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BY

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CHAPTER I

MOST people kindled at sight of David Anson and longed for children, if they had none. The stricter of them, simple farmer folk, felt at the same time that a boy of twelve had better think more of fields at his feet than of what went on inside his small head. But this was rather because they distrusted his ardent imaginativeness, which stirred to hunger, if not dissatisfaction, the dull monotony of their meager lives. No good, they were sure, would come of it.

A full measure of this ardor was certainly to be seen in David's gray eyes, under their shock of red-brown hair, on the most expectant morning of his young years. After an early farm breakfast he had not gone with Uncle William to the barn, where the day's work was beginning, nor had he hung questioningly about while Aunt Mary

cleared away and made ready to churn. Instead he hastened around the long, low house, made of soundest logs, to three great oaks, his playfellows, by the gate. There, seated on a fence-post, he was gazing up the white dust road that stretched away to the hills.

The sun had just risen above these Kentucky hills rimming Anson farm, and was, as Aunt Mary once told him, laughing away the pretense of the June wheat that dewdrops hanging on its ears were diamonds. The corn, breast-high, was whispering with fresh green briskness; doubtless trying, David chuckled, to ask, Who 's coming? A jay, in the oak-leaves overhead, egotistically shrieked a right to make as much noise as any boy. And between assertions of the jay there came from a rail fence dividing wheatland and woodland a clear, glad lark-note that caused David to look yearningly down the road again, though he knew that Hallie, and Ronald with her, could not come for hours yet.

David had lived at Anson farm with Uncle William and Aunt Mary ever since his mother and father died seven years before; mother, he was told, because a little baby brother the doc-

tor was going to bring did n't come, and father because mother died and because he was wounded in the Civil War. After four more of these years Uncle William was, perhaps, going to send him to the city, where Uncle George lived, and where he was to go to school with Hallie and Ronald, whom he was to greet for the first time to-day.

What would Hallie and Ronald be like? Aunt Mary said that if girls were flowers Hallie would be a wild rose, or if birds, a lark, though she *did* live in a city. She showed David Hallie's picture, too, sent by Aunt Sylvia, and said Hallie was fair, with ripples of hair that had not decided yet whether to be gold or brown, because it 's not always possible to tell until later what your life 's going to be and which color will suit best. The picture faced you, with large eyes that seemed ready to wonder at you, and possibly, if you gave them good reason, to admire.

From the moment of beholding this picture David had determined that if heroism or slavery could avail those eyes should admire him; and as is the way with us, man and boy, he thereupon took stock of his own and the farm's most winsome

resources. Consequently he had not been abashed last night when Uncle William told him the meaning of the Scripture reading, "And Jacob served for Rachel seven years." He was prepared even for that; though it occurred to him, for some reason, that there was an incalculable factor in the situation: Hallie's stepbrother Ronald. For Aunt Sylvia, Hallie's mother, had first married a "widower"—whatever that meant.

David swung his legs from the fence until Cousin Noah, Uncle William's grown-up son, had locked the corn-crib and harnessed Brown Bess for tobacco-plowing. Then he decided he had better discuss Hallie's probable likes and dislikes with Aunt Mary again, for Aunt Mary had strange ways of knowing things nobody else did, as if they were being whispered to her, "like in the Bible." But as he slid off the railing he saw the dust of an approaching vehicle far up the road, and joy quivered tumultuously down to his heart, while he hurried in to spread the news.

"They 're coming, Aunt Mary," he called, capering up to the serene woman who was churning in the "dog-trot" that divided dining-room and

kitchen from the rest of the house. "They 're coming!"

Aunt Mary looked up, out of what David had heard Uncle William call her "inner abiding-place," and smiled. Her lips were always as ready with sweetness and gentle humor as were her spectacled eyes with sympathy and clear understanding.

"Not yet, child," she replied. "It 's still too early. That woodpecker there has n't found four ripe cherries yet."

"But they *are*, Aunt Mary, *fast!*" exclaimed David. "The dust is just flying uppity! I guess she wants to get here to us quick. Maybe Jeb's drivin' his race-horse!"

Aunt Mary was going to say "maybe," in the soft way that made people look twice at her; but suddenly she changed, stopped churning, and her "inner abiding-place" seemed clouded.

