.

"All right," he said, "I'll come in."

"For a million bushels?"

"Yes—for a million. How much in margins will you want?"

Gretry figured a moment on the back of an envelope.

"Fifty thousand dollars," he announced at length.

Jadwin wrote the check on a corner of the broker's desk, and held it a moment before him.

"Good-bye," he said, apostrophising the bit of paper. "Good-bye. I ne'er shall look upon your like again."

Gretry did not laugh.

"Huh!" he grunted. "You'll look upon a hatful of them before the month is out."

That same morning Landry Court found himself in the corridor on the ground floor of the Board of Trade about nine o'clock. He had just come out of the office of Gretry, Converse

& Co., where he and the other Pit traders for the house had been receiving their orders for the day.

As he was buying a couple of apples at the news stand at the end of the corridor, Semple and a young Jew named Hirsch, Pit traders for small firms in La Salle Street, joined him.

"Hello, Court, what do you know?"

"Hello, Barry Semple! Hello, Hirsch!" Landry offered the halves of his second apple, and the three stood there a moment, near the foot of the stairs, talking and eating their apples from the points of their penknives.

"I feel sort of seedy this morning," Semple observed between mouthfuls. "Was up late last night at a stag. A friend of mine just got back from Europe, and some of the boys were giving him a little dinner. He was all over the shop, this friend of mine; spent most of his time in Constantinople; had some kind of newspaper business there. It seems that it's a pretty crazy proposition, Turkey and the Sultan and all that. He said that there was nearly a row over the 'Higgins-Pasha' incident, and that the British agent put it pretty straight to the Sultan's secretary. My friend said Constantinople put him in mind of a lot of opera bouffe scenery that had got spilled out in the mud. Say, Court, he said the streets were dirtier than the Chicago streets."

"Oh, come now," said Hirsch.

"Fact! And the dogs! He told us he knows now where all the yellow dogs go to when they die."

"But say," remarked Hirsch, "what is that about the Higgins-

Pasha business? I thought that was over long ago."

"Oh, it is," answered Semple easily. He looked at his watch. "I guess it's about time to go up, pretty near half-past nine."

The three mounted the stairs, mingling with the groups of floor traders who, in steadily increasing numbers, had begun to move in the same direction. But on the way Hirsch was stopped by his brother.

"Hey, I got that box of cigars for you."

Hirsch paused. "Oh! All right," he said, then he added: "Say, how about that Higgins-Pasha affair? You remember that row between England and Turkey. They tell me the British agent in Constantinople put it pretty straight to the Sultan the other day."

The other was interested. "He did, hey?" he said. "The market hasn't felt it, though. Guess there's nothing to it. But there's Kelly yonder. He'd know. He's pretty thick with Porteous' men. Might ask him."

"You ask him and let me know. I got to go on the floor. It's nearly time for the gong."

Hirsch's brother found Kelly in the centre of a group of settlement clerks.

"Say, boy," he began, "you ought to know. They tell me there may be trouble between England and Turkey over the Higgins-Pasha incident, and that the British Foreign Office has threatened the Sultan with an ultimatum. I can see the market if that's so."

"Nothing in it," retorted Kelly. "But I'll find out—to make sure, by jingo."

Meanwhile Landry had gained the top of the stairs, and turning to the right, passed through a great doorway, and came out upon the floor of the Board of Trade.

It was a vast enclosure, lighted on either side by great windows of coloured glass, the roof supported by thin iron pillars elaborately decorated. To the left were the bulletin blackboards, and beyond these, in the northwest angle of the floor, a great railed-in space where the Western Union Telegraph was installed. To the right, on the other side of the room, a row of tables, laden with neatly arranged paper bags half full of samples of grains, stretched along the east wall from the doorway of the public room at one end to the telephone room at the other.

The centre of the floor was occupied by the pits. To the left and to the front of Landry the provision pit, to the right the corn pit, while further on at the north extremity of the floor, and nearly under the visitors' gallery, much larger than the other two, and flanked by the wicket of the official recorder, was the wheat pit itself.

Directly opposite the visitors' gallery, high upon the south wall a great dial was affixed, and on the dial a marking hand that indicated the current price of wheat, fluctuating with the changes made in the Pit. Just now it stood at ninety-three and three-eighths, the closing quotation of the preceding day.

