Camp Wadsworth

The Guarded Heights

Wadsworth Camp

The Guarded Heights

Camp W.

The Guarded Heights / W. Camp — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Camp Wadsworth
The Guarded Heights

PART I
OAKMONT

I

George Morton never could be certain when he first conceived the preposterous idea that Sylvia Planter ought to belong to him. The full realization, at any rate, came all at once, unexpectedly, destroying his dreary outlook, urging him to fantastic heights, and, for that matter, to rather curious depths.

It was, altogether, a year of violent change. After a precarious survival of a rural education he had done his best to save his father's livery business which cheap automobiles had persistently undermined. He liked that, for he had spent his vacations, all his spare hours, indeed, at the stable or on the road, so that by the time the crash came he knew more of horses and rode better than any hunting, polo-playing gentleman he had ever seen about that rich countryside. Nor was there any one near his own age who could stand up to him in a rough-and-tumble argument. Yet he wondered why he was restless, not appreciating that he craved broader worlds to conquer. Then the failure came, and his close relation with the vast Planter estate of Oakmont, and the arrival of Sylvia, who disclosed such worlds and heralded the revolution.

That spring of his twentieth year the stable and all its stock went to the creditors, and old Planter bought the small frame house just outside the village, on the edge of his estate, and drew his boundary around it. He was willing that the Mortons should remain for the present in their old home at a nominal rent, and after a fashion they might struggle along, for George's mother was exceptionally clever at cleansing fine laces and linens; the estate would have work for his father from time to time; as for himself, Planter's superintendent suggested, there were new and difficult horses at Oakmont and a scarcity of trustworthy grooms. George shook his head.

"Sure, I want a job," he admitted, "but not as old Planter's servant, or anybody else's. I want to be my own boss."

George hadn't guessed that his reputation as a horseman had travelled as far as the big house. The superintendent explained that it had, and that, living at home, merely helping out for the summer, he would be quite apart from the ordinary men around the stables. His parents sensed a threat. They begged him to accept.

"We've got to do as Old Planter wants at the start or he'll put us out, and we're too old to make another home."

So George went with his head up, telling himself he was doing Planter a favour; but he didn't like it, and almost at once commenced to plan to get away, if he could, without hurting his parents. Then Sylvia, just home from her last year at school, came into the stable toward the end of his day's work. Her overpowering father was with her, and her brother, Lambert, who was about George's age. She examined interestedly the horse reserved for her, and one or two others of which she was envious.

George wanted to stare at her. He had only glimpsed her casually and at a distance in summers gone by. Now she was close, and he knew he had never seen anything to match her slender, adolescent figure, or her finely balanced face with its intolerant eyes and its frame of black hair.

"But," he heard her say to her father in a flexible contralto voice, "I don't care to bother you or Lambert every time I want to ride."

An argument, unintelligible to George, flowed for a moment. Then Old Planter's tones, bass and authoritative, filled the stable.

"Come here, young Morton!"

George advanced, not touching his cap, to remind the big man that there was a difference between him and the other stable men, and that he didn't like that tone.

"You are a very dependable horseman," the great millionaire said. "I can trust you. When Miss Sylvia wants to ride alone you will go with her and see that she has no accidents. During your hours here you will be entirely at her disposal."

Instead of arousing George's anger that command slightly thrilled him.

"So you're Morton," Sylvia said, indifferently. "I shall expect you always to be convenient."

He ventured to look at last, pulling off his cap.

"You can depend on it," he said, a trifle dazed by her beauty.

She went out. Her father and her brother followed, like servitors of a sort themselves. George had no sense of having allowed his position there to be compromised. He only realized that he was going to see that lovely creature every day, would be responsible for her safety, would have a chance to know her.

"A peach!" a groom whispered. "You're lucky, Georgie boy."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe so."

Yet he agreed. She was a peach, and he took no pains to conceal his appraisal from his parents that evening.

"Seen Old Planter's daughter yet?"

His father, a drooping, tired figure in the dusk of the little porch, nodded.

"I haven't," his mother called from the kitchen. "Is she as pretty as she was last summer?"

"Pretty!" he scoffed. "Who was the prettiest woman in the world?"

"I don't know," came the interested voice from the house. "Maybe the Queen of Sheba."

"Then," George said, "she'd have cried her eyes out if she had seen Old Planter's girl."

The elder Morton took his pipe from his mouth.

"Young men like you," he said, slowly, "haven't any business looking at girls like Old Planter's daughter."

George laughed carelessly.

"Even a cat can look at a queen."

And during the weeks that followed he did look, too persistently, never dreaming where his enthusiasm was leading him. Occasionally he would bring her brother's horse around with hers or her father's. At such times he would watch them ride away with a keen disappointment, as if he had been excluded from a pleasure that had become his right. Lambert, however, was away a good deal, and Old Planter that summer fought rheumatic attacks, which he called gout, so that Sylvia, for the most part, rode alone through remote bridle-paths with George at her heels like a well-trained animal.

He knew he could not alter that all at once; she would have it no other way. She only spoke to him, really, about the condition of the horses, or the weather – never a word conceivably personal; and every day he looked at her more personally, let his imagination, without knowing it, stray too far. At first he merely enjoyed being with her; then he appreciated that a sense of intimacy had grown upon him, and he was troubled that she did not reciprocate, that their extended companionship had not diminished at all the appalling distance dividing them. There was something, moreover, beyond her beauty to stimulate his interest. She appeared not to know fear, and once or twice he ventured to reprove her, enjoying her angry reactions. She even came to the stables, urging him to let her ride horses that he knew were not safe.

"But you ride them," she would persist.

"When I find a horse I can't ride, Miss Sylvia, I guess I'll have to take up a new line. If your father would come and say it's all right – "

Even then he failed to grasp the fact that he guarded her for his own sake rather more than for her father's.

He nearly interfered when he heard her cry to her brother as they started off one morning:

"I'm going to ride harder from now on, Lambert. I've got to get fit for next winter. Coming out will take a lot of doing."

"If she rides any harder," he muttered, "she'll break her silly neck."

It angered him that she never spoke to him in that voice, with that easy manner. Perhaps his eagerness to be near her had led her to undervalue him. Somehow he would change all that, and he wanted her to stop calling him "Morton," as if he had been an ordinary groom, or an animal, but he would have to go slowly. Although he didn't realize the great fact then, he did know that he shrank from attempting anything that would take her away from him.

It was her harder riding, indeed, that opened his eyes, that ushered in the revolution.

It happened toward the close of a mid-July afternoon. Mud whirled from her horse's hoofs, plentifully sprinkling her humble guardian.

"Now what the devil's she up to?" he thought with a sharp fear.

She turned and rode at a gallop for a hedge, an uneven, thorny barrier that separated two low meadows. He put spurs to his horse, shouting:

"Hold up, Miss Sylvia! That's a rotten take-off."

Flushed and laughing, she glanced over her shoulder.

"Got to try it to prove it, Morton."

He realized afterward that it was as near intimacy as she had ever come.

He saw her horse refuse, straightening his knees and sliding in the marshy ground. He watched Sylvia, with an ease and grace nearly unbelievable, somersault across the hedge and out of sight in the meadow beyond.

"Miss Sylvia! Are you hurt?"

No answer. He sprang from his horse, leaving it free to graze with hers. He stormed through the hedge, his heart choking him. She lay on her side, quite motionless, the high colour fled from her cheeks, her hair half down. Although the soft ground should have reassured him he was obsessed by the thought that she might never get up again.

In the warmth of his fear barriers were consumed. Within his horizon survived just two people, himself and this silent object of an extended, if unconscious, adoration.

He shrank from learning the truth, yet it was impossible to hesitate. He had to do what he could.

He approached on tip-toe, knelt, and lifted her until she rested against him. The contact was galvanic. He became aware of his trembling hands. Some man, it occurred to him, would touch those curved, slightly parted lips. Not if he knew it, unless it were himself! He wanted to hear those lips speak to him as if he were a human being, and not just – Morton. How could he dream of such things now? He fumbled for her pulse, failed at first to find it, and became panic-stricken. He shook her, more than ever alone, facing an irretrievable loss.

"Open your eyes," he begged wildly. "What's the matter with you? Oh, my God, Miss Sylvia, I can't ever get along without you now."

He glanced haggardly around for water, any means to snatch her back; then she stirred in his arms, and with his relief came a sickening return to a peopled and ordered world. He understood he had sprung headlong with his eyes shut; that his anxiety had dictated phrases he had had no business to form, that he would not have uttered if she had been able to hear. Or, good Lord! Had she heard? For she drew herself convulsively away, the colour rushing back, her eyes opening, and they held a sort of horror.

"Are you hurt?" he said, trying to read her eyes.

She got to her knees, swaying a trifle.

"I remember. A bit of a fall. Stunned me. That's all. But you said something, Morton! Will you please repeat that?"

Her eyes, and her voice, which had a new, frightening quality, stung his quick temper. What he had suffered a moment ago was a little sacred. He couldn't afford to let her cheapen it one cent's worth.

"I guess I don't need to repeat it," he said. "It was scared out of me, Miss Sylvia, because I thought – I know it was silly – but I thought you were dead. I never dreamed you could hear. I'll try to forget it."

He saw her grope in the wet grass at her knees. Scarcely understanding, he watched her rise, lifting her riding crop, her face disclosing a temper to match his own.

"You're an impertinent servant," she said. "Well, you'll not forget."

She struck at his face with the crop. He got his hand up just in time, and caught her wrist.

"Don't you touch me," she whispered.

His jaw went out.

"You'll learn not to be afraid of my touch, and I'm not a servant. You get that straight."

She struggled, but he held her wrist firmly. The sight of the crop, the memory of her epithet, thickened his voice, lashed his anger.

"Have it your own way. You say I shan't forget, and I won't. I'm going after you, and I usually get what I go after. You'll find I'm a human being, and I'd like to see anybody hit me in the face and get away with it."

"Let me go! Let me go!"

He released her wrist, dragging the crop from her grasp. He snapped it in two and flung the pieces aside. The slight noise steadied him. It seemed symbolic of the snapping of his intended fate. She drew slowly back, chafing the wrist he had held. Her face let escape the desire to hurt, to hurt hard.

"Someone else will have the strength," she whispered. "You'll be punished, you – you – stable boy."

She forced her way blindly through the hedge. Responding to his custom he started automatically after her to hold her stirrup. She faced him, raising her hands.

"Keep away from me, you beast!"

Unaided, she sprang into her saddle and started home at a hard gallop.

George glanced around thoughtfully. He was quite calm now. The familiar landscape appeared strangely distorted. Was that his temper, or a reflection from his altered destiny? He didn't know how the deuce he could do it, but he was going to justify himself. Maybe the real situation had never been explained to her, and, as the price of her companionship, he had, perhaps, let her hold him too cheaply; but now he was going to show her that he was, indeed, instead of a servant, a human being, capable of making his boasts good.

He picked up the two pieces of her riding crop and thrust them into his pocket. They impressed him as a necessary souvenir of his humiliation, a reminder of what he had to do. She had hurt. Oh, Lord! How she had hurt! He experienced a hot desire to hurt back. The scar could only be healed, he told himself, if some day he could strike at her beautiful, contemptuous body as hard as she had just now struck at him.

II

He mounted and pressed his horse, but he had only one or two glimpses of Sylvia, far ahead, using her spurs, from time to time raising her hand as if she had forgotten that her crop had been torn from her, broken, and thrown aside.

Such frantic haste was urged by more than the necessity of escape. What then, if not to hasten his punishment, to tell her father, her mother, and Lambert? She had threatened that someone else would have the strength to give him a thrashing. Probably Lambert. Aside from that how could they punish a man who had only committed the crime of letting a girl know that he loved her? All at once he guessed, and he laughed aloud. They could kick him out. He wanted, above everything else, to be kicked out of a job where he was treated like a lackey, although he was told he was nothing of the kind. Expert with horses, doing Old Planter a favour for the summer! Hadn't she just called him a servant, a stable boy? He wanted to put himself forever beyond the possibility of being humiliated in just that way again.

In the stable he found a groom leading Sylvia's horse to a stall.

"Take mine, too, and rub him down, will you?"

The groom turned, staring.

"The nerve! What's up, George?"

"Only," George said, deliberately, "that I've touched my last horse for money."

"Say! What goes on here? The young missus rides in like a cyclone, and looking as if she'd been crying. I always said you'd get in trouble with the boss's daughter. You're too good looking for the ladies, Georgie – "

"That's enough of that," George snapped. "Scrape him down, and I'll be much obliged."

He went out, knowing that the other would obey, for as a rule people did what George wanted. He took a path through the park toward home, walking slowly, commencing to appreciate the difficulties he had brought upon himself. His predicament might easily involve his parents. The afternoon was about done, they would both be there, unsuspecting. It was his duty to prepare them. He experienced a bitter regret as he crossed the line that a few months ago had divided their property, their castle, from Oakmont. Now Old Planter could cross that line and drive them out.

Before George came in sight of the house he heard a rubbing, slapping noise, and with a new distaste pictured his mother bending over a washtub, suggesting a different barrier to be leaped. As he entered the open space back of the house he wanted to kick the tub over, wanted to see sprawling in the dirt the delicate, intimate linen sent down weekly from the great house because his mother was exceptionally clever with such things. To the uncouth music of her labour her broad back rose and bent rhythmically. His father, wearing soiled clothing, sat on the porch steps, an old briar pipe in his mouth.

Abruptly his mother's drudgery ceased. She stared. His father rose stiffly.

"You've got yourself in trouble," he said.

George had not fancied the revolution had unfurled banners so easily discernible. He became self-conscious. His parents' apprehension made matters more difficult for him. They, at least, were too old to revolt.

"I suppose I have," he acknowledged shortly.

His father used the tone of one announcing an unspeakable catastrophe.

"You mean you've had trouble with Miss Sylvia."

"George!" his mother cried, aghast. "You've never been impertinent with Miss Sylvia!"

"She thinks I have," George said, "so it amounts to the same thing."

His father's face twitched.

"And you know Old Planter can put us out of here without a minute's notice, and where do you think we'd go? How do you think we'd get bread and butter? You talk up, young man. You tell us what happened."

"I can't," George said, sullenly. "I can't talk about it. You'll hear soon enough."

"I always said," his mother lamented, "that Georgie wasn't one to know his place up there."

"Depends," George muttered, "on what my place is. I've got to find that out. Look! You'll hear now."

A bald-headed figure in livery, one of the house servants, glided toward them through the shrubbery, over that vanished boundary line, with nervous haste. George squared his shoulders. The messenger, however, went straight to the older man.

"Mr. Planter's on his ear, and wants to see you right off in the library. What you been up to, young Morton?"

George resented the curiosity in the pallid, unintelligent eyes, the fellow's obvious pleasure in the presence of disaster. It would have appeased him to grasp those sloping shoulders, to force the grinning face from his sight. A queer question disturbed him. Had Sylvia felt something of the sort about him?

"Come on," the elder Morton said. "It's pretty hard at my age. You'll pay for this, George."

"Old Planter would never be that unfair," George encouraged him.

"Georgie! Georgie!" his mother said when the others were out of sight, "what have you been up to?"

He walked closer and placed his arm around her shoulders.

"I've been getting my eyes opened," he answered. "I never ought to have listened to them. I never ought to have gone up there. I did say something to Miss Sylvia I had no business to. If I'd been one of her own kind, instead of the son of a livery stable keeper, I'd have got polite regrets or something. It's made me realize how low I am."

"No," she said with quick maternal passion. "You're not low. Maybe some day those people'll be no better than we are."

He shook his head.

"I'd rather I was no worse than they are. And I will be. I won't put up with it. If some people have to be treated like dirt, I'm going to help do the treating."

"That's no right way of thinking," she warned. "It's money makes the mare go."

But in Sylvia's case, George admitted, there was other propulsion than that; something more fragile, and harder to understand or capture for one's self.

"Don't you worry, I'll make money," he said.

She glanced up quickly.

"Who's that?"

A brisk masculine voice volleyed through the shrubbery:

"Young Morton! I say, young Morton!"

"It's Mr. Lambert," she breathed. "Go quick."

George remembered what Sylvia had said about someone else having the strength.

"Can't you guess, Ma, what the young lady's brother wants of me?"

The bitterness left his face. His smile was engaging.

"To give me the devil."

"Young Morton! Young Morton!"

"Coming!" he called.

"George," she begged, "don't have any trouble with Mr. Lambert."