"Why, something *is* the matter," she said, and untying her apron, which she hung on the churn, she hurried through the living-room to the gate. The vehicle which David had seen was a dust-wrapped buggy reeling hurriedly toward them a hundred yards away.

Almost before the lad could see that Hallie was not in it, a lathered horse was jerked up, panting, at the gate. The driver, now recognizable as Farmer Ledbetter, leaned from it with red streaming face and agonized lips.

"I 'm askin' you to come again, Mrs. Anson," he gasped; "I 'm beggin' you. She 's had another attack, an' only you an' yore faith kin save her. I 'm beggin' you for Christ 's sake to come."

David, gazing at the bloodshot desperate eyes of the pleader, was not surprised at these words; for the neighborhood around had long regarded Aunt Mary as a "faith-healer." On certain days in summer the boy had seen afflicted folk come from far and near, with wens, goiters, rheumatism, and various other ailments, to be healed. Along the roads, in the fields, or in the courthouse yard at Foxton, her cures were discussed with reverent awe and admiration.

"And you, Farmer Ledbetter, have caused the attack?" she demanded very quietly. "You have been drinking again? Do you want to kill her struggling faith so that she *can't* be cured?"

The stammering reply was pitiful. "S' help

me God, Mrs. Anson, I have, but I won't no more, not if my bowels flame with thirst I won't, if you 'll come."

Aunt Mary turned toward David.

"Tell them at dinner, child, where I 've gone," she said, getting into the buggy without more ado, and added, as the horse turned about, "Keep the chickens out of the garden, and show Hallie and Ronald where to put their things when they come."

David promised obedience and watched them drive away. He was fascinated as usual by Aunt Mary's strange manner. It affected him as did the invisible power of stars or of heat-lightning at night.

He turned away from his seat at the gate and began to wander musingly about the yard—to Aunt Mary's loom-house first, where the loom seemed lonesomely quiet, then to the rain-barrel, in whose opaque water, smelling of shingles and soot, his startled fancy seemed for a moment to see Hallie. . . . He wondered if Hallie too would be a "healer" when *she* grew up.

Noon came, and a mirage of heat wavered over everything; but Hallie and Ronald did not ap-

pear. Mammy Caroline, who had been the boy's nurse and who had come to the farm to cook when he was brought there, told him to ring the big bell high in an oak-prong outside the dining-room to let Marse William and Marse Noah know dinner was ready.

Uncle William came first. He was tall and lean. He was also amazingly silent, except in camp-meetings, at Shiloh, on Sundays. And yet his silence was not oppressive or terrifying. It was rather like that of a tree; and David thought his high cheek-bones and gnarled knuckles were like tree-knots, too—knots that grew round with sap swelling under the bark.

Cousin Noah, who also was lean and wiry, was far from silent. He had jerky blue eyes that always seemed to be thinking of queer little things inside his head. He was constantly breaking into snatches of song, like "Rats in the sugar-bowl, skip-to-my-Lou!" or "I won't have none of your weevily wheat!" and he would do funny little dance steps to them, if Uncle William was n't looking. Sometimes, however, he was speechless and gloomy. That was when he wanted to go

away to be a cowboy in Texas; which Uncle William opposed.

Both Uncle William and Cousin Noah dipped water into the tin wash-basin with a gourd that hung on the log wall and were soon ready for the fried chicken which had been odorously teasing David's appetite for ten minutes. The dinner table that awaited them was large and round, with an elevated revolving center on which jellies, bread, preserves, and vegetables were placed, so that every one could turn it and help himself. When they sat down Uncle William said grace, *which,* David always thought, should come *after* the meal.

As country hunger is not loquacious and as Aunt Mary's message had been delivered, David's tongue was wholly free to make other speed. But when he was about ready for preserves a startling thought suddenly struck his mind and ended appetite. What if the train which was to bring Hallie and Ronald to Foxton, whence they were to drive to Anson farm, had run off the track? Or what if Jesse James, whose deeds Cousin Noah had often related to him, had held

the cars up and run away with Hallie, to make her his wife? The possibility caused him to spring up, wiping his hands on his shirt, and to scatter knife and napkin on the floor.