As yet all the pits were empty. It was some fifteen minutes after nine. Landry checked his hat and coat at the coat room near the north entrance, and slipped into an old tennis jacket of striped

blue flannel. Then, hatless, his hands in his pockets, he leisurely crossed the floor, and sat down in one of the chairs that were ranged in files upon the floor in front of the telegraph enclosure. He scrutinised again the despatches and orders that he held in his hands; then, having fixed them in his memory, tore them into very small bits, looking vaguely about the room, developing his plan of campaign for the morning.

In a sense Landry Court had a double personality. Away from the neighbourhood and influence of La Salle Street, he was "rattle-brained," absent-minded, impractical, and easily excited, the last fellow in the world to be trusted with any business responsibility. But the thunder of the streets around the Board of Trade, and, above all, the movement and atmosphere of the floor itself awoke within him a very different Landry Court; a whole new set of nerves came into being with the tap of the nine-thirty gong, a whole new system of brain machinery began to move with the first figure called in the Pit. And from that instant until the close of the session, no floor trader, no broker's clerk nor scalper was more alert, more shrewd, or kept his head more surely than the same young fellow who confused his social engagements for the evening of the same day. The Landry Court the Dearborn girls knew was a far different young man from him who now leaned his elbows on the arms of the chair upon the floor of the Board, and, his eyes narrowing, his lips tightening, began to speculate upon what was to be the temper of the Pit that morning.

Meanwhile the floor was beginning to fill up. Over in the railed-in space, where the hundreds of telegraph instruments were in place, the operators were arriving in twos and threes. They hung their hats and ulsters upon the pegs in the wall back of them, and in linen coats, or in their shirt-sleeves, went to their seats, or, sitting upon their tables, called back and forth to each other, joshing, cracking jokes. Some few addressed themselves directly to work, and here and there the intermittent clicking of a key began, like a diligent cricket busking himself in advance of its mates.

From the corridors on the ground floor up through the south doors came the pit traders in increasing groups. The noise of footsteps began to echo from the high vaulting of the roof. A messenger boy crossed the floor chanting an unintelligible name.

The groups of traders gradually converged upon the corn and wheat pits, and on the steps of the latter, their arms crossed upon their knees, two men, one wearing a silk skull cap all awry, conversed earnestly in low tones.

Winston, a great, broad-shouldered bass-voiced fellow of some thirty-five years, who was associated with Landry in executing the orders of the Gretry-Converse house, came up to him, and, omitting any salutation, remarked, deliberately, slowly:

"What's all this about this trouble between Turkey and England?"

But before Landry could reply a third trader for the Gretry Company joined the two. This was a young fellow named

Rusbridge, lean, black-haired, a constant excitement glinting in his deep-set eyes.

"Say," he exclaimed, "there's something in that, there's something in that!"

"Where did you hear it?" demanded Landry.

"Oh—everywhere." Rusbridge made a vague gesture with one arm. "Hirsch seemed to know all about it. It appears that there's talk of mobilising the Mediterranean squadron. Darned if I know."

"Might ask that 'Inter-Ocean' reporter. He'd be likely to know. I've seen him 'round here this morning, or you might telephone the Associated Press," suggested Landry. "The office never said a word to me."

"Oh, the 'Associated.' They know a lot always, don't they?" jeered Winston. "Yes, I rung 'em up. They 'couldn't confirm the rumour.' That's always the way. You can spend half a million a year in leased wires and special service and subscriptions to news agencies, and you get the first smell of news like this right here on the floor. Remember that time when the Northwestern millers sold a hundred and fifty thousand barrels at one lick? The floor was talking of it three hours before the news slips were sent 'round, or a single wire was in. Suppose we had waited for the Associated people or the Commercial people then?"

"It's that Higgins-Pasha incident, I'll bet," observed Rusbridge, his eyes snapping.

"I heard something about that this morning," returned Landry.

"But only that it was—"

"There! What did I tell you?" interrupted Rusbridge. "I said it was everywhere. There's no smoke without some fire. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we get cables before noon that the British War Office had sent an ultimatum."