III

She watched him with anxious eyes, failing to observe, because she was his mother, details that informed his boasts with power. His ancestry of labour had given him, at least, his straight, slender, and unusually muscular body, and from somewhere had crept in the pride, just now stimulated, with which he carried it. His wilful, regular features, moreover, guarded by youth, were still uncoarsened.

He found Lambert Planter waiting beyond the old boundary behind a screen of bushes, his hands held behind his back. In his face, which had some of Sylvia's beauty, hardened and enlarged, dwelt the devil George had foreseen.

George nodded, feeling all at once at ease. He could take care of himself in an argument with Lambert Planter. No such distances separated them as had widened beyond measure a little while back between him and Sylvia. He wondered if that conception sprang from Lambert, or if it came simply from the fact that they were two men, facing each other alone; for it was from the first patent that Sylvia had asked her brother to complete a punishment she had devised as fitting, but which she had been incapable of carrying out herself. Lambert, indeed, brought his hands forward, disclosing a whip. It was a trifle in his way as he took off his coat.

"That's right," George said. "Make yourself comfortable."

"You won't help matters by being impertinent, Morton."

Lambert's voice contrasted broadly with George's round, loud tones. While, perhaps, not consciously affected, its accents fell according to the custom of the head master of a small and particular preparatory school. George crushed his instinct to mock. What the deuce had he craved ever since his encounter with Sylvia unless it was to be one with men like Lambert Planter? So all he said was:

"What's the whip for?"

"You know perfectly well," Lambert answered. "There's no possible excuse for what you said and did this afternoon. I am going to impress that on you."

"You mean you want a fight?"

"By no means. I wouldn't feel comfortable fighting a man like you. I'd never dreamed we had such a rotten person on the place. Oh, no, Morton. I'm going to give you a good horse-whipping."

George's chin went out. His momentary good-humour fled.

"If you touch me with that whip I'm likely to kill you."

Without hesitating Lambert raised the whip. George sprang and got his hands on it, intent only on avoiding a blow that would have carried the same unbearable sting as Sylvia's riding crop. Such tactics took Lambert by surprise. George's two hands against his one on the stock were victorious. The whip flew to one side. Lambert, flushing angrily, started after it. George barred his path, raising his fists.

"You don't touch that thing again."

Lambert's indecision, his hands hanging at his sides, hurt George nearly as much as the lashing would have done. He had to destroy that attitude of sheer superiority.

"I'm not sure you're a man," he said, thickly, "but you tried to hit me, so you can put your pretty hands up or take it in the face."

He aimed a vicious blow. Lambert side-stepped and countered. George's ear rang. He laughed, his self-respect rushing back with the keen joy of battle. In Lambert's face, stripped of its habitual repression, he recognized an equal excitement. It was a man's fight, with blood drawn at the first moment, staining both of them. Lambert boxed skillfully, and his muscles were hard, but after the first moment George saw victory, and set out to force it. He looked for fear in the other's eyes then, and longed to see it, but those eyes remained as unafraid as Sylvia's until there wasn't left in them much of anything conscious. As a last chance Lambert clinched, and they went down, fighting like

a pair of furious terriers. George grinned as he felt those eclectic hands endeavouring in the most brotherly fashion to torture him. He managed to pin them to the ground. He laughed happily.

"Thought you hated to touch me."

"You fight like a tiger, anyway," Lambert gasped.

"Had enough?"

Lambert nodded.

"I know when I'm through."

George didn't release him at once. His soul expanded with a sense of power and authority earned by his own effort. It seemed an omen. It urged him too far.

"Then," he mused, "I guess I'd better let you run home and tell your father what I've done to you."

"That," Lambert said, "proves I was right, and I'm sorry I fought you."

George tried to think. He felt hot and angry. Was the other, after all, the better man?

"I take it back," he muttered. "Ought to have had enough sense to know that a fellow that fights like you's no tattle-tale."

"Thanks, Morton."

George's sense of power grew. He couldn't commence too soon to use it.

"See here, Mr. Planter, I came up here to help with some horses your people didn't know how to handle, and let myself get shifted to this other job; but I'm not your father's slave, and anyway I'm getting out."

He increased the pressure on Lambert's arms.

"Just to remind you what we've been fighting about, and that I'm not your slave, you call me Mr. Morton, or George, just as if I was about as good as you."

Lambert smiled broadly.

"Will you kindly let me go – George?"

George sprang up, grinning.

"How you feel, Mr. Lam – " He caught himself – "Mr. Planter?"

Lambert struggled to his feet.

"Quite unwell, thanks. I'm sorry you made such a damned fool of yourself this afternoon. We might have had some pretty useful times boxing together."

"I'd just as leave tell you," George said, glancing away, "that I never intended to say it. I didn't realize it myself until it was scared out of me."

Lambert put on his coat.

"It won't bear talking about."

"It never hit me," George said, huskily, "that even a cat couldn't look at a queen."

"Perfectly possible," Lambert said as he walked off, feeling his bruises, "only the queen mustn't see the cat."

IV

George went, obliterating as best he could the souvenirs of battle. Water, unfortunately, was a requisite, and the nearest was to be found at his own home. His mother gasped.

"You did! After what I said!"

At the pump he splashed cold water over his face and arms.

"I thrashed him," he spluttered.

"I guess that settles it for your father and me."

"Young Planter won't tell anybody," George assured her. "Although I don't see how he's going to get away with it unless he says he was run over by an automobile and kicked by a mule."

"What's come over you?" she demanded. "You've gone out of your head."

He dodged her desire for details. As Lambert had said, the thing wouldn't bear talking about. For the first time in his life he stood alone, and whatever he accomplished from now on would have to be done alone.

He saw his father striding toward them, the anxious light gone from his eyes. George experienced a vast relief.

"Father looks a little more cheerful," he commented, drying his face.

"Get supper, Ma," the man said as he came up.

She hesitated, held by her curiosity, while he turned on George.

"I don't wonder you couldn't open your mouth to me. You're to be out of here to-morrow."

"I'd made up my mind to that."

"And Old Planter wants to see you at nine o'clock to-night."

"Since you and Ma," George said, "seem on such good terms with him I suppose I'll have to go."

"Thank the Lord we are," his father grumbled. "I wouldn't have blamed him if he had packed us all off. He was more than fair. I've looked after you so far, but you'll have to shift for yourself now."

"And the only thing I didn't like about it," George mused, "was leaving you and Ma."

"What did he say to Miss Sylvia?" his mother whispered.

"Said he couldn't get along without her, and was going to have her."

He might have been speaking of one who had ventured to impersonate the deity.

"And he touched her! Put his arms around her!"

The horror in his mother's face grew.

"Georgie! Georgie! What could you have been thinking of?"

He leaned against the pump.

"I'm thinking now," he said, softly, "it's sort of queer a man's father and mother believe there's any girl in the world too good for their son."

"Lots of them," his father snapped. "Sylvia Planter most of all."

"Oh, yes," his mother agreed.

He straightened.

"Then listen," he said, peremptorily. "I don't think so. I told her I was going to have her, and I will. Just put that down in your books. I'll show the lot of you that I'm as good as she is, as good as anybody."

The late sun illuminated the purpose in his striking face.

"Impertinent servant!" he cried. "Stable boy! Beast! It's pretty rough to make her marry all that. It's my only business from now on."

V

He went to his room, leaving his parents aghast. With a nervous hurry he rid himself of his riding breeches, his puttees, his stock.

"That," he told himself, "is the last time I shall ever wear anything like livery."

When he had dressed in one of his two suits of ordinary clothing he took the broken riding crop and for a long time stared at it as though the venomous souvenir could fix his resolution more firmly. Once his hand slipped to the stock where Sylvia's fingers had so frequently tightened. He snatched his hand away. It was too much like an unfair advantage, a stolen caress.

"Georgie! Georgie!"

His mother's voice drifted to him tentatively.

"Come and get your supper."

He hid the broken crop and went out. His father glanced disapproval.

"You'd do better to wear Old Planter's clothes while you can. It's doubtful when you'll buy any more of your own."

George sat down without answering. Since his return from the ride that afternoon his parents and he had scarcely spoken the same language, and by this time he understood there was no possible interpreter. It made him choke a little over his food.

The others were content to share his silence. His father seemed only anxious to have him away; but his mother, he fancied, looked at him with something like sorrow.

Afterward he fled from that nearly voiceless scrutiny and paced one of the park paths, counting the minutes until he could answer Old Planter's summons. He desired to have the interview over so that he could snap every chain binding him to Oakmont, every chain save the single one Sylvia's contempt had unwittingly forged. He could not, moreover, plan his immediate future with any assurance until he knew what the great man wanted.

"Only to make me feel a little worse," he decided. "What else could he do?"

What, indeed, could a man of Planter's wealth and authority not do? It was a disturbing question.

Through the shrubbery the lights of the house gleamed. The moonlight outlined the immense, luxurious mass. Never once had he entered the great house. He was eager to study the surrounding in which women like Sylvia lived, which she, to an extent, must reflect.

In that serene moonlight he realized that his departure, agreeable and essential as it was, would make it impossible for him during an indefinite period to see that slender, adolescent figure, or the features, lovely and intolerant, that had brought about this revolution in his life. He acknowledged now that he had looked forward each day to those hours of proximity and contemplation; and there had been from the first, he guessed, adoration in his regard.

It was no time to dwell on the sentimental phase of his situation. He despised himself for still loving her. His approaching departure he must accept gladly, since he designed it as a means of coming closer – close enough to hurt.

He wondered if he would have one more glimpse of her, perhaps in the house. He glanced at his watch. He could go at last. He started for the lights. Would he see her?

At the corner of the building he hesitated before a fresh dilemma. His logical entrance lay through the servants' quarters, but he squared his shoulders and crossed the terrace. It was impossible now that he should ever enter the house in which she lived by the back door.

It was a warm night, so the door stood open. The broad spaces of the hall, the rugs, the hangings, the huge chairs, the portraits in gilt frames against polished walls, the soft, rosy light whose source he failed to explore, seemed mutely to reprove his presumption.

He rang. He did not hear the feet of the servant who answered. The vapid man that had trotted for his father that afternoon suddenly shut off his view.

"You must wear rubbers," George said.

"What you doing here? Go 'round to the back."

"Mr. Planter," George explained, patiently, "sent for me."

"All right. All right. Then go 'round to the back where you belong."

George reached out, caught the other's shoulder, and shoved him to one side. While the servant gave a little cry and struggled to regain his balance, George walked in. A figure emerged painfully from an easy chair in the shadows by the fireplace.

"What's all this, Simpson?"

The polished voice gave the impression of overcoming an impediment, probably a swollen lip.

"It's young Morton, Mr. Lambert," Simpson whined. "I told him to go to the back door where he belongs."

"What an idea!" Lambert drawled. "Enter, Mr. Morton. My dear Mr. Morton, what is the occasion? What can we do for you? I must beg you to excuse my appearance. I had a trifling argument with my new hunter this afternoon."

George grinned.

"Must be some horse."

None the less, he felt a bruise. It would have been balm to destroy Lambert's mocking manner by a brusque attack even in this impressive hall.

"Your father sent for me."

"Shall I put him out, sir?" Simpson quavered.

Lambert burst into a laugh.

"I shouldn't try it. We can't afford too many losses in one day. Go away, Simpson, and don't argue with your betters. You might not be as clever as I at explaining the visible results. I'll take care of Mr. Morton."

Simpson was bewildered.

"Quite so, sir," he said, and vanished.

"My father," Lambert said, "is in the library – that first door. Wait. I'll see if he's alone."

Painfully he limped to the door and opened it, while George waited, endeavouring not to pull at his cap.

"Father," Lambert said, smoothly, "Mr. Morton is calling."

A deep voice, muffled by distance, vibrated in the hall.

"What are you talking about?"

Lambert bowed profoundly.

"Mr. Morton from the lodge."

George stepped close to him.

"Want me to thrash you again?"

Lambert faced him without panic.

"I don't admit that you could, but, my dear – George, I'm too fatigued to-night to find out. Some day, if the occasion should arise, I hope I may. I do sincerely."

He drew the door wide open, and stepped aside with a bow that held no mockery. A white-haired, stately woman entered the hall, and, as she passed, cast at George a glance curiously lacking in vitality. In her George saw the spring of Sylvia's delicacy and beauty. Whatever Old Planter might be this woman had something from the past, not to be acquired, with which to endow her children. George resented it. It made the future for him appear more difficult. Her voice was in keeping, cultured and unaffected.

"Mr. Planter is alone, Morton. He would like to see you."

She disappeared in a room opposite. George took a deep breath.

"On that threshold," Lambert said, kindly, "I've often felt the same way, though I've never deserved it as you do."

George plunged through and closed the door.

The room was vaster than the hall, and darker, impressing him confusedly with endless, filled book-shelves; with sculpture; with a difficult maze of furniture. The only light issued from a lamp on a huge and littered table at the opposite end.

At first George glanced vainly about, seeking the famous man.

"Step over here, Morton."

There was no denying that voice. It came from a deep chair whose back was turned to the light. It sent to George's heart his first touch of fear. He walked carefully across the rugs and around the table until he faced the figure in the chair. He wanted to get rid of his cap. He couldn't resist the temptation to pull at it; and only grooms and stable boys tortured caps.

The portly figure in evening clothes was not calculated to put a culprit at ease. Old Planter sat very straight. The carefully trimmed white side whiskers, the white hair, the bushy brows above inflamed eyes, composed a portrait suggestive of a power relentless and not to be trifled with. George had boasted he was as good as any one. He knew he wasn't as good as Old Planter; their disparity of attainment was too easily palpable. No matter whether Old Planter's success was worthy, he had gone out into the world and done things. He had manipulated railroads. He had piled up millions whose number he couldn't be sure of himself. He had built this house and all it stood for. What one man had done another could. George stopped pulling at his cap. He threw it on the table as into a ring. His momentary fear died.

"You sent for me, sir."

The mark of respect flowed naturally. This old fellow was entitled to it, from him or any one else.

The bass voice had a dynamic quality.

"I did. This afternoon you grossly and inexcusably insulted my daughter. It will be necessary to speak of her to you just once more. That's why I told your father to send you. If I were younger it would give me pleasure to break every bone in your body."

The red lips opened and shut with the precision of a steel trap. They softened now in a species of smile.

"I see, Morton, you had a little argument with a horse this afternoon."

George managed to smile back.

"Nothing to speak of, sir."

"I wish it had been. I take a pleasure in punishing you. It isn't biblical, but it's human. I'm only sorry I can't devise a punishment to fit the crime."

"It was no crime," George said bravely, "no insult."

"Keep your mouth shut. Unfortunately I can't do much more than run you away from here, for I don't care to evict your parents from their home for your folly; and they do not support you. Mr. Evans will pay you off in the morning with a month's extra wages."

"I won't take a cent I haven't earned," George said.

Old Planter studied him with more curiosity.

"You're a queer livery stable boy."

"I'm banking on that," George said, willing the other should make what he would of it.

"It's there if you wish it," Old Planter went on. "I sent for you so that I could tell you myself that you will be away from Oakmont and from the neighbourhood by noon to-morrow. And remember your home is now a portion of Oakmont. You will never come near us again. You will forget what happened this afternoon."

He stood up, his face reddening. George wanted to tell him that Sylvia herself had said he shouldn't forget.

"If, Morton," the old man went on with a biting earnestness, "once you're away from Oakmont, you ever bother Miss Sylvia again, or make any attempt to see her, I'll dispossess your parents, and

I'll drive you out of any job you get. I'll keep after you until you'll understand what you're defying. This isn't an idle threat. I have the power."

The father completely conquered him. He clenched his knotted fists.

"I'd destroy a regiment of creatures like you to spare my little girl one of the tears you caused her this afternoon."

"After all," George said, defensively, "I'm a human being."

Old Planter shook his head.

"If your father hadn't failed you'd have spent your life in a livery stable. It takes education, money, breeding to make a human being."

George nodded. He wouldn't need to plan much for himself, after all. Sylvia's father was doing it for him.

"I've heard some pretty hard words to-day, sir," he said. "It's waked me up. Can't a man get those things for himself?"

He fancied reminiscence in Old Planter's eyes.

"The right kind can. Get out of here now, Morton, and don't let me see you or hear of you again."

George stepped between him and the table to pick up his cap. His nerves tightened. Close to his cap lay an unmounted photograph, not very large, of Sylvia. What a companion piece for the broken crop! What an ornament for an altar dedicated to ambition, to anger, and to love! He would take it under her father's nose, following her father's threats.