"Why, boy," said Uncle William, looking up in mild surprise, with fork poised in space, "what 's ailing you?"

"We—we must stop him, Uncle William!" cried David, quite possessed by his imagining. "I—I mean Jesse James. If he 's held up the train, we could go across the bottoms with your gun before—before—!"

"Now, bless my bones," Uncle William stared astonished, "are *you* getting the Texas fever too?"

"He 'll run away with her, Uncle William, and make her marry him," David explained. "And Hallie does n't want to. I know she does n't."

Uncle William looked at Cousin Noah and said, "Ahem." Cousin Noah chuckled, a bit sheepishly, then avowed solemnly that, as he had been told Jesse James already *had* a wife, he really guessed there was n't much danger, and that anyhow he heard the sound of wheels!

David, who had been all fears, was now all

ears, and a moment later all legs. When he reached the gate with Shep, Cousin Noah's collie, at his heels, he found that wheels were indeed near. A surrey was coming up, and on the front seat with Jeb Jayson, who kept the livery-stable at Foxton, was Hallie.

Then a strange thing happened. At sight of Hallie heaven and earth instantly became a wild throbbing blur to David, and before he knew it he was flying panic-stricken, though without knowing why, from the scene. Uncle William, against whom he stumbled, was amazed and exclaimed, "What addles the boy?"

On the orchard grass where he flung himself down, David was soon asking the same question. He tried to tell himself that his soiled shirt had been the cause of his ignominious flight. But that it was not was evidenced by his gallant return, a few minutes later, to meet Hallie's round dubious eyes and Ronald's hang-lipped cynicism. That he had merely run away, instinctively, from the first enthralling tentacles of femininity, was an explanation he could no more have comprehended at the time than a larva can comprehend that it will one day become a butterfly.

CHAPTER II

AT supper Cousin Noah was full of mocking winks and squints at David. Hallie did not see these, but was rapturous over the revolving table, though Ronald said *he* thought it was better to have servants wait on you. When all had finished they went to the front porch to see if Aunt Mary might not be coming.

As she was n't, Uncle William strolled out to the garden to look over his peas; Cousin Noah said he reckoned he had better go see to the *other* calves—and separate them from their mammies; the three children were left to themselves.

Drawn by the afterglow that lit the girdling woods and hills beyond field and meadow, they went to the front fence and sat on its railing. Quails, which Hallie had never heard before, were tossing "bob-whites" to each other; katydids were making their accusations; and bull-frogs by the crib were saying, "*R-ube, R-ube,*" "Just as mother does to father sometimes,"

Hallie avowed, "when she mocks at him for not holding his fork right at table."

This brought forth a question from David, between whom and Hallie, Ronald had assertively placed himself. It was to begin a conversation characteristic of them all.

"What's a widower?" he asked, too exclusively aware of Hallie to be conscious of the silent antagonism that had been growing up in Ronald. "Uncle William says Aunt Sylvia married a widower first."

"She did," answered the dark, thin-visaged Ronald. "She did marry a widower. An' he was my father. An' that 's why Hallie 's not my sister, an' why I can marry her when we grow up, as I mean to."

David was as startled by this unexpected asseveration as if he had heard a wolf-call from the bottoms. It was as if a twilight-ripened star, which fell at the moment, had been knocked down by the blow of the words.

Hallie, however, sensitive as ever to an unhappy situation, rushed into the breach.

"I *am* your sister, Ronald," she cried; "you know I am. And if your papa had n't died I 'd

call him papa too, though I don't suppose I could have two papas."

"An' you can't have two husbands either," sulked Ronald. "An' David wants to marry you already, you know he does; because he keeps on lookin' at your curls. But he can't; for I asked you first; you know I did."

David, who by all rights should have put in here, could not utter a word. Straight before him the horizon moon, tarnished as all things are by earth's touch, was rising full and golden. As it swelled and broke free of the trees, he felt the beautiful yet terrifying mystery of life in and around him—felt it without knowing its depths.

At length he managed to stammer out apologetically and wistfully: "I guess I *would* marry Hallie if I could, but I guess she won't marry anybody but a king, or something, like Esther in the Bible. An' I don't guess I *could* be a king."