And very naturally a few minutes later Winston, at that time standing on the steps of the corn pit, heard from a certain broker, who had it from a friend who had just received a despatch from some one "in the know," that the British Secretary of State for War had forwarded an ultimatum to the Porte, and that diplomatic relations between Turkey and England were about to be suspended.

All in a moment the entire Floor seemed to be talking of nothing else, and on the outskirts of every group one could overhear the words: "Seizure of custom house," "ultimatum," "Eastern question," "Higgins-Pasha incident." It was the rumour of the day, and before very long the pit traders began to receive a multitude of despatches countermanding selling orders, and directing them not to close out trades under certain very advanced quotations. The brokers began wiring their principals that the market promised to open strong and bullish.

But by now it was near to half-past nine. From the Western Union desks the clicking of the throng of instruments rose into the air in an incessant staccato stridulation. The messenger boys ran back and forth at top speed, dodging in and out among the knots of clerks and traders, colliding with one another, and

without interruption intoning the names of those for whom they had despatches. The throng of traders concentrated upon the pits, and at every moment the deep-toned hum of the murmur of many voices swelled like the rising of a tide.

And at this moment, as Landry stood on the rim of the wheat pit, looking towards the telephone booth under the visitors' gallery, he saw the osseous, stoop-shouldered figure of Mr. Cressler—who, though he never speculated, appeared regularly upon the Board every morning—making his way towards one of the windows in the front of the building. His pocket was full of wheat, taken from a bag on one of the sample tables. Opening the window, he scattered the grain upon the sill, and stood for a long moment absorbed and interested in the dazzling flutter of the wings of innumerable pigeons who came to settle upon the ledge, pecking the grain with little, nervous, fastidious taps of their yellow beaks.

Landry cast a glance at the clock beneath the dial on the wall behind him. It was twenty-five minutes after nine. He stood in his accustomed place on the north side of the Wheat Pit, upon the topmost stair. The Pit was full. Below him and on either side of him were the brokers, scalpers, and traders—Hirsch, Semple, Kelly, Winston, and Rusbridge. The redoubtable Leaycraft, who, bidding for himself, was supposed to hold the longest line of May wheat of any one man in the Pit, the insignificant Grossmann, a Jew who wore a flannel shirt, and to whose outcries no one ever paid the least attention. Fairchild,

Paterson, and Goodlock, the inseparable trio who represented the Porteous gang, silent men, middle-aged, who had but to speak in order to buy or sell a million bushels on the spot. And others, and still others, veterans of sixty-five, recruits just out of their teens, men who—some of them—in the past had for a moment dominated the entire Pit, but who now were content to play the part of "eighth-chasers," buying and selling on the same day, content with a profit of ten dollars. Others who might at that very moment be nursing plans which in a week's time would make them millionaires; still others who, under a mask of nonchalance, strove to hide the chagrin of yesterday's defeat. And they were there, ready, inordinately alert, ears turned to the faintest sound, eyes searching for the vaguest trace of meaning in those of their rivals, nervous, keyed to the highest tension, ready to thrust deep into the slightest opening, to spring, mercilessly, upon the smallest undefended spot. Grossmann, the little Jew of the grimy flannel shirt, perspired in the stress of the suspense, all but powerless to maintain silence till the signal should be given, drawing trembling fingers across his mouth. Winston, brawny, solid, unperturbed, his hands behind his back, waited immovably planted on his feet with all the gravity of a statue, his eyes preternaturally watchful, keeping Kelly—whom he had divined had some "funny business" on hand—perpetually in sight. The Porteous trio—Fairchild, Paterson, and Goodlock—as if unalarmed, unassailable, all but turned their backs to the Pit, laughing among themselves.

The official reporter climbed to his perch in the little cage on the edge of the Pit, shutting the door after him. By now the chanting of the messenger boys was an uninterrupted chorus. From all sides of the building, and in every direction they crossed and recrossed each other, always running, their hands full of yellow envelopes. From the telephone alcoves came the prolonged, musical rasp of the call bells. In the Western Union booths the keys of the multitude of instruments raged incessantly. Bare-headed young men hurried up to one another, conferred an instant comparing despatches, then separated, darting away at top speed. Men called to each other half-way across the building. Over by the bulletin boards clerks and agents made careful memoranda of primary receipts, and noted down the amount of wheat on passage, the exports and the imports.