He slipped his cap over the photograph, and picked up both, the precious likeness hidden by the cheap cloth.

"Good-night, sir."

He thought Old Planter started at the ring in his voice. He walked swiftly from the room. Let Old Planter look out for himself. What did all those threats amount to? Perhaps he could steal Sylvia as easily from under her terrible parent's nose.

VI

Lambert, hands in pockets, stopped him in the hall.

"Packed off, as you deserve, but you'll need money."

"Thanks," George said. "I don't want any I don't earn."

"If father should kick me out," Lambert drawled, "I'd be inclined to take what I could get."

"I'd rather steal," George said.

Lambert smiled whimsically.

"A word of advice. Stealing's dangerous unless you take enough."

George indicated the library door. He tried to imitate Lambert's manner.

"Then I suppose it's genius."

"What are you getting at?"

"I mean," George said, "you people may drive me to stealing, but it'll be the kind you get patted on the back for."

"Sounds like Wall Street," Lambert smiled.

George wanted to put himself on record in this house.

"I'm going to make money, and don't you forget it."

Lambert's smile widened.

"Then good luck, and a good job – George."

George crushed his helpless irritation, turned, and walked out the front door; more disappointed than he would have thought possible, because he had failed to see Sylvia.

Reluctantly he returned to the nearly silent discomfort of his parents. He tried to satisfy their curiosity.

"Nothing but threats. I'm to be driven to crime if I'm ever heard of after I leave Oakmont in the morning."

"He might have made it worse," his father grunted.

The conversation died for lack of an interpreter.

His father made a pretence of reading a newspaper. His mother examined her swollen hands. Her eyes suggested the nearness of tears. George got up.

"I suppose I'd better be getting ready."

As he stooped to kiss her his mother slipped an arm around his neck.

"Mother's little boy."

George steadied his voice.

"Good-night, Dad."

His father filled his pipe reflectively.

"Good-night, George."

No word of sympathy; no sympathy at all, beyond a fugitive, half-frightened hint from his mother, because he had run boldly against a fashion of thinking; little more, really.

He softly closed the door of his room, the last time he would ever do that! He sat on the edge of the bed. He took Sylvia's photograph from his pocket and studied it with a deliberate lack of sentiment. He fancied her desirable lips framing epithets of angry contempt and those other words to which he had given his own significance.

"You'll not forget."

He looked so long, repeating it in his mind so often, that at last his eyes blurred, and the pictured lips seemed, indeed, to curve and straighten.

"You'll not forget."

He tapped the photograph with his forefinger.

"You're going to help me remember," he muttered. "I'll not forget."

VII

He placed the photograph and the broken crop at the bottom of his oilcloth suitcase. The rest of his packing was simple; he had so little that was actually his own. There were a few books on a shelf, relics of his erratic attendance at the neighbouring high school – he regretted now that his ambition there had been physical rather that mental. Even in the development of his muscles, however, his brain had grown a good deal, for he was bright enough. If he made himself work, drawing on what money he had, he might get ready for college by fall. He had always envied the boys, who had drifted annually from the high school to the remote and exhilarating grandeur of a university.

What had Old Planter's sequence been? Education, money, breeding. Of course. And he guessed that the three necessities might, to an extent, walk hand in hand. The acquisition of an education would mean personal contacts, helpful financially, projecting, perhaps, that culture that he felt was as essential as the rest. Certainly the starting place for him was a big university where a man, once in, could work his way through. Lambert went to Yale. Harvard sprang into his mind, but there was the question of railroad fare and lost time. He'd better try his luck at Princeton which wasn't far and which had, he'd heard, a welcome for boys working their way through college.

He examined his bank book. Fortunately, since he had lived with his parents, he had had little opportunity or need for spending. The balance showed nearly five hundred dollars, and he would receive fifty more in the morning. If he could find someone to bolster up his insufficient schooling for a part of that amount he'd make a go of it; he'd be fairly on his course.

He went to bed, but he slept restlessly. He wanted to be away from Oakmont and at work. Through his clouded mind persisted his desire for a parting glimpse of Sylvia. If he slept at all it was to the discordant memory of her anger.

The sun smiled into his room, summoning him to get up and go forth.

His father was not there. As if to emphasize the occasion, his mother deserted her washtub, served his breakfast herself, stood about in helpless attitudes.

"George," she whispered, toward the close of the desolate meal, "try to get a job near here. Of course you could never come home, but we could go to see you."

"Father," he said, "is kicking me out as much as Old Planter is, and you back him up."

She clasped her hands.

"I've got to. And you can't blame your father. He has to look after himself and me."

"It makes no difference. I'm not going to take a job near by," he said.

"Where are you going?" she asked, sharply.

He stared at her for a moment, profoundly sorry for her and for himself.

"I'm going to get away from everything that would remind me I've ever been treated like something less than human."

She gave a little cry.

"Then say good-bye, my son, before your father comes back."

VIII

His father returned and stood impatiently waiting. There was nothing to hold George except that unlikely chance of a glimpse of Sylvia. He would say good-bye here, go up to the offices for his money, and then walk straight out of Oakmont. He stepped from the house, swinging his suitcase, his overcoat across his arm.

"I'm off," he said, trying to make his voice cheery.

His father considered his cold pipe. He held out his hand.

"It's a bad start, but maybe you'll turn out all right after all."

George smiled his confidence.

"Well, let us hear from you," his father went on, "although as things are I don't see how I could help you much."

"Don't worry," George said.

He walked to his mother, who had returned to her work. He kissed her quickly, saying nothing, for he saw the tears falling from her cheeks to the dirty water out of which linen emerged soft and immaculate. He strode toward the main driveway.

"Good-bye," he called quickly.

The renewed racket at the tub pursued him until he had placed a screen of foliage between himself and the little house. His last recollection of home, indeed, was of swollen hands and swollen eyes, and of clean, white tears dropping into offensive water.

He got his money and walked past the great house and down the driveway. He would not see home again. At a turn near the gate he caught his breath, his eyes widening. The vague chance had after all materialized. Sylvia walked briskly along, accompanied by a vicious-looking bulldog on a leash. Her head was high and her shoulders square, as she always carried them. Her eyes sparkled. Then she saw George, and she paused, her expression altering into an active distaste, her cheeks flushing with tempestuous colour.

"I can't go back now," George thought.

She seemed to visualize all that protected her from him. He put his cheap suitcase down.

"I'm glad I saw you," he said, deliberately. "I wanted to thank you for having me fired, for waking me up."

She didn't answer. She stood quite motionless. The dog growled, straining at his leash toward the man in the road.

"I've been told to get out and stay out," he went on, his temper lashed by her immobility. "You know I meant what I said yesterday when I thought you couldn't hear. I did. Every last word. And you might as well understand now I'll make every word good."

He pointed to the gate.

"I'm going out there just so I can come back and prove to you that I don't forget."

Her colour fled. She stooped swiftly, gracefully, and unleashed the anxious bulldog.

"Get him!" she whispered, tensely.

Like a shot the dog sprang for George. He caught the animal in his arms and submitted to its moist and eager caresses.

"It's a mistake," he pointed out, "to send a dog that loves the stables after a stable boy."

He dropped the dog, picked up his suitcase, and started down the drive. The dog followed him. He turned.

"Go back, Roland!"

Sylvia remained crouched. She cried out, her contralto voice crowded with surprise and repulsion:

"Take him with you. I never want to see him again."

So, followed by the dog, George walked bravely out into the world through the narrow gateway of her home.

PART II
PRINCETON

I

"Young man, you've two years' work to enter."

"Just when," George asked, "does college open?"

"If the world continues undisturbed, in about two months."

"Very well. Then I'll do two years' work in two months."

"You've only one pair of eyes, my boy; only one brain."

George couldn't afford to surrender. He had arrived in Princeton the evening before, a few hours after leaving Oakmont. It had been like a crossing between two planets. Breathlessly he had sought and found a cheap room in a students' lodging house, and afterward, guided by the moonlight, he had wandered, spellbound, about the campus.

Certainly this could not be George Morton, yesterday definitely divided from what Old Planter had described as human beings. His exaltation grew. For a long time he walked in an amicable companionship of broader spaces and more arresting architecture than even Oakmont could boast; and it occurred to him, if he should enter college, he would have as much share in all this as the richest student; at Princeton he would live in the Great House.

His mood altered as he returned to his small, scantily furnished room whose very unloveliness outlined the difficulties that lay ahead.

He unpacked his suitcase and came upon Sylvia's photograph and her broken riding crop. In the centre of the table, where he would work, he placed the photograph with a piece of the crop on either side. Whenever he was alone in the room those objects would be there, perpetual lashes to ambition; whenever he went out he would lock them away.

How lovely and desirable she was! How hateful! How remote! Had ever a man such a goal to strain for? He wanted only to start.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning he set forth. He had never seen a town so curiously empty. There were no students, since it was the long vacation, except a few backward men and doubtful candidates for admission. He stared by daylight at the numerous buildings which were more imposing now, more suggestive of learning, wealth, and breeding. They seemed to say they had something for him if only he would fight hard enough to receive it.

First of all, he had to find someone who knew the ropes. There must be professors here, many men connected with this gigantic plant. On Nassau Street he encountered a youth, a little younger than himself, who, with a bored air, carried three books under his arm. George stopped him.

"I beg your pardon. Are you going here?"

The other looked him over as if suspecting a joke.

"Going where?" he asked, faintly.

George appraised the fine quality of the young man's clothing. He was almost sorry he had spoken. The first thing he had to do was to overcome a reluctance to speak to people who obviously already had much that he was after.

"I mean," he explained, "are you going to this college?"

"The Lord," the young man answered, "and Squibs Bailly alone know. I'm told I'm not very bright in the head."

George smiled.

"Then I guess you can help me out. I'm not either. I want to enter in the fall, and I need a professor or something like that to teach me. I'll pay."

The other nodded.

"You need a coach. Bailly's a good one. I'm going there now to be told for two hours I'm an utter ass. Maybe I am, but what's the use rubbing it in? I don't know that he's got any open time, but you might come along and see."

George, his excitement increasing, walked beside his new acquaintance.

"What's your name?" the bored youth asked all at once.

"Morton. George Morton."

"I'm Godfrey Rogers. Lawrenceville. What prep are you?"

"What what?"

"I mean, what school you come from?"

George experienced a sharp discomfort, facing the first of his unforeseen embarrassments. Evidently his simple will to crush the past wouldn't be sufficient.

"I went to a public school off and on," he muttered.

Rogers' eyes widened. George had a feeling that the boy had receded. It wasn't until later, when he had learned the customs of the place, that he could give that alteration its logical value. It made no difference. He had a guide. Straightway he would find a man who could help him get in; but he noticed that Rogers abandoned personalities, chatting only of the difficulties of entrance papers, and the apparent mad desire of certain professors to keep good men from matriculating.

They came to a small frame house on Dickinson Street. Rogers left George in the hall while he entered the study. The door did not quite close, and phrases slipped out in Rogers' glib voice, and, more frequently, in a shrill, querulous one.

"Don't know a thing about him. Just met him on the street looking for a coach. No prep."

"Haven't the time. I've enough blockheads as it is. He'd better go to Corse's school."

"You won't see him?"

"Oh, send him in," George heard Bailly say irritably. "You, Rogers, would sacrifice me or the entire universe to spare your brain five minutes' useful work. I'll find out what he knows, and pack him off to Corse. Wait in the hall."

Rogers came out, shaking his head.

"Guess there's nothing doing, but he'll pump you."

George entered and closed the door. Behind a table desk lounged a long, painfully thin figure. The head was nearly bald, but the face carried a luxuriant, carelessly trimmed Van Dyke beard. Above it cheeks and forehead were intricately wrinkled, and the tweed suit, apparently, strove to put itself in harmony. It was difficult to guess how old Squibs Bailly was; probably very ancient, yet in his eyes George caught a flashing spirit of youth.

The room was forcefully out of key with its occupant. The desk, extremely neat with papers, blotters, and pens, was arranged according to a careful pattern. On books and shelves no speck of dust showed, and so far the place was scholarly. Then George was a trifle surprised to notice, next to a sepia print of the Parthenon, a photograph of a football team. That, moreover, was the arrangement around the four walls – classic ruins flanked by modern athletes. On a table in the window, occupying what one might call the position of honour, stood a large framed likeness of a young man in football togs.

Before George had really closed the door the high voice had opened its attack.

"I haven't any more time for dunces."

"I'm not a dunce," George said, trying to hold his temper.

Bailly didn't go on right away. The youthful glance absorbed each detail of George's face and build.

"Anyhow," he said after a moment, less querulously, "let's see what you lack of the infantile requirements needful for entrance in an American university."

He probed George's rapid acquaintance with mathematics, history, English, and the classics. With modern languages there was none. Then the verdict came. Two years' work.

"I've got to make my eyes and brain do," George said. "I've got to enter college this fall or never. I tell you, Mr. Bailly, I am going to do it. I know you can help me, if you will. I'll pay."

Bailly shook his head.

"Even if I had the time my charges are high."

George showed his whole hand.

"I have about five hundred dollars."

"For this condensed acquisition of a kindergarten knowledge, or – or – "

"For everything. But only let me get in and I'll work my way through."

Again Bailly shook his head.

"You can't get in this fall, and it's not so simple to work your way through."

"Then," George said, "you refuse to do anything for me?"

The youthful eyes squinted. George had an odd impression that they sought beyond his body to learn just what manner of man he was. The querulous voice possessed more life.

"How tall are you?"

"A little over six feet."

"What's your weight?"

George hesitated, unable to see how such questions could affect his entering college. He decided it was better to answer.

"A hundred and eighty-five."

"Good build!" Bailly mused. "Wish I'd had a build like that. If your mind is as well proportioned – Take your coat off. Roll up your sleeves."

"What for?" George asked.

Bailly arose and circled the desk. George saw that the skeleton man limped.

"Because I'd like to see if the atrophying of your brain has furnished any compensations."

George grinned. The portrait in the window seemed friendly. He obeyed.

Bailly ran his hand over George's muscles. His young eyes widened.

"Ever play football?"

George shook his head doubtfully.

"Not what you would call really playing. Why? Would football help?"

"Provided one's the right stuff otherwise, would being a god help one climb Olympus?" Bailly wanted to know.

He indicated the framed likeness in the window.

"That's Bill Gregory."

"Seems to me I've seen his name in the papers," George said.

Bailly stared.

"Without doubt, if you read the public prints at all. He exerted much useful cunning and strength in the Harvard and Yale games last fall. He was on everybody's All-American eleven. I got him into college and man-handled him through. Hence this scanty hair, these premature furrows; for although he had plenty of good common-sense, and was one of the finest boys I've ever known, he didn't possess, speaking relatively, when it came to iron-bound text-books, the brains of a dinosaur; but he had the brute force of one."

"Why did you do it?" George asked. "Because he was rich?"

"Young man," Bailly answered, "I am a product of this seat of learning. With all its faults – and you may learn their number for yourself some day – its success is pleasing to me, particularly at football. I am very fond of football, perhaps because it approximates in our puling, modern fashion, the classic public games of ruddier days. In other words, I was actuated by a formless emotion called Princeton spirit. Don't ask me what that is. I don't know. One receives it according to one's concept.

But when I saw in Bill something finer and more determined than most men possess, I made up my mind Princeton was going to be proud of him, on the campus, on the football field, and afterward out in the world."

The hollow, wrinkled face flushed.

"When Bill made a run I could think of it as my run. When he made a touchdown I could say, 'there's one score that wouldn't have been made if I hadn't booted Bill into college, and kept him from flunking out by sheer brute mentality!' Pardon me, Mr. Morton. I love the silly game."

George smiled, sensing his way, if only he could make this fellow feel he would be the right kind of Princeton man!

"I was going to say," he offered, "that while I had never had a chance to play on a regular team I used to mix it up at school, but I was stronger than most of the boys. There were one or two accidents. They thought I'd better quit."

Bailly laughed.

"That's the kind of material we want. You do look as if you could bruise a blue or a crimson jersey. Know where the field house is? Ask anybody. Do no harm for the trainer to look you over. Be there at three o'clock."

"But my work? Will you help me?"

"Give me," Bailly pled, "until afternoon to decide if I'll take another ten years from my life. That's all. Send that fellow Rogers in. Be at the field house at three o'clock."

And as George passed out he heard him reviling the candidate.