"An' I could n't either," said Ronald. "But I 've got twenty-five thousand dollars when I 'm grown up, that my father left me when he died. I could buy Hallie a house for us to live in, an' a pony for us to drive; an' *you* could n't. Besides I 'm thirteen, an' you 're not—yet."

A chuckling laugh behind them pricked the tension of this matrimonial symposium, and Cousin Noah's comic voice sang out teasingly:

"As sure as the grass grows green around the stump
You are my dar-ling su-gar lump!"

They turned blushing, whereupon the ironic wag continued more delightedly: "Matri*mo*ny, is it? I suppose, then, I 'd better get Brother Bone of Shiloh to come and see it 's done right. *But,* if I might ad*vise,* my opinion would be, a night's sleep on the question would n't do a sight of harm."

He twinkled. Then, winking and scratching his ear, he gave a funny little chuckle that caused Hallie, always ready in those days to laugh at herself, and sometimes at others, to break out into a gay twitter.

She slipped down from the fence and ran into the house. David and Ronald followed, receiving on the way more chuckling advice from Cousin Noah, who said that if he could be of any service in getting the license, which would cost two dollars, he would ride over to Foxton to-morrow and *see* the clerk about it.

In doors, where night had fallen, sat Uncle William, between the spinning-wheel and large fireplace, on which a clean-chimneyed lamp glowed. With open Bible and in dark homespun coat, he was preparing for evening prayers. The tall house-clock was ticking in the corner as solitarily and solemnly as an owl blinks, and as if the dispensing of time belonged altogether to itself.

Hallie sat shyly on the linen-chest at Uncle William's left. Cousin Noah by the door still squinted at David and Ronald on the sofa, while Uncle William began to read, to the pagan accompaniment of strident nature voices without.

Now if Destiny does not indeed deal in minutiæ, if she is quite above occupying herself with infinitesimals, there was evidence to the contrary in the passage chosen by Uncle William for that night's reading. For David, who at first sat watching an unfortunate moth beat insatiably toward the lamp flame, was to hear words of a kind never forgotten by the heart into which they once fall. He did not know whose words they were, nor to whom they were being spoken; but quietly

the large gentle lips of Uncle William seemed to be breathing the most sadly beautiful sentences in the world.

"Entreat me not to leave thee," rolled softly forth, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

That tears should, and did, gather in David's eyes at the beautiful words, was not strange; for he had been brought up on the poetic pastoral simplicity of the Great Book. Nor was it strange if he was unaware that Hallie, whose sweetness had so quickly rushed into the lonely places of his small being, saw him, and that *her* lips trembled too; or that Ronald's mouth thereupon had dropped sharply open with suspicious wonder. He was only feeling such a smother of divine yearning as his keenly sensitive young heart had never before known.

After the "Amen" of Uncle William's prayer, he scrambled up from his knees and slipped quickly out to the dark porch to be alone. But Ronald followed.

"What you cryin' for?" demanded the older boy aggressively. "Because you can't have Hallie?"

"I 'm cryin' because it hurts," said David, turning away.

"What hurts?" persisted Ronald.

"I don't know. What Uncle William was readin', an' all that."

"About Naomi an' Mara an' those things? Pooh! You was n't. Only grown-ups cry over the Bible."

David was silent. He felt there was reason for his tears, but not one he could give to the evidently hard-minded Ronald. He did not know that these words had wakened a mingled sense of tenderness and loving sublimity in innumerable breasts, for it was his first experience of such emotions. He only looked away and let the new-found phrases, "Whither thou goest, I will go," and "Thy God shall be my God," play through his heart.

"You *was n't* cryin' about the Bible," repeated Ronald, "but about Hallie. An' we 've got to settle this, an' fair too. I 've got a dollar an' a half—an' here 's my new knife, with four

blades. Take 'em—you just take 'em. But *Hallie 's* got to be mine!"

Why this proffer, which was at least frank enough, made David so angry, he could not have told. Angry he was, however, and his small body began to writhe, as at an insult. Instantly he cried: "She 's *not* yours, and she 's *not* mine! She 's not anybody's! An' you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Ronald Wickham!"

A rumble of approaching wheels—those of Farmer Ledbetter's buggy bringing Aunt Mary home—may have been all that prevented a medieval end to this altercation between the two young apprentices of love. As they ceased, and as the gate was unlatched, Uncle William appeared in the doorway, saying, "Well, Mary, is it you?"