And all these sounds, the chatter of the telegraph, the intoning of the messenger boys, the shouts and cries of clerks and traders, the shuffle and trampling of hundreds of feet, the whirring of telephone signals rose into the troubled air, and mingled overhead to form a vast note, prolonged, sustained, that reverberated from vault to vault of the airy roof, and issued from every doorway, every opened window in one long roll of uninterrupted thunder. In the Wheat Pit the bids, no longer obedient of restraint, began one by one to burst out, like the first isolated shots of a skirmish line. Grossmann had flung out an arm crying:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and an eighth," while Kelly and Semple had almost simultaneously shouted, "'Give

seven-eighths for May!"

The official reporter had been leaning far over to catch the first quotations, one eye upon the clock at the end of the room. The hour and minute hands were at right angles.

Then suddenly, cutting squarely athwart the vague crescendo of the floor came the single incisive stroke of a great gong. Instantly a tumult was unchained. Arms were flung upward in strenuous gestures, and from above the crowding heads in the Wheat Pit a multitude of hands, eager, the fingers extended, leaped into the air. All articulate expression was lost in the single explosion of sound as the traders surged downwards to the centre of the Pit, grabbing each other, struggling towards each other, tramping, stamping, charging through with might and main. Promptly the hand on the great dial above the clock stirred and trembled, and as though driven by the tempest breath of the Pit moved upward through the degrees of its circle. It paused, wavered, stopped at length, and on the instant the hundreds of telegraph keys scattered throughout the building began clicking off the news to the whole country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Mackinac to Mexico, that the Chicago market had made a slight advance and that May wheat, which had closed the day before at ninety-three and three-eighths, had opened that morning at ninety-four and a half.

But the advance brought out no profit-taking sales. The redoubtable Leaycraft and the Porteous trio, Fairchild, Paterson, and Goodlock, shook their heads when the Pit offered ninety-

four for parts of their holdings. The price held firm. Goodlock even began to offer ninety-four. At every suspicion of a flurry Grossmann, always with the same gesture as though hurling a javelin, always with the same lamentable wail of distress, cried out:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and a fourth."

He held his five fingers spread to indicate the number of "contracts," or lots of five thousand bushels, which he wished to sell, each finger representing one "contract."

And it was at this moment that selling orders began suddenly to pour in upon the Gretry-Converse traders. Even other houses —Teller and West, Burbank & Co., Mattieson and Knight— received their share. The movement was inexplicable, puzzling. With a powerful Bull clique dominating the trading and every prospect of a strong market, who was it who ventured to sell short?

Landry among others found himself commissioned to sell. His orders were to unload three hundred thousand bushels on any advance over and above ninety-four. He kept his eye on Leaycraft, certain that he would force up the figure. But, as it happened, it was not Leaycraft but the Porteous trio who made the advance. Standing in the centre of the Pit, Patterson suddenly flung up his hand and drew it towards him, clutching the air— the conventional gesture of the buyer.

"'Give an eighth for May."

Landry was at him in a second. Twenty voices shouted "sold,"

and as many traders sprang towards him with outstretched arms. Landry, however, was before them, and his rush carried Paterson half way across the middle space of the Pit.

"Sold, sold."

Paterson nodded, and as Landry noted down the transaction the hand on the dial advanced again, and again held firm.

But after this the activity of the Pit fell away. The trading languished. By degrees the tension of the opening was relaxed. Landry, however, had refrained from selling more than ten "contracts" to Paterson. He had a feeling that another advance would come later on. Rapidly he made his plans. He would sell another fifty thousand bushels if the price went to ninety-four and a half, and would then "feel" the market, letting go small lots here and there, to test its strength, then, the instant he felt the market strong enough, throw a full hundred thousand upon it with a rush before it had time to break. He could feel—almost at his very finger tips—how this market moved, how it strengthened, how it weakened. He knew just when to nurse it, to humor it, to let it settle, and when to crowd it, when to hustle it, when it would stand rough handling.