"Don't see why you come to college. No chance to make the team or a Phi Beta Kappa. One ought to be a requisite."

The shrill voice went lower. George barely caught the words certainly not intended for him.

"You know I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that fellow you brought me, if he had a chance, might do both."

II

George, since he had nothing else to do, walked home. Bailly could get him in if he would. Did it really depend in part on the inspection he would have to undergo that afternoon? It was hard there was nothing he could do to prepare himself. He went to the yard, to which the landlady had condemned Sylvia's bulldog, and, to kill time, played with the friendly animal until luncheon. Afterward he sat in his room before Sylvia's portrait impressing on himself the necessity of strength for the coming ordeal.

His landlady directed him glibly enough to the field house. As he crossed the practice gridiron, not yet chalked out, he saw Bailly on the verandah; and, appearing very small and sturdy beside him, a gray-haired, pleasant-faced man whose small eyes were relentless.

"This is the prospect, Green," George heard Bailly say.

The trainer studied George for some time before he nodded his head.

"A build to hurt and not get hurt," he said at last; "but, Mr. Bailly, it's hard to supply experience. Boys come here who have played all their lives, and they know less than nothing. Bone seems to grow naturally in the football cranium."

He shifted back to George.

"How fast are you?"

"I've never timed myself, but I'm hard to catch."

"Get out there," the trainer directed.

"In those clothes?" Bailly asked.

"Why not? The ground's dry. A man wouldn't run any faster with moleskins and cleats. Now you run as far as the end of that stand. Halt there for a minute, then turn and come back."

He drew out a stop watch.

"All set? Then – git!"

George streaked down the field.

"It's an even hundred yards," the trainer explained to Bailly.

As George paused at the end of the stand the trainer snapped his watch, whistling.

"There are lots with running shoes and drawers wouldn't do any better. Let's have him back."

He waved his arm. George tore up and leant against the railing, breathing hard, but not uncomfortably.

"You were a full second slower coming back," the trainer said with a twinkle.

"I'm sorry," George cried. "Let me try it again."

Green shook his head.

"I'd rather see you make a tackle, but I've no one to spare."

He grinned invitation at Bailly.

"My spirit, Green," the tutor said, "is less fragile than my corpus, but it has some common-sense. I prefer others should perish at the hands of my discoveries."

"You've scrubbed around," the trainer said, appraising George's long, muscular legs. "Ever kick a football?"

"A little."

Green entered the field house, reappearing after a moment with a football tucked under his arm.

"Do you mind stepping down the field, Mr. Bailly, to catch what he punts? I wouldn't go too far."

Bailly nodded and walked a short distance away. The trainer gave George the football and told him to kick it to Bailly. George stepped on the grass and swung his leg. If the ball had travelled horizontally as far as it did toward heaven it would have been a good kick. For half an hour the trainer coached interestedly, teaching George the fundamentals of kicking form. Some of the later punts, indeed, boomed down the field for considerable distances, but in George's mind the high light of

that unexpected experience remained the lanky, awkward figure in wrinkled tweeds, limping about the field, sometimes catching the ball, sometimes looking hurt when it bounded from his grasp, sometimes missing it altogether, and never once losing the flashing pleasure from his eyes or the excitement out of his furrowed face.

"Enough," the trainer said at last.

George heard him confide to the puffing tutor:

"Possibilities. Heaven knows we'll need them a year from this fall, especially in the kicking line. I believe this fellow can be taught."

Bailly, his hands shaking from his recent exercise, lighted a pipe. He assumed a martyr's air. His voice sounded as though someone had done him an irreparable wrong.

"Then I'll have to try, but it's hard on me, Green, you'll admit."

George hid his excitement. He knew he had passed his first examination. He was sure he would enter college. Already he felt the confidence most men placed in Squibs Bailly.

"Wouldn't you have taken him on anyway, Mr. Bailly?" the trainer laughed. "Anyway, a lot of my players are first-group men. I depend on you to turn him over in the fall for the Freshman eleven. Going to town?"

"Come on, Morton," Bailly said, remorsefully.

Side by side the three walked through to Nassau Street and past the campus. George said nothing, drinking in the scarcely comprehensible talk of the others about team prospects and the appalling number of powerful and nimble young men who would graduate the following June.

Near University Place he noticed Rogers loafing in front of a restaurant with several other youths who wore black caps. He wondered why Rogers started and stared at him, then turned, speaking quickly to the others.

Green went down University Place. George paced on with Bailly. In front of the Nassau Club the tutor paused.

"I'm going in here," he said, "but you can come to my house at eight-thirty. We'll work until ten-thirty. We'll do that every night until your brain wrinkles a trifle. You may not have been taught that twenty-four hours are allotted to each day. Eight for sleep. Two with me. Two for meals. Two at the field. Two for a run in the country. That leaves eight for study, and you'll need every minute of them. I'll give you your schedule to-night. If you break it once I'll drop you, for you've got to have a brain beyond the ordinary to make it wrinkle enough."

"Thanks, Mr. Bailly. If you don't mind, what will it cost?"

Bailly considered.

"I'll have to charge you," he said at last, "twenty-five dollars, but I can lend you most of the books."

George understood, but his pride was not hurt.

"I'll pay you in other ways."

Bailly looked at him, his emaciated face smiling all over.

"I think you will," he said with a little nod. "All right. At eight-thirty."

He limped along the narrow cement walk and entered the club. George started back. The group, he noticed, still loitered in front of the restaurant. Rogers detached himself and strolled across. He was no longer suspicious.

"You been down at the field with Mr. Green?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Running a little, kicking a football around."

"Trust Bailly to guess you played. What did Green say?"

"If I get in," George, answered simply, "I think he'll give me a show."

"I guess so," Rogers said, thoughtfully, "or he wouldn't be wasting his time on you now. Come on over and meet these would-be Freshmen. We'll all be in the same class unless we get brain-fever. Mostly Lawrenceville."

George crossed and submitted to elaborate introductions and warm greetings.

"Green's grooming him already for the Freshman eleven," Rogers explained.

George accepted the open admiration cautiously, not forgetting what he had been yesterday, what Sylvia had said. Why was Rogers so friendly all at once?

"What prep?" "Where'd you play?" "Line or backfield?"

The rapidity of the questions lessened his discomfort. How was he to avoid such moments? He must make his future exceptionally full so that it might submerge the past of which he couldn't speak without embarrassment. In this instance Rogers helped him out.

"Morton's bummed around. Never went to any school for long."

George pondered this kind act and its fashion as he excused himself and walked on to his lodging. There was actually something to hide, and Rogers admitted it, and was willing to lend a cloak. He could guess why. Because Green was bothering with him, had condescended to be seen on the street with him. George's vision broadened.

He locked himself in his room and sat before his souvenirs. Sylvia's provocative features seemed clearer. For a long time he stared hungrily. He had an absurd impression that he had already advanced toward her. Perhaps he had in view of what had happened that afternoon.

His determination as well as his strength had clearly attracted Bailly; yet that strength, its possible application to football, had practically assured him he would enter college, had made an ally of the careful Rogers, had aroused the admiration of such sub-Freshmen as were in town. It became clear that if he should be successful at football he would achieve a position of prominence from which he could choose friends useful here and even in the vital future after college.

His planning grew more practical. If football, a game of which he knew almost nothing, could do that, what might he not draw from one he thoroughly knew – anything concerning horses, for instance, hunting, polo? The men interested in horses would be the rich, the best – he choked a trifle over the qualification – the financial and social leaders of the class. He would have that card up his sleeve. He would play it when it would impress most. Skill at games, he hazarded, would make it easier than he had thought to work his way through.

Whatever distaste such cold calculation brought he destroyed by staring at Sylvia's remote beauty. If he was to reach such a goal he would have to use every possible short cut, no matter how unlovely.

He found that evening a radical alteration in Squibs Bailly's study. The blotter was spattered with ink. Papers littered the desk and drifted about the floor. Everything within reach of the tutor's hands was disarranged and disreputably untidy. Bailly appeared incomparably more comfortable.

The course opened with a small lecture, delivered while the attenuated man limped up and down the cluttered room.

"Don't fancy," he began, "that you have found in football a key to the scholastic labyrinth."

His wrinkled face assumed a violent disapproval. His youthful eyes flashed resentfully.

"Mr. Morton, if I suffered the divine Delphic frenzy and went to the Dean and assured him you were destined to be one of our very best undergraduates and at the same time would make fifteen touchdowns against Yale, and roughly an equal number against Harvard, do you know what he would reply?"

George gathered that an answer wasn't necessary.

"You might think," the tutor resumed, limping faster than ever, "that he would run his fingers through his hair, if he had sufficient; would figuratively flame with pleasure; would say: 'Miraculous, Mr. Bailly. You are a great benefactor. We must get this extraordinary youth in the university even if he can't parse "the cat caught the rat."'"

Bailly paused. He clashed his hands together.

"Now I'll tell you what he'd actually reply. 'Interesting if true, Mr. Bailly. But what are his scholastic attainments? Can he solve a quadratic equation in his head? Has he committed to memory my favourite passages of the "Iliad" of Homer and the "Aeneid" of Virgil? Can he name the architect of the Parthenon or the sculptor of the Aegean pediments? No? Horrible! Then off with his head!'"

Bailly draped himself across his chair.

"Therefore it behooves us to get to work."

III

That was the first of sixty-odd toilsome, torturing evenings, for Bailly failed to honour the Sabbath; and, after that first lecture, drab business alone coloured those hours. The multiplicity of subjects was confusing; but, although Bailly seldom told him so, George progressed rapidly, and Bailly knew just where to stress for the examinations.

If it had ended there it would have been bad enough. When he studied the schedule Bailly gave him that first night he had a despairing feeling that either he or it must break down. Everything was accounted for even to the food he was to eat. That last, in fact, created a little difficulty with the landlady, who seemed to have no manner of appreciation of the world-moving importance of football. Rogers wanted to help out there, too. He had found George's lodging. It was when Green's interest was popular knowledge, when from the Nassau Club had slipped the belief that Squibs Bailly had turned his eyes on another star. George made it dispassionately clear to Rogers that Bailly had not allowed in his schedule for calls. Rogers was visibly disappointed.

"Where do you eat, then?"

"Here – with Mrs. Michin."

"Now look, Morton. That's no way. Half a dozen of us are eating at Joe's restaurant. They're the best of the sub-Freshmen that are here. Come along with us."

The manner of the invitation didn't make George at all reluctant to tell the truth.

"I can't afford to be eating around in restaurants."

"That needn't figure," Rogers said, quickly. "Green's probably only letting you eat certain things. I'll guarantee Joe'll take you on for just what you're paying Mrs. Michin."

George thought rapidly. He could see through Rogers now. The boy wanted, even as he did, to run with the best, but for a vastly different cause. That was why his manner had altered that first morning when he had sized George up as the unfinished product of a public school, why it had altered again when he had sensed in him a football star. George's heart warmed, but not to Rogers. Because he rioted around for a period each afternoon in an odorous football suit he was already, in the careful Rogers' eyes, one of the most prominent of the students in town. For the same reason he was in a position to wait and make sure that Rogers himself was the useful sort. George possessed no standard by which to judge, and it would be a mistake to knot ropes that he might want to break later; nor did he care for that sort of charity, no matter how well disguised, so he shook his head.

"Green and Squibs wouldn't put up with it."

He wheedled his landlady, instead, into a better humour, paying her reluctantly a little more.

The problem of expenses was still troublesome, but it became evident that there, too, Bailly would be a useful guide.

"I have actually bearded the dean about you," he said one evening. "There are a few scholarships not yet disposed of. If I can prove to him that you live by syntax alone you may get one. As for the rest, there's the commons. Impecunious students profitably wait on table there."

George's flush was not pretty.

"I'll not be a servant," he snapped.

"It's no disgrace," Bailly said, mildly.

"It is – for me."

He didn't like Bailly's long, slightly pained scrutiny. There was no use keeping things from him anyway.

"I can trust you, Mr. Bailly," he said, quickly, and in a very low voice, as if the walls might hear: "I know you won't give me away. I – I was too much like a servant until the day I came to Princeton. I've sworn I'd never be again. I can't touch that job. I tell you I'd rather starve."

"To do so," Bailly remarked, drily, "would be a senseless suicide. You'll appreciate some day, young man, that the world lives by service."

George wondered why he glanced at the untidy table with a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"I'm also sorry to learn your ambition is not altogether unselfish, or altogether worthy."

George longed to make Bailly understand.

"It was forced on me," he said. "I worked in my father's livery business until he failed. Then I had to go to a rich man's stable. I was treated like dirt. Nobody would have anything to do with me. They won't here, probably, if they find out."

"Never mind," Bailly sighed. "We will seek other means. Let us get on with our primers."

Once or twice, when some knotty problem took George to the house during the early morning, he found the spic-and-span neatness he had observed at his first visit. In Bailly's service clearly someone laboured with a love of labour, without shame or discouragement.

One evening in August the maid who customarily opened the door was replaced by a short, plump-looking woman well over thirty. She greeted George with kindly eyes.

"I daresay you're Mr. Morton. I've heard a great deal about you."

George had never seen a face more unaffected, more friendly, more competent. His voice was respectful.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And I am Mrs. Bailly. We expect much of you."

There rushed over George a feeling that, his own ambition aside, he had to give them a great deal. No wonder Squibs felt as he did if his ideas of service had emerged from such a source.

That portion of his crowded schedule George grew eventually to like. It brought him either unrestrained scolding or else a tempered praise; and he enjoyed his cross-country runs. Sylvia's bulldog usually accompanied him, unleashed, for he could control the animal. With surprised eyes he saw estates as extravagant as Oakmont, and frequently in better taste. Little by little he picked up the names of the families that owned them. He told himself that some day he would enter those places as a guest, bowed to by such servants as he had been. It was possible, he promised himself bravely, if only he could win a Yale or a Harvard game.

He enjoyed, too, the hours he spent at the field. He could measure his progress there as well as in Bailly's study. Green was slow with either praise or blame, but sometimes Rogers and his clan would come down, and, sitting in the otherwise empty stands, would audibly marvel at the graceful trajectory of his punts. He soiled himself daily at the tackling dummy. He sprawled after an elusive ball, falling on it or picking it up on the run. Meantime, he had absorbed the elements of the rules. He found them rather more complicated than the classics.

The head coach came from the city one day. Like Green, he said nothing in praise or blame, merely criticising pleasantly; but George felt that he was impressed. The great man even tossed the ball about with him for a while, teaching him to throw at a definite mark. After that Rogers and his cronies wanted to be more in evidence than ever, but George had no time for them, or for anything outside his work.

His will to survive the crushing grind never really faltered, but he resented its necessity, sometimes wistfully, sometimes with turbulence. He despised himself for regretting certain pleasanter phases of his serfdom at Oakmont. The hot, stuffy room on the top floor of the frame house; the difficult books; the papers streaked with intricate and reluctant figures, contrived frequently to swing his mind to pastoral corners of the Planter estate. He might have held title to them, they had been so much his own. He had used them during his free time for the reading of novels, and latterly, he remembered, for formless dreams of Sylvia's beauty. At least his mind had not been put to the torture there. He had had time to listen to a bird's song, to ingratiate himself with a venturesome squirrel, to run his hands through the long grass, to lie half asleep, brain quite empty save for a temporal content.

Now, running or walking in the country, he found no time for the happier aspects of woods or fields. He had to drive himself physically in order that his mind could respond to Bailly's urgencies. And sometimes, as has been suggested, his revolt was more violent. He paced his room angrily. Why did he do it? Why did he submit? Eventually his eyes would turn to her photograph, and he would go back to his table.

He was grateful for the chance that had let him pick up that picture. Without its constant supervision he might not have been able to keep up the struggle. During the worst moments, when some solution mocked him, he would stare at the likeness while his brain fought, while, with a sort of self-hypnosis induced by that pictured face, he willed himself to keep on.

One night, when he had suffered over an elusive equation beyond his scheduled bedtime, he found his eyes, as he stared at the picture, blurring strangely; then the thing was done, the answer proved; but after what an effort! Why did his eyes blur? Because of the intensity of some emotion whose significance he failed all at once to grasp. He continued to stare at Sylvia's beauty, informed even here with a sincere intolerance; at those lips which had released the contempt that had delivered him to this other slavery. Abruptly the emotion, that had seemed to leap upon him from the books and the complicated figures, defined itself with stark, unavoidable brutality. He reached out and with both hands grasped the photograph. He wanted to snatch his hands apart, ripping the paper, destroying the tranquil, arrogant features. He replaced the picture, leant back, and continued hypnotically to study it. His hands grasped the table's edge while the blurring of his eyes increased. He spoke aloud in a clear and sullen voice:

"I hate you," he said. "With all my heart and soul and body I hate you."