"Yes, William," she answered resignedly, coming up the walk. Then before greeting the children on the outskirts of the door-light, she added, "And this time it *was* too late. Healing was in vain. Mrs. Ledbetter is dead."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" cried Hallie, stricken by this note of tragedy, and running to her.

The healer, seeing the small uplifted face with

its moist eyes, laid her hands on the halo of hair and said: "Dear child, we are glad to have you here, and Ronald too. And David, I know, is gladder. You must teach him much, and maybe learn a little from him. Men make the cities, but God, you know, made the country. That much," she ended, pushing back David's shock of ruddy hair, "your Uncle William and I have taught our boy."

David seized her hand and held it; he wanted to speak. But Uncle William told him words were *one* fruit that would keep, and that 't was bedtime. So candles were lighted and good nights said. Then Hallie, with the glow on her face, was led away by Aunt Mary, while he and Ronald, who were to sleep together, followed.

Without speaking, the two boys washed their feet, slipped out of waists and trousers, snuffed the candles, and climbed into bed. But for Ronald the conflict was not closed. As they lay in the moonlight, he said, "No girl would have a boy who cried about the Bible; not when she 's grown up, anyhow."

David did not answer. With open eyes he was

saying over to himself those words, more beautiful than ever with the moon on them: "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

CHAPTER III

IF David awoke at dawn dreaming that Hallie was telling him that girls did n't like boys who cried because they got their shirts greasy reading the Bible, the week that followed, notwithstanding the fact that it ended with a heroic little tragedy, was a happy one. For Anson farm quickly became a thrilling, enchanted place to its visitors, and therefore to David himself.

To get up in the morning and hurry shoe-less and stocking-less out of doors; to drink in the dawn freshness of bird-song and dew-sparkle; to hear the calves ask for their turn at the milking, and the pigs for theirs at the trough; to see gobbler and rooster with lordly crests lead their hens to spots richest in earthworms; to have Shep come bounding in, dew-wet, from an early rabbit chase in the pasture, and almost knock you down with joyful, affectionate barkings; to be called by Aunt Mary to a breakfast of berries and cream, of bacon, biscuits, and eggs—these were enough

to make even the precociously conjugal Ronald himself forget moods and jealousies learned at a too early age from his elders. Also the children's delight in them caused Cousin Noah to cease to tease as he had about having his wedding suit made of puppy-skin, and to lapse into silent brooding over what, doubtless, was his desire to go to Texas.

After breakfast the joy continued, at the corn-crib, around which, when the horses had been fed, were many cobs with pulpy centers you could stick on the end of a willow switch and throw swirling out into the apple orchard. Rivalry in this popular art was always tempered by Hallie, who not only acted as conscientious judge of the distances thrown, but as enthusiastic admirer.

Then there was hunting for eggs in the hay-loft, an occupation not appreciated by its tenant, the owl, who did n't see why folks could n't do their hunting at night; for what could you see in daytime anyhow? Or there was filling your pockets with apples, and taking the road to the creek, where Hallie always found it fearful sport to brave hissing geese; though David assured her, as he strode boldly ahead, that geese could only

waddle and quack, and would n't hurt anybody.

At the creek, again, there were innumerable joys. You could fish from the bridge; which was n't so much fun either, for Hallie thought it cruel and always ran off to gather flowers and berries while David and Ronald tried their luck. You could wade in the clear, minnow-silvered water behind the weir; though here the sun-flecked face and round straight legs of the little girl would sometimes compel the sensitive David to throw himself on the bank and close his eyes with a yearning quite obscure to his small understanding. You could swing in loops of wild grapevine out over the water, and drop into it while Hallie laughed with bliss. Or, again, the creek banks would lead you far into the bottoms, where wild turkeys would suddenly start up noisily, and tell their young ones to vanish, "before you could say Jack Robinson."

But even better than all these was walking to Boone Harding's cabin on the edge of the woods, where Boone's gun and coonskin cap were to be seen, and where he would tell of conversations that occurred among the wild things he hunted and trapped. For Boone lived alone in the

woods, his wife having run away and left him; and he knew what all the wild things talked about.