Grossmann still uttered his plaint from time to time, but no one so much as pretended to listen. The Porteous trio and Leaycraft kept the price steady at ninety-four and an eighth, but showed no inclination to force it higher. For a full five minutes not a trade was recorded. The Pit waited for the Report on the Visible Supply.

And it was during this lull in the morning's business that the idiocy of the English ultimatum to the Porte melted away. As inexplicably and as suddenly as the rumour had started, it now disappeared. Everyone, simultaneously, seemed to ridicule it. England declare war on Turkey! Where was the joke? Who was the damn fool to have started that old, worn-out war scare? But, for all that, there was no reaction from the advance. It seemed to be understood that either Leaycraft or the Porteous crowd stood ready to support the market; and in place of the ultimatum story a feeling began to gain ground that the expected report would indicate a falling off in the "visible," and that it was quite on the cards that the market might even advance another point.

As the interest in the immediate situation declined, the crowd in the Pit grew less dense. Portions of it were deserted; even Grossmann, discouraged, retired to a bench under the visitors' gallery. And a spirit of horse-play, sheer foolishness, strangely inconsistent with the hot-eyed excitement of the few moments after the opening invaded the remaining groups. Leaycraft, the formidable, as well as Paterson of the Porteous gang, and even the solemn Winston, found an apparently inexhaustible diversion in folding their telegrams into pointed javelins and sending them sailing across the room, watching the course of the missiles with profound gravity. A visitor in the gallery—no doubt a Western farmer on a holiday—having put his feet upon the rail, the entire Pit began to groan "boots, boots, boots."

A little later a certain broker came scurrying across the floor

from the direction of the telephone room. Panting, he flung himself up the steps of the Pit, forced his way among the traders with vigorous workings of his elbows, and shouted a bid.

"He's sick," shouted Hirsch. "Look out, he's sick. He's going to have a fit." He grabbed the broker by both arms and hustled him into the centre of the Pit. The others caught up the cry, a score of hands pushed the newcomer from man to man. The Pit traders clutched him, pulled his necktie loose, knocked off his hat, vociferating all the while at top voice, "He's sick! He's sick!"

Other brokers and traders came up, and Grossmann, mistaking the commotion for a flurry, ran into the Pit, his eyes wide, waving his arm and wailing:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and a quarter."

But the victim, good-natured, readjusted his battered hat, and again repeated his bid.

"Ah, go to bed," protested Hirsch.

"He's the man who struck Billy Paterson."

"Say, a horse bit him. Look out for him, he's going to have a duck-fit."

The incident appeared to be the inspiration for a new "josh" that had a great success, and a group of traders organized themselves into an "anti-cravat committee," and made the rounds of the Pit, twitching the carefully tied scarfs of the unwary out of place. Grossman, indignant at "t'ose monkey-doodle pizeness," withdrew from the centre of the Pit. But while he stood in front of Leaycraft, his back turned, muttering his disgust, the latter, while

carrying on a grave conversation with his neighbour, carefully stuck a file of paper javelins all around the Jew's hat band, and then—still without mirth and still continuing to talk—set them on fire.

Landry imagined by now that ninety-four and an eighth was as high a figure as he could reasonably expect that morning, and so began to "work off" his selling orders. Little by little he sold the wheat "short," till all but one large lot was gone.

Then all at once, and for no discoverable immediate reason, wheat, amid an explosion of shouts and vociferations, jumped to ninety-four and a quarter, and before the Pit could take breath, had advanced another eighth, broken to one-quarter, then jumped to the five-eighths mark.

It was the Report on the Visible Supply beyond question, and though it had not yet been posted, this sudden flurry was a sign that it was not only near at hand, but would be bullish.

A few moments later it was bulletined in the gallery beneath the dial, and proved a tremendous surprise to nearly every man upon the floor. No one had imagined the supply was so ample, so all-sufficient to meet the demand. Promptly the Pit responded. Wheat began to pour in heavily. Hirsch, Kelly, Grossmann, Leaycraft, the stolid Winston, and the excitable Rusbridge were hard at it. The price began to give. Suddenly it broke sharply. The hand on the great dial dropped to ninety-three and seven-eighths.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.