IV

About this time one partial break in the schedule came like a strong tonic. Bailly at the close of an evening's session spoke, George fancied, with a little embarrassment.

"My wife wants to speak to you before you go."

He raised his voice.

"Martha! The battle's over for to-night."

She came quietly in and perched herself on the arm of a chair.

"I'm having a few people for dinner to-morrow," she explained. "There's one young girl, so I want a young man. Won't you help me out?"

George's elation was shot with doubt of an unexplored territory. This promised an advance if he could find the way. He glanced inquiringly at Bailly.

"Women," the tutor said, "lack a sense of values. I shall be chained anyway to my wife's ill-conceived hospitality, so you might as well come. But we'll dine early so we won't destroy an entire evening."

"Then at seven-thirty, Mr. Morton," Mrs. Bailly said.

"Thank you," George answered. "I shall be very happy to come."

As a matter of fact, he was there before seven-thirty, over-anxious to be socially adequate. He had worried a good deal about the invitation. Could it be traced to his confession to Bailly? Was it, in any sense, a test? At least it bristled with perplexities. His ordinary suit of clothing, even after an extended pressing and brushing, was, he felt, out of place. It warned him that of the ritual of a mixed dinner he was blankly ignorant. He established two cardinal principles. He would watch and imitate the others. He wouldn't open his mouth unless he had to.

Bailly, with tact, wore the disgraceful tweeds, but there were two other men, a professor and a resident, George gathered in the rapidity of the introduction which slurred names. These wore evening clothes. Of the two elderly women who accompanied them one was quite dazzling, displaying much jewellery, and projecting an air truly imperial. Side by side with her Mrs. Bailly appeared more than ever a priestess of service; yet to George her serene self-satisfaction seemed ornament enough.

Where, George wondered, was the girl for whom he had been asked?

Mrs. Bailly drew him from these multiple introductions. He turned and saw the girl standing in the doorway, a dazzling portrait in a dingy frame. As he faced her George was aware of a tightening of all his defences. Her clothing, her attitude, proclaimed her as of Sylvia's sort. He ventured to raise his eyes to her face. It was there, too, the habit of the beautiful, the obvious unfamiliarity with life's grayer tones. Yet she did not resemble Sylvia. Her skin was nearly white. Her hair glinted with gold; but she, too, was lovely. George asked himself if she would have lifted the crop, if all these fortunates reacted to a precise and depressing formula. Somehow he couldn't imagine this girl striking to hurt.

Mrs. Bailly presented him. Her name was Alston, Betty

Alston, it developed during the succeeding general conversation. He fixed the stouter of the men in evening clothes as her father and the imperial woman as her mother. He understood then that they were, indeed, of Sylvia's sort, for during his cross-country work he had frequently passed their home, an immense Tudor house in the midst of pleasant acres.

It was because of the girl that the pitfalls of dinner were bridged. In the technique of accepting Mrs. Bailly's excellent courses he was always a trifle behind her. She made conversation, moreover, surprisingly easy. After the first few moments, during which no one troubled to probe his past, the older people left them to themselves. She didn't ask what his prep was, or where he lived, or any other thing to make him stammer.

"You look like a football player," she said, frankly.

They talked of his work. He said he had admired her home during his runs. She responded naturally:

"When we are really back you must come and see it more intimately."

The invitation to enter the gates!

He fell silent. Would it be fair to go without giving her an opportunity to treat him as Sylvia had done? Why should she inspire such a question? Hadn't he willed his past to oblivion? Hadn't he determined to take every short cut? Of course he would go, as George Morton, undergraduate, football player, magician with horses. The rest was none of her business.

They were in Princeton, she explained, only for a few days from time to time, but would be definitely back when college opened. She, too, was going to be introduced to society that winter. He wanted to ask her how it was done. He pictured a vast apartment, dense with unpleasant people, and a man who cried out with a brazen voice: "Ladies and gentlemen! This is Miss Sylvia Planter. This is Miss Betty Alston." Quite like an auction.

"It must be wonderful to play football," she was saying. "I should have preferred to be a man. What can a girl do? Bad tennis, rotten golf, something with horses."

He smiled. He could impress Betty Alston, but there was no point in that, because she was a girl, and he could think of only one girl.

Yet he carried home an impression of unexpected interest and kindness. Her proximity, the rustling of her gown, the barely detectable perfume from her tawny hair, furnished souvenirs intangible but very warm in his memory. They made the portrait and the broken crop seem lifeless and unimpressive.

He forced himself to stare at Sylvia's likeness until the old hypnotic sense returned.

V

He saw Betty Alston once more before college opened, unexpectedly, briefly, and disturbingly; but with all that he carried again to his lodging an impression of a distracting contact.

He was out for a morning run, wearing some ancient flannels Bailly had loaned him, and a sweater, for autumn's first exhilaration sharpened the air. Sylvia's bulldog barked joyously about him as he trotted through a lane not far from the Alston place. He often went that way, perhaps because its gates were already half open. As he turned the corner of a hedge he came face to face with Betty. In a short skirt and knitted jacket she was even more striking than she had been at the Bailly's. The unexpected encounter had brought colour to her rather pale face. The bulldog sprang for her. George halted him with a sharp command.

"I am not afraid of him," she laughed. "Come here, savage beast."

The dog crawled to her and licked her fingers. George saw her examining the animal curiously.

"I hope he didn't frighten you," he said, his cap in his hand.

She glanced up, and at her voice George straightened, and turned quickly away so that she couldn't see the response to her amazing question. Was it, he asked himself, traceable to Old Planter's threats. Were they going to try to smash him at the start and keep him out of Princeton?

"Do you happen," Betty had said, frowning, "to know Sylvia Planter, or, perhaps, her brother, Lambert?"

George didn't care to lie; nor was it, his instinct told him, safe to lie to Betty. She knew the Planters, then. But how could Old Planter drive him out except through his parents? He wasn't going to be driven out. He turned back slowly. In Betty's face he read only a slight bewilderment.

"That's a queer thing to ask," he managed.

"The dog," she said, caressing the ugly snout, "is the image of one Sylvia Planter was very fond of. Sylvia and I were at school together last year. I've just been visiting her the last few days. She said she had given her dog away."

She drew the dog closer and read the name on the collar.

"Roland! What was the name of her dog?"

George relaxed.

"That dog," he said, harshly, "belongs to me."

She glanced at him, surprised, releasing the dog and standing up. It wasn't Old Planter then, and his parents were probably safe enough; but had Sylvia, he asked himself angrily, made a story for her guest out of his unwary declaration and his abrupt vanishing from Oakmont? Did this friendly creature know anything? If she did she would cease to be amiable. His anger diminished as he saw the curiosity leave her face.

"An odd resemblance! Do you know, Mr. Morton, I rather think you're bound to meet Lambert Planter anyway. I believe he's a very important young man at Yale. You'll have to play football a little better than he does. His sister and he are going to visit me for a few days before he goes back to New Haven. Perhaps you'll see him then."

George resented the prospect. He got himself away.

"Squibs," he told her, "sees everything. If I loiter he finds out and scolds."

He had an impression that she looked after him until he was out of sight. Or was it the dog that still puzzled her? Something of her, at least, accompanied him longer than that – her kindness, her tact in the matter of the Planters. He would take very good care that he didn't meet Lambert; the prospect of Sylvia's adjacence, however, filled him with a disturbing excitement. He wanted to see her, but he felt it wouldn't be safe to have her see him yet.

Her picture increased his excitement, filled him with a craving for her physical presence. He desired to look at her, as he had looked at the photograph, to see if he could tell himself under those

conditions that he hated her. Whether that was true or not, he was more determined than ever to make his boasts good.

VI

The day of the immediate test approached and he found himself no longer afraid of it. Even Bailly one early September evening abandoned cynicism.

"You've every chance, Morton," he said, puffing at his pipe, "to enter creditably. You may have a condition in French, but what of that? We'll have it off by the divisionals. I'll admit you're far from a dunce. During the next ten days we'll concentrate on the examination idiosyncrasies of my revered colleagues."

The scholarship had, in fact, been won for George, but the necessary work, removed from any suspicion of the servatorial, had not yet been found. Bailly, although he plainly worried himself, told George not to be impatient; then, just before the entrance examinations, the head coach arrived and settled himself in Princeton. Self-assured young men drifted to the field now every afternoon – "varsity men," the Rogers clan whispered with awe. And there were last year's substitutes, and faithful slaves of the scrub, over-anxious, pouring out to early practice, grasping at one more chance. So far no Freshmen candidates had been called, but the head coach was heard to whisper to Green:

"We'd better work this fellow Morton with the squad until the cubs start. He'll stand a lot of practice. Give him all the football he'll hold. He's outkicking his ends now. Jack him up without cutting down his distance. I'd like to see him make a tackle. He looks good at the dummy, but you never can tell. He may be an ear-puller."

The magic words slipped through the town. George caught arriving Freshmen pointing him out. He overheard glowing prophecies.

"Green says he'll outkick Dewitt."

It didn't turn his head. To be the greatest player the game had ever known wouldn't have turned his head, for that would have been only one small step toward the summit from which Sylvia looked down on him with contemptuous, inimical eyes.

The head coach one afternoon gave the ball to a young man of no pronounced value, and instructed him to elude George if he could.

"You, Morton," the head coach instructed, "see that he doesn't get past you. Remember what you've done to the dummy."

George nodded, realizing that this was a real test to be passed with a hundred per cent. That man with the ball had the power and the desire to make a miserable failure of him. For the moment he seemed more than a man, deadly, to be conquered at any cost. Schooled by his rough-and-tumble combats at school and in the stables, George kept his glance on the other's eyes; knew, therefore, when he was going to side-step, and in which direction; lunged at exactly the right moment; clipped the runner about the knees; lifted him; brought him crashing to the ground. The ball rolled to one side. George released his man, sprawled, and gathered the ball in his arms. A great silence descended on the field. Out of it, as George got up, slipped the uncertain voice of his victim.

"Did anything break off, Green? That wasn't a tackle. It was a bad accident. How could I tell he was a bull when he didn't wear horns?"

George helped the man to his feet.

"Hope I didn't hurt you."

"Oh, no. I'll be all right again in a couple of months."

He limped about his work, muttering:

"Maybe mother was right when she didn't want me to play this game."

The coach wasn't through. He gave the ball to George and signalled one of the biggest of the varsity men.

"Let me see you get past that fellow, Morton."

George didn't get past, although, with the tackler's vise-like grip about his legs, he struggled with knees and elbows, and kept his feet until the coach called to let him go.

"I'm sorry," George began.

"Yes," Green said, severely, "you've got to learn to get past tacklers. If you learn to do that consistently I'll guarantee you a place on the team, provided Mr. Stringham's willing."

"I'm willing," the head coach said with apparent reluctance.

Everyone within hearing laughed, but George couldn't laugh, although he knew it was expected.

"Mr. Stringham," he said, "I will learn to get past them unless they come too thick."

The coach patted his shoulder. His voice was satisfied.

"Run along to the showers now."

There may have been something in the sequence of these events, for that very night Squibs Bailly's face twitched with satisfaction.

"You have a share," he said, "in the agency of the laundry most generally patronized by our young men. It will pay you enough unless you long for automobiles and gaiety."

"No," George said, "but, Mr. Bailly, I need clothes. I can afford to buy some now. Where shall I go? What shall I get?"

Bailly limped about thoughtfully. He named a tailor of the town. He prescribed an outing suit and a dinner suit.

"Because," he said, "if you're asked about, you want to be able to go, and a dinner suit will pass for a Freshman nearly anywhere."

"If," George asked himself defiantly as he walked home, "Squibs thinks my ambition unworthy, why does he go out of his way to boost it? Anyway, I'm going to do my best to make touchdowns for him and Mrs. Squibs. Is that Princeton spirit, or Bailly spirit, or am I fooling myself, and am I going to make touchdowns just for myself and Sylvia Planter?"

VII

The meeting he had desired above all things to avoid took place when he was, for a moment, off his guard. He was on his way to Dickinson Hall for his first examination. Perhaps that was why he was too absorbed to notice the automobile drawn up at the curb just ahead, and facing him. He had no warning. He nearly collided with Lambert Planter, who walked out of a shop. George stopped, drew back, and thought of dodging behind the procession of worried, sombrely clothed Freshmen; but there wasn't time. Lambert's face showed bewilderment and recognition.

"Certainly it is Mr. Morton," he said in his old mocking fashion.

George glanced at the surprised features which, in a masculine fashion, were reminiscent of Sylvia; and beyond he saw, in the rear seat of the automobile, Sylvia herself, lovelier, more removed than ever. Betty Alston sat at her side. Evidently neither had observed the encounter, for they laughed and chatted, probably about the terror-stricken Freshmen.

George swallowed hard.

"I heard you were going to be here. I wanted to keep out of your way."

"But why?" Lambert laughed. "You have a scholastic appearance. You never mean – "

"I am taking my entrance examinations," George said. "I want to make good here."

He looked straight into Lambert's eyes. His voice became incisive, threatening.

"I will make good. Don't try giving me away. Don't you tell Miss Alston where I came from – "

"Yeh. The big fellow! Morton! Stringham and Green say he's going to be a wonder."

It drifted to them from the passing youths.

Lambert whistled. The mockery left his voice.

"Go as far as you can," he said.

And followed it with:

"Don't be a self-conscious ass."

He smiled whimsically.

"Glad to have run into you – George."

The driver had noticed Lambert. The automobile glided nearer.

"I – I've got to get away," George said, hastily. "I don't want your sister to see me."

Lambert turned. His voice, in turn, was a trifle threatening.

"That's all nonsense. She's forgotten all about you; she wouldn't know you from Adam."

George couldn't help staring. What a contrast the two young women offered! He wanted to realize that he actually looked at Sylvia Planter, Sylvia of the flesh, Sylvia who had expressed for him an endless contempt. But he couldn't help seeing also the golden hair and the soft colouring of Betty Alston.

Lambert sprang into the car. Sylvia and Betty both glanced at the man he had left. George waited. What would happen now? Sylvia's colour did not heighten. Her eyes did not falter. Betty smiled and waved her hand. George took off his cap, still expectant. Sylvia's lifeless stare continued until the car had rolled away. George sighed, relaxed, and went on.

Had Lambert been right? He didn't want to believe that. It hurt too much.

"She saw me," he muttered. "She stared, not as if she saw an unknown man, but as if she wanted to make me think she saw nothing. She saw me."

But he couldn't be sure. It seemed to him then that he wanted more than anything in the world to be sure.

And he had not taken advantage of his chance. Instead of looking at her and fixing the stark fact of hatred in his mind, he had only thought with an angry, craving desire:

"You are the loveliest thing in the world. The next time you'll know me. By God, the next time I'll *make* you know me."

VIII

In the examination hall George called upon his will to drive from his mind the details of that encounter. Lambert might be dependable, but if Sylvia had actually recognized him what might she not say to Betty Alston? He didn't want to see the kindness vanish from Betty's eyes, nor the friendliness from her manner. Lambert's assurance, moreover, that Sylvia had forgotten him lingered irritatingly.

"I will not think of it," George told himself. "I will think of nothing but this paper. I will pass it."

This ability to discipline his mind had increased steadily during his hours before Sylvia's portrait. The simple command "I will," was a necessity his brain met with a decreasing reluctance. For two hours now it excluded everything except his work. At the end of that time he signed his paper, sat back, and examined the anxious young men crowded about him in the long room. From these he must sooner or later detach the ones of value to himself. That first quick appraisal disclosed little; they were clothed too much to a pattern, wearing black jerseys, more often than not, black clothes, with black caps hanging from the supports of their chairs. In their faces, however, were visible differences that made him uneasy. Even from a uniform, then, men, to an extent, projected discrepancies of birth, or training, or habit. He sighed and turned in his paper.

At the foot of the stairs groups collected, discussing the ordeal pessimistically. As he started to walk through, several spoke to George.

"How did *you* hit it, Morton?"

Already he was well spotted. He paused and joined the apprehensive chatter.

"It's a toss-up with me," Rogers admitted. "Don't tell me any answers. If ignorance is bliss, I want to stay dumb."