"Do possums *really* carry their young on their backs?" asked Hallie on a day that was to bring a most consequential adventure near Boone's. "And do crows *really* talk?" she appealed, with flushed cheeks and eyes that would have kindled imagination in a less fanciful breast than the hunter's.

"Talk?" replied Boone, looking at her with slow absorbing eyes, and gesturing with his open jack-knife. "Talk? Well, now, I 'm obliged to say they do. Why, I come by a camp-meetin' of crows one day last fall in the three big pines just beyond yore Uncle William's corn-field. They 'd been followin' the harvest, them crows had, and was settin' thar solemn in the pine tops. An' if one big presidin' elder of a crow was n't sermonizin' on the subject of how little was left by gleanin' Pharisees, like us, for poor crows to pick up, then a rabbit 's a whale! Yes 'm, he just told his congregation that he did n't believe no such farmer could enter the kingdom of heaven; an' *I* have n't much doubt but what that reverend crow could explain Revelation itself."

"Oh, David, did he? Do you think he *really* did?" cried the wide-eyed ecstatic Hallie. And David, who could see at once crows *were* like certain black-coated Shiloh brethren, said he *thought* they could talk, but he could n't understand them like Boone did. Upon which Ronald said *he* did n't believe crows could say anything but "Caw," and that did n't *mean* anything.

Boone said no more. But that his primitive-mindedness had induced magic in Hallie was evident in what followed. They started home, and Ronald insisted on going a new way. David, who let him have his head in this as in most other things, assented—a forbearance for which the peace-loving Hallie rewarded him with a sudden caress.

As they passed through the cool-hearted woods, Hallie, gathering flowers ahead, came suddenly upon a hornets' nest pendant from a low tree-limb. It hung there humming with the yellow-jacketed inmates, who had doubtless just returned from a day's foray and were not in the best of humors. To Hallie, who cried out and gave it a delightful swing, it was merely another new enchantment.

David, responding to her call of delight, came up and instantly saw the danger; for a country-bred boy learns early that hornets are neighbors who brook no familiarity. Yet before he could warn Hallie not to touch it again one large hornet, sensing indignity to his habitation, hummed out of the door, ahead of his mates, and, after circling a moment, stung the astonished and terrified Hallie on the arm.

As a hundred then swarmed angrily forth, David, in whose heart Hallie's cry of pain had awakened every masculine instinct of protection, shouted, "Run, Hallie, they 're hornets! Run, an' I 'll keep 'm from followin' you, by fightin' 'em."

Not hesitating, Hallie fled, stumbling, terrified, and precipitate, with Ronald at her heels. In doing so they lost the path, though fortunately not the right direction, homeward.

David meanwhile broke off a sassafras branch to protect himself with and began to retreat slowly—and at first successfully—from the zone of danger. Some unusual agitation must, however, have stirred the hornet throng. They began to swarm out in greater numbers and strike with

fierce, though wild, aim at him. But at length one, more accurate, getting through his guard, pierced him between the eyes.

Blinded by the pain of the blow, David dropped the defensive branch to put his hands protectingly over his eyes. Then the tragedy began in earnest. One after another of the little yellow-jacketed free-lances attacked him, piercing ears, scalp, neck, and hands with their small poison rapiers. So fierce was the charge that he was beaten to the ground, where, remembering Ronald's taunt and refusing to cry, he fainted with pain.

Some minutes later halloos, shouted through the woods by Cousin Noah and Uncle William, brought him back to consciousness, and he knew what had occurred. He tried therefore to shout in response, but could not, and so another long five minutes passed before he heard Hallie cry out near him. She had rediscovered a spot near which he was lying and, hurrying up, threw herself down strickenly beside him.

"Well, now, who 'd a-thought it!" exclaimed Cousin Noah, also arriving on the scene. "Who 'd a-thought," he repeated, picking David up tenderly, "that yellow-jackets were regular blood-

thirsty bandits—cousins and brothers to Jesse James himself!"

"But David fought 'em, David did," Hallie avowed, trudging homeward beside Cousin Noah, and realizing instinctively that admiration was a balm which would mollify the pain. "David did n't want 'em to sting me, because I 'm a girl an' cry when I 'm hurt; so he fought 'em, an' did n't cry either."