He caught George's arm.

"Have you met Dicky Goodhue? Hello, Goodhue!"

Goodhue gave the impression of not having met Rogers to any extent. He was a sturdy young man with handsome, finely formed features. George looked at him closely, because this young man alone of the Freshmen he had met remained unmoved by his fame.

"Would like you to meet Morton, Goodhue."

Goodhue glanced at George inquiringly, almost resentfully.

"George Morton," Rogers stumbled on, as if an apology were necessary. "Stringham, you know, and Green – "

"Glad to meet you," Goodhue said, indifferently.

"Thanks," George acknowledged as indifferently, and turned away.

Goodhue, it came upon him with a new appreciation of difficulties, was the proper sort. He watched him walk off with a well-dressed, weak-looking youth, threading a careless course among his classmates.

"How long have you known this fellow Goodhue?" George asked as he crossed the campus with Rogers.

"Oh, Goodhue?" Rogers said, uncomfortably. "I've seen him any number of times. Ran into him last night."

"Good-looking man," George commented. "Where's he come from?"

"You don't know who Dicky Goodhue is!" Rogers cried. "I mean, you must have heard of his father anyway, the old Richard. Real Estate for generations. Money grows for them without their turning a hand. Dicky's up at the best clubs in New York. Plays junior polo on Long Island."

George had heard enough.

"If I do as well with the other exams," he said, "I'm going to get in."

With Freshmen customs what they were, he was thinking, he could appear as well dressed as the Goodhue crowd. He would take pains with that.

He passed Goodhue on his way to the examination hall that afternoon, and Goodhue didn't remember him. The incident made George thoughtful. Was football going to prove the all-powerful lever he had fancied? At any rate, Rogers' value was at last established.

He reported that evening to Bailly:

"I think it's all right so far."

The tutor grinned.

"To-day's beyond recall, but to-morrow's the future, and it cradles, among other dragons, French."

He pointed out passages in a number of books.

"Wrestle with those until midnight," he counselled, "and then go to sleep. Day after to-morrow we'll hope you can apply your boot to a football again."

Mrs. Bailly stopped him in the hall.

"How did it go?" she asked, eagerly.

Her anxiety had about it something maternal. It gave him for the first time a feeling of being at home in Princeton.

"I got through to-day," he said.

"Good! Good!"

She nodded toward the study.

"Then you have made him very happy."

"I always want to," George said. "That's a worthy ambition, isn't it?"

She looked at him gropingly, as if she almost caught his allusion.

IX

As George let himself out of the gate a closed automobile turned the corner and drew up at the curb. The driver sprang down and opened the door. Betty Alston's white-clad figure emerged and crossed the sidewalk while George pulled off his cap and held the gate open for her. He suffered an ugly suspense. What would she say? Would she speak to him at all? Phrases that Sylvia might have used to her flashed through his mind; then he saw her smile as usual. She held out her hand. The warmth of her fingers seemed to reach his mind, making it less unyielding. The fancy put him on his guard.

"I know you passed," she said.

He walked with her across the narrow yard to the porch.

"I think so, to-day."

She paused with her foot on the lower step. The light from the corner disclosed her face, puzzled and undecided; and his uneasiness returned.

"I am just returning this," she said, holding up a book. "I'd be glad to drop you at your lodging – "

"I'll wait."

While she was inside he paced the sidewalk. There had been a question in her face, but not the vital one, which, indeed, she wouldn't have troubled to ask. Sylvia had not recognized him, or, recognizing him, had failed to give him away.

Betty came gracefully down the steps, and George followed her into the pleasant obscurity of the automobile. He could scarcely see her white figure, but he became aware again of the delightful and singular perfume of her tawny hair. If Sylvia had spoken he never could have sat so close to her. He had no business, anyway —

She snapped on the light. She laughed.

"I said you were bound to meet Lambert Planter."

He had started on false ground. At any moment the ground might give way.

"If I wasn't quite honest about that the other morning," he said, "it was because I had met Lambert Planter, but under circumstances I wanted to forget."

"I'm sorry," she said, softly, "that I reminded you; but he seemed glad to see you this morning. It is all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered, doubtfully.

That thrilling quality of her voice became more pronounced.

"I'm glad. For he's a good friend to have. He's a very real person; I mean, a man who's likely to do big things, don't you think?"

"Yes," he said again.

Why was he conscious of resentment? Why did he ask himself quickly if Lambert thought of her with equal benevolence? He pulled himself up short. What earthly business was it of his what Betty Alston and Lambert Planter thought of each other? But he regretted the briefness of his companionship with Betty in the unaccustomed luxury of the car. It surrounded him with a settled and congenial atmosphere; it lessened, after the first moments, the sharp taste of the ambition to which he had condemned himself.

"Don't worry," she said, as he descended at his lodging, "you'll get in. Dear old Squibs told me so."

He experienced a strong impulse to touch her hand again. He thanked her, said good-night, and turned resolutely away.

It was only after long scrutiny of Sylvia's photograph that he attacked Bailly's marked passages. Again and again he reminded himself that he had actually seen her that day, and that she had either not

remembered him, or had, with a deliberate cruelty, sought to impress him with his ugly insignificance in a crowded and pleasurable landscape.

Then why should this other girl of the same class treat him so differently?

The answer came glibly. For that instant he was wholly distasteful to himself.

"Because she doesn't know."

He picked up a piece of the broken riding crop, flushing hotly. He would detach himself from the landscape for Sylvia. He would use that crop yet.

X

He worked all the next day in the examination hall. He purposely chose a seat in the row behind Goodhue. Five or six men, clearly all friends of Goodhue's, sat near him, each modelled more or less as he was. George noticed one exception, a short fellow who stood out from the entire room. At first George thought it was because he was older, then he decided it was the light moustache, the thick hair, the eyes that lacked lustre, the long, white fingers. The man barely lifted his examination sheets. He glanced at them once, then set to work. He was the first to rise and hand his papers in. The rest paused, stared enviously, and sighed. George heard Goodhue say to the man next him:

"How do you suppose Spike does it?"

George wondered why they called the dainty little man Spike.

He was slow and painstaking himself, and the room was fairly well emptied before he finished. Except for the French, he was satisfied. He took a deep breath. The ordeal was over. For the first time in more than two months he was his own master. He could do anything he pleased.

First of all, he hurried to Squibs Bailly.

"Lend me a novel – something exciting," he began. "No, I wouldn't open a text-book even for you to-night. The schedule's dead and buried, sir, and you haven't given me another."

Bailly's wrinkled face approved.

"You wouldn't be coming at me this way if there was any doubt. You shall have your novel. I'm afraid – "

He paused, laughing.

"I mean, my task with you is about done. You've more brain than a dinosaur. It is variously wrinkled where once it was like a babe's. Except for the French, you should handle your courses without superhuman effort. Don't ever let me hear of your getting a condition. Your next schedule will come from Stringham and Green."

He limped to a bookcase and drew out a volume bound in red.

"Without entirely wasting your time, you may amuse yourself with that."

"'Treasure Island.'"

George frowned doubtfully.

"We studied something about this man. If he's good enough to get in the school books maybe he isn't just what I'm looking for to-night."

"Have you ever perused Nick Carter, or, perhaps Old Sleuth?" Bailly asked.

George smiled.

"I know I have to forget all that."

"In intellectual circles," Bailly agreed.

He glanced slyly around.

"I've scanned such matter," he whispered, "with a modicum of enjoyment, so I can assure you the book you have in your hand possesses nearly equal merit, yet you may discuss it without losing caste in the most exalted places; which would seem to indicate that human judgment is based on manner rather than matter."

"You mean," George said, frowning, "that if a man does a rotten thing it is the way he does it rather than the thing itself that is judged?"

Bailly limped up and down, his hands behind his back. He faced George with a little show of bewildered temper.

"See here, Freshman Morton, I've taught you to think too fast. You can't fasten a scheme of ethics on any silly aphorism of mine. Go home and read your book. Dwell with picturesque pirates, and walk with flawless and touching virtue. Delve for buried treasure. That, at least, is always worth while."

George's attitude was a challenge.

"Remembering," he said, softly, "to dig in a nice manner even if your hands do get dirty."

Bailly sprawled in his chair and waved George away. "You need a preacher," he said, "not a tutor."

XI

In his room George opened his book and read happily. Never in his life had he been so relaxed and content. Entangled in the adventures of colourful characters he didn't hear at first the sliding of stealthy feet in the hall, whispered consultations, sly knockings at various doors. Then there came a rap at his own door, and he glanced up, surprised, sweeping the photograph and the broken crop into the table drawer.

"Come in," he called, not heartily.

A dozen young men crowded slowly into the room. They wore orange and black jerseys and caps brilliant with absurd devices. They had the appearance of judges of some particularly atrocious criminal. George had no doubt that he was the man, for those were the days just before hazing was frowned out of existence by an effete conservatism.

"Get up, you Freshman," one hissed. "Put on your hat and coat, and follow us."

George was on the point of refusing, had his hands half up in fact, to give them a fight; but a thrill entered his soul that he should be qualified as a victim of such high-handed nonsense which acknowledged him as an entity in the undergraduate world. He arose gladly, ready to obey. Then someone grunted with disgust.

"Come on. Duck out of here."

"What for? This guy looks fresh as salt mackerel."

"It's Morton. We can't monkey with him."

The others expressed disappointment and thronged through the door in search of victims more available. George became belligerent for an opposite reason.

"Why not?" he demanded.

The leader smiled in friendly fashion.

"You'll get all the hazing you need down at the field."

As the last filed out and closed the door George smiled appreciation. Even among the Sophomores he was spotted, a privileged and an important character.

The next morning, packed with the nervous Freshmen in a lecture room, he heard his name read out with the sections. He fought his way into the university offices to scan the list of conditioned men. He didn't appear on a single slip. He had even managed the easy French paper. He attended to the formalities of matriculating. He was free to play football, to take up the by-no-means considerable duties of the laundry agency, to make friends. He had completed the first lap.

When he reported at the field that afternoon he found that the Freshmen had a coach of their own, a young man who possessed the unreal violence of a Sophomore, but he knew the game, and the extra invective with which he drove George indicated that Stringham and Green had confided to him their hopes.

The squad was large. Later it would dwindle and its members be thrown into a more intimate contact. Goodhue was there, a promising quarterback. Rogers toiled with a hopeless enthusiasm. George smiled, appreciating the other's logic. It was a good thing to try for the team, even though one had no chance of making it. As a matter of fact, Rogers disappeared at the first weeding-out.

The opening fortnight was wholly pleasant – a stressing of fundamentals that demanded little severe physical effort. Nor did the curriculum place any grave demands on George. During the evenings he frequently supplemented his work at the field with a brisk cross-country run, more often than not in the vicinity of the Alston place. He could see the lights in the huge house, and he tried to visualize that interior where, perhaps, men of the Goodhue stamp sat with Betty. He studied those fortunates, meantime, and the other types that surrounded him. There were many men of a sort, of the Rogers sort particularly, who continually suggested their receptivity; and he was invariably courteous

– from a distance, as he had seen Goodhue respond to Rogers. For George had his eyes focused now. He had seen the best.

The election of Freshmen class officers outlined several facts. The various men put up for office were unknown to the class in general, were backed by little crowds from their own schools. Men from less important schools, and men, like George, with no preparatory past, voted wild. These school groups, he saw, clung together; would determine, it was clear, the social progress through college of their members. That inevitably pointed to the upper-class club houses on Prospect Street. George had seen them from his first days at University Field, but until now they had, naturally enough, failed to impress him with any immediate interest. He desired the proper contacts for the molding of his own deportment and, to an extent even greater, for the bearing they would have on his battle for money and position after he should leave college. But it became clear to him now that the contest for Prospect Street had begun on the first day, even earlier, back in the preparatory schools.

Were such contacts possible in a serviceable measure without success in that selfish, headlong race? Was it practicable to draw the attention of the eager, half-blind runners to one outside the sacred little groups? Football would open certain doors, but if there was one best club he would have that or nothing. It might be wiser to stand brazenly aloof, posing as above such infantile jealousies. The future would decide, but as he left the place of the elections he had an empty feeling, a sharpened appreciation of the hazards that lay ahead.

Goodhue would be pointed for the highest. Goodhue would lead in many ways. He was elected the first president of the class.

The poor or earnest men, ignorant of everything outside their books, come from scattered homes, quite friendless, gravitated together in what men like Rogers considered a social quarantine. Rogers, indeed, ventured to warn George of the risk of contagion. As chance dictated George chatted with such creatures; once or twice even walked across the campus with them.

"You're making a mistake," Rogers advised, "being seen with polers like Allen."

"I've been seen with him twice that I can think of," George answered. "Why?"

"That lot'll queer you."

George put his hand on Rogers' shoulder.

"See here. If I'm so small that that will queer me, you can put me down as damned."

He walked on with that infrequently experienced sensation of having made an advance. Yet he couldn't quite see why. He had responded to an instinct that must have been his even in the days at Oakmont, when he had been less than human. If he didn't see more of men like Allen it was because they had nothing to offer him; nothing whatever. Goodhue had —

When their paths crossed on the campus now Goodhue nodded, for each day they met at the field, both certainties, if they escaped injury, for the Freshmen eleven.

Football had ceased to be unalloyed pleasure. Stringham that fall used the Freshmen rather more than the scrub as a punching bag for the varsity. The devoted youngsters would take punishment from three or four successive teams from the big squad. They became, consequently, as hard as iron. Frequently they played a team of varsity substitutes off its feet. George had settled into the backfield. He was fast with the ball, but he found it difficult to follow his interference, losing patience sometimes, and desiring to cut off by himself. Even so he made consistent gains through the opposing line. On secondary defence he was rather too efficient. Stringham was continually cautioning him not to tackle the varsity pets too viciously. After one such rebuke Goodhue unbent to sympathy.

"If they worked the varsity as hard as they do us Stringham wouldn't have to be so precious careful of his brittle backs. Just the same, Morton, I would rather play with you than against you."

George smiled, but he didn't bother to answer. Let Goodhue come around again.

George's kicking from the start outdistanced the best varsity punts. The stands, sprinkled with undergraduates and people from the town, would become noisy with handclapping as his spirals arched down the field.

Squibs Bailly, George knew, was always there, probably saying, "I kicked that ball. I made that run," and he had. The more you thought of it, the more it became comprehensible that he had.

The afternoon George slipped outside a first varsity tackle, and dodged two varsity backs, running forty yards for a touchdown, Squibs limped on the field, followed by Betty Alston. The scrimmaging was over. The Freshmen, triumphant because of George's feat, streaked toward the field house. Goodhue ran close to George. Bailly caught George's arm. Goodhue paused, calling out:

"Hello, Betty!"

At first Betty seemed scarcely to see Goodhue. She held out her hand to George.

"That was splendid. Don't forget that you're going to make me congratulate you this way next fall after the big games."

"I'll do my best. I want you to," George said.

Again he responded to the frank warmth of her fingers that seemed unconsciously endeavouring to make more pliable the hard surface of his mind.

"The strength of a lion," Bailly was saying, "united to the cruel cunning of the serpent. Heaven be praised you didn't seek the higher education at Yale or Harvard."

Betty called a belated greeting to Goodhue.

"Hello, Dicky! Wasn't it a real run? I feel something of a sponsor. I told him before college opened he would be a great player."

Goodhue's surprise was momentarily apparent.

"It was rather nice to see those big fellows dumped," he said.

Betty went closer to him.

"Aren't you coming out to dinner soon? I'll promise Green you won't break training."

The warm, slender fingers were no longer at George's mind. He felt abruptly repulsed. He wanted only to get away. Her eyes caught his, and she smiled.

"And bring Mr. Morton. I'm convinced he'll never come unless somebody takes him by the hand."

George glanced at her hand. He had a whimsical impulse to reach out for it, to close his eyes, to be led.

Heavy feet hurried behind the little group. A voice filled with rancour and disgust cried out:

"You standing here without blankets just to enjoy the autumn breezes? You ought to have better sense, Mr. Bailly."

"It's my fault, Green," Betty laughed.

"That's different," the trainer admitted, gallantly. "You can't expect a woman to have much sense. Get to the showers now, and on the run."

Goodhue and George trotted off.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Betty Alston's," Goodhue said.

George didn't answer. Goodhue didn't say anything else.

XII

Often after those long, pounding afternoons George returned to his room, wondering dully, as he had done last summer, why the deuce he did it. Sylvia's picture stared the same answer, and he would turn with a sigh to one of the novels Bailly loaned him regularly. Bailly was of great value there, too, for he chose the books carefully, and George was commencing to learn that as a man reads so is he very likely to think. Whenever he spoke now he was careful to modulate his voice, to choose his words, never to be heard without a reason.

The little fellow with the moustache whom the Goodhue crowd called Spike met him on the campus one day after practice.

"My name," he announced in a high-pitched, slurred voice, "is Wandel. You may not realize it, but you are a very great man, Morton."

George looked him over, astonished. He had difficulty not to mock the other's manner, nearly effeminate.

"Why am I great, Mr. Wandel?"

"Anybody," Wandel answered in his singing voice, "who does one thing better than others is inevitably great."

George smiled vindictively.

"I suppose I ought to return the compliment. What do you do?"

Wandel wasn't ruffled.

"Very many things. I brew good tea for one. What about a cup now? Come to my rooms. They're just here, in Blair tower."

George weighed the invitation. Wandel was beyond doubt of the fortunates, yet curiously apart from them. George's diplomacy required a forcing of the fortunates to seek him. Wandel, for that matter, had sought. Where George might have refused a first invitation from Goodhue he accepted Wandel's, because he was anxious to know the man's real purpose in asking him.

"All right. Thanks. But I haven't much time. I want to do some reading before dinner."

He hadn't imagined anything like Wandel's room existed in college, or could be conceived or executed by one of college age. The study was large and high with a broad casement window. The waning light increased the values Wandel had evidently sought. The wall covering and the draperies at the three doors and the window were a dead shade of green that, in fact, suggested a withdrawal from life nearly supernatural, at least medieval. The half-dozen pictures were designed to complete this impression. They were primitives – an awkward but lovely Madonna, a procession of saints who seemed deformed by their experiences, grotesque conceptions of biblical encounters. There were heavy rugs, also green in foundation; and, with wide, effective spaces between, stood uncomfortable Gothic chairs, benches, and tables.

Two months ago George would have expressed amazement, perhaps admiration. Now he said nothing, but he longed for Squibs' opinion of the room. He questioned what it reflected of the pompous little man who had brought him.

Wandel stooped and lighted the fire. He switched the heavy green curtains over the window. In a corner a youth stirred and yawned.

"Hello, Dalrymple," Wandel said. "Waited long? You know that very great man, Morton?"

The increasing firelight played on Dalrymple's face, a countenance without much expression, intolerant, if anything, but in a far weaker sense than Sylvia's assurance. George recognized him. He had seen him accompany Goodhue through the crowd the day of the first examination. Dalrymple didn't disturb himself.

"The football player? How do. Damn tea, Spike. You've got whiskey and a siphon."

George's hand had been ready. He was thankful he hadn't offered it. In that moment a dislike was born, not very positive; the emotion one has for an unwholesome animal.

Wandel disappeared. After a moment he came in, wearing a fantastic embroidered dressing gown of the pervading dead green tone. He lighted a spirit lamp, and, while the water heated, got out a tea canister, cups, boxes of biscuits, cigarettes, bottles, and glasses. Dalrymple poured a generous drink. Wandel took a smaller one.

"You," he said to George, "being a very great man, will have some tea."

"I'll have some tea, anyway," George answered.

The door opened. Goodhue strolled in. His eyebrows lifted when he saw George.

"Do you know you're in bad company, Morton?"

"I believe so," George answered.

Wandel was pleased. George saw Goodhue glance a question at Dalrymple. Dalrymple merely stared.

They sat about, sipping, talking of nothing in particular, and the curious room was full of an interrogation. George lost his earlier fancy of being under Wandel's inspection. It was evident to him now that Wandel was the man to do his inspecting first. Why the deuce had he asked him here? Dalrymple and Goodhue were clearly puzzled by the same question.

When he had emptied his cup George rose and put on his cap.

"Thanks for the cup of tea, Wandel."

"Don't go," Wandel urged.

He waved his hands helplessly.

"But, since you're a very distinguished person, I suppose I can't keep you. Come again, any day this time. Every day."

The question in Goodhue's eyes increased. Dalrymple altered his position irritably, and refilled his glass. George didn't say good-bye, waiting for the first move from him. Dalrymple, however, continued to sip, unaffected by this departure.

Goodhue, on the other hand, after a moment's hesitation, followed George out. When they had reached the tower archway Goodhue paused. The broken light from an iron-framed lamp exposed the curiosity and indecision in his eyes.

"Have you any idea, Morton," he asked, "what Spike's up to with you; I mean, why he's so darned hospitable all of a sudden?"

George shook his head. He was quite frank.

"I'm not so dull," he said, "that I haven't been wondering about that myself."

Goodhue smiled, and unexpectedly held out his hand.

"Good-night, see you at the field to-morrow."

"Why," George asked as he released that coveted grasp, "do you call Wandel 'Spike'?"

Goodhue's voice was uneasy in spite of the laugh with which he coloured it.

"Maybe it's because he's so sharp."

XIII

George saw a day or two later a professor's criticism in the *Daily Princetonian* of the current number of the *Nassau Literary Magazine*. Driggs Wandel, because of a poem, was excitedly greeted as a man with a touch of genius. George borrowed a copy of the *Lit* from a neighbour, and read a haunting, unreal bit of verse that seemed a part of the room in which it had probably been written. Obsessed by the practicality of the little man, George asked himself just what Wandel had to gain by this performance. He carried the whole puzzle to Bailly that night, and was surprised to learn that Wandel had impressed himself already on the faculty.

"This verse isn't genius," Bailly said, "but it proves that the man has an abnormal control of effect, and he does what he does with no apparent effort. He'll probably be managing editor of the *Lit* and the *Princetonian*, for I understand he's out for that, too. He's going to make himself felt in his class and in the entire undergraduate body. Don't undervalue him. Have you stopped to think, Morton, that he still wears a moustache? Revolutionary! Has he overawed the Sophomores, or has he too many friends in the upper classes?"

Bailly limped up and down, ill at ease, seeking words.

"I don't know how to advise you. I believe he'll help you delve after some treasure, though the stains on his own hands won't be visible. Whether it's just the treasure you want is another matter. Be inscrutable yourself. Accept his invitations. If you can, find out what he's up to without committing yourself. You can put it down that he isn't after you for nothing."

"But why?" George demanded.

Bailly shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Anyway, I've told you what I could, and you'll go your own way whether you agree or not."

George did, as a matter of fact. His curiosity carried him a number of times to Wandel's rooms. Practically always Dalrymple sat aloof, sullenly sipping whiskey which had no business there. He met a number of other men of the same crowd who talked football in friendly enough fashion; and once or twice the suave little fellow made a point of asking him for a particular day or hour. Always Wandel would introduce him to some new man, offering him, George felt, as a specimen to be accepted as a triumph of the Wandel judgment. And in every fresh face George saw the question he continually asked himself.

Wandel's campaign accomplished one result: Men like Rogers became more obsequious, considering George already a unit of that hallowed circle. But George wasn't fooled. He knew very well that he wasn't.

Goodhue, however, was more friendly. Football, after all, George felt, was quite as responsible for that as Betty Alston or Wandel; for it was the combination of Goodhue at quarter and George at half that accounted for the team's work against the varsity, and that beat the Yale and the Harvard Freshmen. Such a consistent and effectual partnership couldn't help drawing its members closer out of admiration, out of joy in success, out of a ponderable dependence that each learned to place upon the other. That conception survived the Freshman season. George no longer felt he had to be careful with Goodhue. Goodhue had even found his lodgings.

"Not palatial," George explained, "because – you may not know it – I am working my way through college."

Goodhue's voice was a trifle envious.

"I know. It must give you a fine feeling to do that."

Then Betty's vague invitation materialized in a note which mentioned a date and the fact that Goodhue would be there. Goodhue himself suggested that George should call at his rooms that evening so they could drive out together. George had never been before, had not suspected that

Dalrymple lived with Goodhue. The fact, learned at the door, which bore the two cards, disquieted him, filled him with a sense nearly premonitory.

When he had entered in response to Goodhue's call his doubt increased. The room seemed inimical to him, yet it was a normal enough place. What did it harbour that he was afraid of, that he was reluctant even to look for?

Goodhue was nearly ready. Dalrymple lounged on a window seat. He glanced at George languidly.

"Will say, Morton, you did more than your share against those Crimson Freshmen Saturday."

George nodded without answering. He had found the object the room contained for which he had experienced a premonitory fear. On one of the two desks stood an elaborately framed replica of the portrait he himself possessed of Sylvia Planter. Its presence there impressed him as a wrong, for to study and commune with that pictured face he had fancied his unique privilege. Nor did its presence in this room seem quite honest, for Sylvia, he was willing to swear, wasn't the type to scatter her likenesses among young men. George had an instinct to turn on Dalrymple and demand a history of the print, since Goodhue, he was certain, wouldn't have placed it there without authority. After all, such authority might exist. What did he know of Sylvia aside from her beauty, her arrogance, and her breeding? That was it. Her breeding made the exposure of her portrait here questionable.

"What you staring at?" Dalrymple asked, sullenly.

"Is this your desk?" George demanded.

"Yes. Why?"

George faced him abruptly.

"I was looking at that photograph."

"What for?" Dalrymple demanded, sitting up.

"Because," George answered, evenly, "it happens to be where one sees it."

Dalrymple flushed.

"Deuced pretty girl," he said with an affectation of indifference. "Of course you don't know her."

"I have seen her," George said, shortly.

He felt that a challenge had been passed and accepted. He raised his voice.

"How about it, Goodhue?"

"Coming."

Dalrymple opened his mouth as if to speak, but Goodhue slipped into the room, and George and he went down the stairs and climbed into Goodhue's runabout.

"I didn't know," George said when they had started, "that you lived with Dalrymple."

"We were put together at school, so it seemed simple to start out here."

George was glad to fancy a slight colour of apology, as if such a companionship needed a reason.

It was a pleasant and intimate little dinner to which they drove. Mr. and Mrs. Alston recollected meeting George at the Baillys', and they were kind about his football. A friend of Betty's from a neighbouring house made the sixth. George was not uncomfortable. His glass had shown him that in a dinner suit he was rather better looking than he had thought. Observation had diminished his dread of social lapses. There flowed, however, rather too much talk of strange worlds, which included some approaching gaieties in New York.

"You," Betty said casually to him, "must run up to my great affair."

Her aunt, it appeared, would engineer that a short time before the holidays. George was vague. The prospect of a ballroom was terrifying. He had danced very little, and never with the type of women who would throng Betty Alston's début. Yet he wanted to go.

"Betty," her mother said, dryly, "will have all the lions she can trap."

George received an unpleasant impression of having been warned. It didn't affect him strongly, because warnings were wasted there; he was too much the slave of a photograph and a few intolerable memories. Sylvia would almost certainly be at that dance.

Wandel appeared after dinner.

"I tried to get Dolly to come," he said, "but he was in a most villainous temper about something, and couldn't be budged. Don't mind saying he missed a treat. I hired a pert little mare at Marlin's. If I can find anything in town nearly as good I'll break the two to tandem this winter."

George's suppressed enthusiasm blazed.

"I'd like to help you. I'd give a good deal for a real fight with a horse."

He was afraid he had plunged in too fast. He met the surprise of the others by saying he had played here and there with other people's horses; but the conversation had drifted to a congenial topic, and it got to polo.

"Because a man was killed here once," Wandel said, "is no reason why the game should be damned forever."

"If you young men," Mr. Alston offered, "want to get some ponies down in the spring, or experiment with what I've got, you're welcome to play here all you please, and it might be possible to arrange games with scrub teams from Philadelphia and New York."

"Do you play, Mr. Morton?" Betty asked, interestedly.

"I've scrubbed around," he said, uncertainly.

She laughed.

"Then he's a master. That's what he told dear old Squibs about his football."

George wanted to get away from horses. He could score only through action. Talking was dangerous. He was relieved when he could leave with Goodhue and Wandel.

The runabout scurried out of Wandel's way. The pert little mare sensed a rival in the automobile, and gave Wandel all the practice he wanted. George smiled at the busy little man as his cart slithered from side to side of the driveway.

"That's Spike's one weakness," Goodhue laughed as they hurried off. "He's not a natural horseman, but he loves the beasts, so he takes his falls. By the way, I rather think I can guess what he's up to with you."

"What?" George asked.

Goodhue shook his head.

"Learn from Spike. Anyway, I may be wrong."

Then why had Goodhue spoken at all? To put him on his guard?

"Wandel," George promised himself, "will get away with nothing as far as I am concerned."

Yet all that night the thought of the little man made him uncomfortable.

XIV

George watched his first big varsity game the following Saturday. It was the last of the season, against Yale. He sat with Goodhue and other members of the Freshman eleven in an advantageous part of the stands. The moment the blue squad, greeted by a roar, trotted on the field, he recognized Lambert Planter's rangy figure. Lambert's reputation as a fullback had come to Princeton ahead of him, and it had scarcely been exaggerated. Once he had torn through the line he gave the Princeton backs all they wanted to do. He kicked for Yale. Defensively he was the deadliest man on the field. He, George and Goodhue agreed, would determine the outcome. As, through him, the balance of the contest commenced to tip, George experienced a biting restlessness. It wasn't the prospect of the defeat of Princeton by Yale that angered him so much as the fact that Lambert Planter would unquestionably be the cause. George felt it unjust that rules should exist excluding him from that bruising and muddy contest. More than anything else just then he wanted to be on the field, stopping Planter, avoiding the reluctance of such an issue.

"We ought to be out there, Morton," Goodhue muttered. "If nothing happens, we will be next year."

"It's that fellow Planter," George answered. "He could be stopped."

"You could stop him," Goodhue said. "You could outkick him."

George's face was grim.

"I'm stronger than Planter," he said, simply. "I could beat him."

The varsity, however, couldn't. Lambert, during the last quarter, slipped over the line for the deciding touchdown. The game ended in a dusky and depressing autumn haze. George and Goodhue watched sullenly the enemy hosts carry Planter and the other blue players about the field. Appearing as if they had survived a disaster, they joined the crowd of men and women, relatives and friends of the players, near the field house. The vanquished and the substitutes had already slipped through and out of sight. The first of the steaming Yale men appeared and threaded a path toward the steps. Lambert, because he had been honoured most, was the last to arrive, and at that moment out of the multitude there came into George's vision faces that he knew, as if they had waited to detach themselves for this spectacular advent.

He saw the most impressive one first of all, and he stood, as he had frequently stood before her portrait, staring in a mood of wilful obstinacy. It was only for a few moments, and she was quite some distance away. Before he could appreciate the chance, she had withdrawn herself, after a quick, approving tap of her brother's shoulder, among the curious, crowding people. George had seen her face glow with a happy pride in spite of her effort at repression; but in the second face which he noticed there was no emotion visible at all. The hero's mother simply nodded. Dalrymple stood between mother and daughter, smiling inanely.

Lambert forged ahead, filthy and wet. The steam, like vapour from an overworked animal, wavered about him. The Baillys and the Alstons pushed close to George and Goodhue, who were in Lambert's path, pressed there and held by the anxious people.

At sight of Betty, Lambert paused and stretched out his hand. She was, George thought, whiter than ever.

"You'll say hello even to an Eli?"

She gave her hand quickly, the colour invading her pallor. For an instant George thought Lambert was going to draw her closer, saw his lips twitch, heard him say:

"Don't hold it against me, Betty."

Certainly something was understood between these two, or Lambert, at least, believed so.

Betty freed her hand and caught at George's arm.

"Look at him," she said clearly, indicating Planter. "You're going to take care of him next fall. You're not going to let him laugh at us again."

George managed a smile.

"I'll take care of him, Miss Alston."

Lambert's dirty face expanded.

"These are threats! And it's – George. Then we're to have a return bout next fall. I'll look forward to it. Hello, Dick. Good-bye, Betty. Till next fall – George."

He passed on, leaving an impression of confidence and conquest.

"Why," Betty said, impulsively, in George's ear, "does he speak to you that way? Why does he call you George like that?"

For a moment he looked at her steadily, appealingly.

"It's partly my own fault," he said at last, "but it hurts."

Her voice was softer than before.

"That's wrong. You mustn't let little things hurt, George."

For the first time in his memory he felt a stinging at his eyes, the desire for tears. He didn't misunderstand. Her use of his first name was not a precedent. It had been balm applied to a wound that she had only been able to see was painful. Yet, as he walked away with Goodhue, he felt as if he had been baptized again.

XV

Wandel, quite undisturbed, joined them.

"You and Dicky," the little man said, "look as if you had come out of a bad wreck. What's up? It's only a game."

"Of course you're right," George answered, "but you have to play some games desperately hard if you want to win."

"Now what are you driving at, great man?" Wandel wanted to know.

"Come on, Spike," Goodhue said, irritably. "You're always looking for double meanings."

George walked on with them, desolately aware of many factors of his life gone awry. The game; Lambert's noticeable mockery, all the more unbearable because of its unaffectedness; Dalrymple's adjacence to Sylvia – these remembrances stung, the last most of all.

"Come on up, you two," Goodhue suggested as they approached the building in which he lived, "I believe Dolly's giving tea to Sylvia Planter and her mother."

George wanted to see if the photograph was still there, but he couldn't risk it. He shook his head.

"Not into the camp of the enemy?" Wandel laughed.

Of course, George told himself as he walked off, Wandel's words couldn't possibly have held any double meaning.

He fought it out that night, sleeping scarcely at all. In the rush of his progress here he had failed to realize how little he had really advanced toward his ultimate goal. Lambert had offhand, perhaps unintentionally, shown him that afternoon how wide the intervening space still stretched. Was it because of moral cowardice that he shrank from challenging a crossing? The answer to such a challenge might easily mean the destruction of all he had built up, the heavy conditioning of his future which now promised so abundantly.

He faced her picture with his eyes resolute, his jaw thrust out.

"I'll do it," he told the lifeless print. "I'll make you know me. I'll teach your brother not to treat me as a servant who has forgotten his place."

The last, in any case, couldn't be safely put off. Lambert's manner had already aroused Betty's interest. Had she known its cause she might not have resented it so sweetly for George. There was no point in fretting any more. His mind was made up to challenge at the earliest possible moment.

In furtherance of his resolution he visited his tailor the next day, and during the evening called at the Baillys'. He came straight to the point.

"I want some dancing lessons," he said. "Do you know anybody?"

Bailly limped up, put his hands on George's shoulder, and studied him.

"Is this traceable to Wandel?"

"No. To what I told you last summer."

"He's going to Betty Alston's dance," Mrs. Bailly cried.

"If I'm asked," George admitted, "but as a general principle – "

Mrs. Bailly interrupted, assuming control.

"Move that table and the chairs," she directed the two men. "You'll keep my husband's secret – tinkling music hidden away between grand opera records. It will come in handy now."

George protested, but she had her own way. Bailly sat by, puffing at his pipe, at first scornful.

"I hate to see a football player pirouetting like a clown."

But in a little while he was up, awkwardly illustrating steps, his cheeks flushed, his cold pipe dangling from his lips.

"You dance very well as it is," Mrs. Bailly told George. "You do need a little quieting. You must learn to remember that the ballroom isn't a gridiron and your partner the ball."

And at the end of a fortnight she told him he was tamed and ready for the soft and perfumed exercise of the dance floor.

He was afraid Betty wouldn't remember. Her invitation had been informal, his response almost a refusal.

On free afternoons Goodhue and he often ran together, trying to keep in condition, already feeling that the outcome of next year's big games would depend on them. They trotted openly through the Alston place, hoping for a glimpse of Betty as a break in their grind. When she saw them from the house she would come out and chat for a time, her yellow hair straying in the wind, her cheeks flushed from the cold. During these brief conferences it was made clear that she had not forgotten, and that George would go up with Goodhue and be a guest at his home the night of the dance.

George was grateful for that quality of remoteness in Goodhue which at first had irritated him. Now he was well within Goodhue's vision, and acceptably so; but the young man had not shown the slightest interest in his past or his lack of the right friends before coming to Princeton. At any moment he might.

The Goodhue house was uptown between Fifth and Madison avenues. It was as unexpected to George as Wandel's green study had been. The size of its halls and rooms, the tasteful extravagance of its decorations, the quiet, liveried servants took his breath. It was difficult not to say something, to withhold from his glance his admiration and his lack of habit.

There he was at last, handing his hat and coat to one who bent obsequiously. He felt a great contempt. He told himself he was unjust, as unjust as Sylvia, but the contempt persisted.

There were details here more compelling than anything he had seen or fancied at Oakmont. The entire household seemed to move according to a feudal pattern. Goodhue's father and mother welcomed George, because their son had brought him, with a quiet assurance. Mrs. Goodhue, George felt, might even appreciate what he was doing. That was the outstanding, the feudal, quality of both. They had an air of unprejudiced judgment, of removal from any selfish struggle, of being placed beyond question.

Goodhue and George dined at a club that night. They saw Wandel and Dalrymple, the latter flushed and talking louder than he should have done in an affected voice. They went to the theatre, and afterward drove up Fifth Avenue to Betty's party. George was dazzled, and every moment conscious of the effort to prevent Goodhue's noticing it. His excitement increased as he came to the famous establishment in the large ballroom of which Betty was waiting, and, perhaps, already, Sylvia. To an extent the approaching culmination of his own campaign put him at ease; lifted him, as it were, above details; left him free to face the moment of his challenge.

The lower halls were brilliant with pretty, eager faces, noisy with chatter and laughter, a trifle heady from an infiltration of perfumes.

Wandel joined them upstairs and took George's card, returning it after a time nearly filled.

"When you see anybody you particularly want to dance with," he advised secretly, "just cut in without formality. The mere fact of your presence ought to be introduction enough. You see everybody here knows, or thinks he knows, everybody else."

George wondered why Wandel went out of his way, and in that particular direction. Did the little man suspect? The succeeding moments brushed the question aside.

Betty was radiant, lovelier in her white-and-yellow fashion than George had ever seen her. He shrank a little from their first contact, all the more startling to him because he was so little accustomed to the ritual familiarity of dancing. With his arm around her, with her hand in his, with her golden hair brushing his cheek, with her lips and eyes smiling up at him, he felt like one who steals. Why not? Didn't people win their most prized possessions through theft of one kind or another? It was because those pliant fingers were always at his mind that he wanted to release them, wanted to run away from Betty since she always made him desire to tell her the truth.

"I'm glad you could come. It isn't as bad as football, is it? Have we any more? If I show signs of distress do cut in if you're not too busy."

He overcame his fear of collisions, avoiding other couples smoothly and rhythmically. Dalrymple, he observed, was less successful, apologizing in a high, excited voice. As in a haze George watched a procession of elderly women, young girls, and men of every age, with his own tall figure and slightly anxious face greeting him now and then from a mirror. This repeated and often-unexpected recognition encouraged him. He was bigger and better looking than most; in the glasses, at least, he appeared as well-dressed. More than once he heard girls say:

"Who is that big chap with Betty Alston?"

With all his heart he wanted to ask Betty why she had been so kind to him from the beginning, why she was so kind now. He longed to tell her how it had affected him. She glanced up curiously. Without realizing it his grasp had tightened. He relaxed it, wondering what had been in his mind. It was this odd proximity to a beautiful girl who had been kind to him that had for a moment swung him from his real purpose in coming here, the only purpose he had. He resumed his inspection of the crowding faces. He didn't see Lambert or Sylvia. Had he been wrong? It was incredible they shouldn't appear.

The music stopped.

"Thanks," he said. "Three after this."

His voice was wistful.

"I did like that."

He desired to tell her that he didn't care to dance with any one else, except Sylvia, of course.

"I enjoyed it, too. Will you take me back?"

But her partner met them on the way, and he commenced to trail his.

It was halfway through the next number that he knew he had not planned futilely. It was like Sylvia to arrive in that fashion – a distracting element in a settled picture, or as one beyond the general run for whom a special welcome was a matter of course. To George's ears the orchestra played louder, as if to call attention to her. To his eyes the dancers slackened their pace. The chatter certainly diminished, and nearly everyone glanced toward the door where she stood a little in advance of her mother and two men.

George was able to judge reasonably. In dress and appearance she was the most striking woman in the room. Her dark colouring sprang at one, demanding attention. George saw Dalrymple unevenly force a path in her direction. He caught his breath. The dance resumed its former rhythm. In its intricacies Sylvia was for a time lost.

Sometime later Lambert drifted in. George saw him dancing with Betty. He also found Sylvia. He managed to direct his partner close to her a number of times. She must have seen him, but her eyes did not waver or her colour heighten. He wouldn't ask for an introduction. There was no point. His imagination pictured a number of probable disasters. If he should ask her to dance would she recognize him, and laugh, and demand, so that people could hear, how he had forced a way into this place?

George relinquished his partner to a man who cut in. From a harbour close to the wall he watched Sylvia, willing himself to the point of action.

"I will make her know me before I leave this dance," he said to himself.

Dalrymple had her now. His weak face was too flushed. He was more than ever in people's way. George caught the distress in Sylvia's manner. He remembered Wandel's advice, what Betty had asked him to do for her. He dodged, without further reflection, across the floor, and held out his hand.

"If I may – "

Without looking at him she accepted his hand, and they glided off, while Dalrymple stared angrily. George scarcely noticed. There was room in his mind for no more than this amazing and intoxicating experience. She was so close that he could have bent his head and placed his lips on her

dark hair – closer than she had been that unforgettable day. The experience was worthless unless she knew who he was.

"She must know," he thought.

If she did, why did she hide her knowledge behind an unfathomable masquerade?

"That was kind of you," he heard her say. "Poor Dolly!"

She glanced up. Interrogation entered her eyes.

"I can't seem to remember – "

"I came from Princeton with Dick Goodhue," he explained. "It seemed such a simple thing. Shouldn't I have cut in?"

He looked straight at her now. His heart seemed to stop. She had to be made to remember.

"My name is George Morton."

She smiled.

"I've heard Betty talk of you. You're a great football player. It was very kind. Of course it's all right."

But it wasn't. The touch of her hand became unbearable to George because she didn't remember. He had to make her remember.

They were near the entrance. He paused and drew her apart from the circling dancers.

"Would you mind losing a little of this?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady. "It may seem queer, but I have something to tell you that you ought to know."

She studied him, surprised and curious.

"I can't imagine – " she began. "What is it?"

It was only a step through the door and to an alcove with a red plush bench. The light was soft there. No one was close enough to hear. She sat down, laughing.

"Don't keep me in suspense."

He, too, sat down. He spoke deliberately.

"The last two times I've seen you you wouldn't remember me. Even now, when I've told you my name, you won't."

Her surprise increased.

"It's about you! But I said Betty had – Who are you?"

He bent closer.

"If I didn't tell you you might remember later. Anyway, I wouldn't want to fight a person whose eyes were closed."

Her lips half parted. She appeared a trifle frightened. She made a movement as if to rise.

"Just a minute," he said, harshly.

He called on the hatred that had increased during the hours of his mental and physical slavery, a hatred to be appeased only through his complete mastery of her.

"It won't take much to remind you," he hurried on. "Although you talk to me as if I were a man now, last summer I was a beast because I had the nerve to touch you when you were thrown from your horse."

She stood up quickly, reaching out for the alcove curtain. Her contralto voice was uneven.

"Stop! You shouldn't have said that. You shouldn't have told me."

All at once she straightened, her cheeks flaming. She started for the ballroom. He sprang after her, whispering over her shoulder:

"Now we can start fair."

She turned and faced him.

"I don't know how you got here, but you ask for a fight, Mr. Morton – "

He smiled.

"I am Mr. Morton now. I'm getting on."

Then he knew again that sickening sensation of treacherous ground eager to swallow him.

"Are you going to run and tell them," he asked, softly, "as you did your father last summer?"

She crossed the threshold of the ballroom. He watched her while she hesitated for a moment, seeking feverishly someone in the brilliant, complacent crowd.

XVI

George watched Sylvia, fighting his instinct to call out a command that she should keep secret forever what he had told her. It was intolerable to stand helpless, to realize that on her sudden decision his future depended. Did she seek her mother, or Lambert, who would understand everything at the first word? Nevertheless, he preferred she should go to Lambert, because he could forecast too easily the alternative – Mrs. Planter's emotionless summoning of Betty and her mother; perhaps of Goodhue or Wandel or Dalrymple; the brutal advertisement of just what he was to all the people he knew, to all the people he wanted to know. That might mean the close of Betty's friendliness, the destruction of the fine confidence that had developed between him and Goodhue, a violent reorganization of all his plans. He gathered strength from a warm realization that with Squibs and Mrs. Squibs Sylvia couldn't possibly hurt him.

He became ashamed of his misgivings, aware that for nothing in the world, even if he had the power, would he rearrange the last five minutes.

He saw her brilliant figure start forward and take an uneven course around the edge of the room until a man caught her and swung her out among the dancers. George turned away. He was sorry it was Wandel who had interfered, but that would give her time to reflect; and even if she blurted it out to Wandel, the little man might be decent enough to advise her to keep quiet.

George wandered restlessly across the hall to the smoking-room. How long would the music lilt on, imprisoning Sylvia in the grasp of Wandel or another man?

He asked for a glass of water, and took it to a lounge in front of the fire. Here he sat, listening to the rollicking music, to the softer harmonies of feminine voices that seemed to define for him compelling and pleasurable vistas down which he might no longer glance. When the silence came Sylvia would go to her mother or Lambert.

"My very dear – George."

Lambert himself bent over the back of the lounge. George guessed the other had seen him enter and had followed. All the better, even if he had come to attack. George had things to say to Lambert, too; so he glanced about the room and was grateful that, except for the servants, it held only some elderly men he had never seen before, who sat at a distance, gossiping and laughing.

"Where," Lambert asked, "will I run into you next?"

"Anywhere," George said. "Whenever we're both invited to the same place. I didn't come without being asked, so my being here isn't funny."

Lambert walked around and sat down. All the irony had left his face. He had an air of doubtful disapproval.

"Maybe not funny," he said, "but – odd."

George stirred. How long would the music and the laughter continue to drift in?

"Why?"

"You've travelled a long way," Lambert mused. "I wonder if in football clothes men don't look too much of a pattern. I wonder if you haven't let yourself be carried a little too far."

"Why?" George asked again.

"Princeton and football," Lambert went on, "are well enough in their way; but when you come to a place like this and dance with those girls who don't know, it seems scarcely fair. Of course, if they knew, and wanted you still – that's the whole point."

"They wouldn't," George admitted, "but why should they matter if the people that count know?"

Lambert glanced at him. Was the music's quicker measure prophetic of the end?

"What do you mean?" Lambert asked.

"What you said last fall has worried me," George answered. "That's the reason I came here – so that your sister would know me from Adam. She does, and she can do what she pleases about it. It's in her hands now."

Lambert reddened.

"You've the nerve of the devil," he said, angrily. "You had no business to speak to my sister. The whole thing had been forgotten."

George shook his head.

"You hadn't forgotten it. She told me that day that I shouldn't forget. I hadn't forgotten it. I never will."

"I can't talk about it," Lambert said.

He looked squarely at George.

"Here's what puts your being here out of shape: You're ashamed of what you were. Aren't you?"

"I've always thought," George said, "you were man enough to realize it's only what I am and may become that counts. I wouldn't say ashamed. I'm sorry, because it makes what I'm doing just that much harder; because you, for instance, know about it, and might cause trouble."

Lambert made no difficulty about the implied question.

"I don't want to risk causing trouble for any one unjustly. It's up to you not to make me. But don't bother my sister again."

"Let me get far enough," George said, "and you won't be able to make trouble – you, or your sister, or your father."

Lambert grinned, the doubt leaving his face as if he had reached a decision.

"I wouldn't bank on father. I'd keep out of his sight."

The advice placed him, for the present, on the safe side. Sylvia's decision remained, and just then the music crashed into a silence, broken by exigent applause. George got up, thrusting his hands in his pockets. The orchestra surrendered to the applause, but was Sylvia dancing now?

Voices drifted in from the hall, one high and obdurate; others better controlled, but persistent in argument. Lambert grimaced. George sneered.

"But that's all right, because he didn't have to work for his living."

"If you don't come a cropper," Lambert said, "you'll get fed up with that sort of thinking. Dolly's young."

Dalrymple was the first in the room, flushed, a trifle uneven in his movements. Goodhue and Wandel followed. Goodhue smiled in a pained, surprised way. Wandel's precise features expressed nothing.

"Why not dancing, Lambert, old Eli?" Dalrymple called jovially. "Haul these gospel sharks off – Waiter! I say, waiter! Something bubbly, dry, and nineteen hundred, if they're doing us that well."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.