Against this, David was not proof. His heart softened, and tears began to roll down his cheeks —tears which Ronald, who now came up with Uncle William, watched with wide, welcome eyes.

"I guess," said he, a little later, when he and Hallie stood by David's bed, while Aunt Mary prepared some lotion in the kitchen, "I guess you cry pretty easy, don't you?"

Hallie, seeing the sting, sprang instantly to the defense.

"*I* guess, Mr. Ronald, that you 're a mean boy, an' I won't marry anybody but David, ever!" she cried, and in tears herself ran precipitately from the room.

This of itself would have gone far toward healing David's hurt, but other soothing was to follow.

He woke in the night and beheld Aunt Mary's white figure standing by him. Her lips were moving in the grave cool moonlight, and he knew she was saying the sweet words used in her faith-healing.

He watched her in the shadowy room, and his faith yielded readily to the invisible strength which seemed to be pouring into him. When she turned and vanished through the door, softly as a spirit, he sighed, closed his eyes, and slept long and soundly. In imagination—or in actuality—he had touched the healing hand of the Infinite.

CHAPTER IV

"WELL, now, I thought this was earth, but it appears to me you think it 's heaven, young rooster," said Cousin Noah to David one morning three days later.

David assented. He had been exalted in Hallie's eyes for two days; and chance was to let him be so exalted for three more. His heart was therefore a nest of happy thoughts that hummed as busily as that in the woods. Yet from it, all unknown to him, there was to issue a sting that should shock his elders as completely as the hornets had shocked Hallie, and that should amaze his own mystified and unexpectedly rebellious young soul.

It all concerned Shiloh—and a sermon. Hallie had said, the first Sunday morning she and Ronald spent on the farm: "It feels so different to Saturday. There is n't any Sunday-school an' there 's not any verses to learn, like at home, but you just feel as if everything was in the

Bible—all the birds an' trees an' everything."

David, starched and clean, said it always felt that way to him, too, but he could n't exactly tell why. He knew, to be sure, that on Sundays the roan mare and Gray Pet were not fed early and harnessed for plowing. Instead they came to the corner of the pasture nearest the house and whinneyed gently, as if to ask whether this was not the day they were to be driven to Shiloh; where, be it added, meetin' was held but once a month. He knew also that when you woke up on Sunday the first thing you were likely to hear was not milking or clucking and crowing, but Uncle William on the front porch softly singing "By cool Siloam's shady rill," to the accompanying tap of his foot. Likewise he knew that when you dressed and went out, you found Uncle William arrayed in his black broadcloth suit, and that Aunt Mary would put on her black silk after breakfast, especially if meetin' was to occur that day.

It was not alone those things, however, that gave the Biblical feel to the farm on Sundays, nor was it that Cousin Noah often went away then to Foxton—"Courtin' an' seein' the folks over

there," Boone once hinted. No. It was something you couldn't explain, but which, David affirmed, made the farm seem to get religion.

For the plow, left in a field corner, stood there as holy as a parable. You could almost hear it saying to the wild-cherry leaves, which stirred congregationally overhead, "Behold a sower went forth to sow." Or the muddy hay-wagon, at rest under the shed, seemed to breathe, "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." Or if—David, a little awed, told Hallie—you went up the road to Uncle William's tool-shop where he did all his carpentering, the shavings and saw and plane were sure to begin talking to you of "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, a carpenter," and outside in the elms you would hear a coo which would remind you that "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him."

Hallie, listening to these interpretations, cried: "Oh! it *is* that way, David. Though I guess things don't *mean* to make you feel that way; be-

cause of course the plow, an' doves an' all don't *really* know it 's Sunday.''

Whereupon Ronald broke in to declare that they *did n't* make you feel that way,—you really only *imagined* they did,—and that there was n't any sense in imagining it an' spoilin' all your fun, especially as Uncle William and Aunt Mary did n't *tell* you not to have fun on Sundays.

''But Aunt Mary never tells you *not* to do *anything,*'' answered Hallie. ''You just *feel* you must n't, even if you 're down to the creek or somewheres, an' she 's not lookin'.''

''Well,'' answered the uncomprehending and realistic Ronald, bored by all this mysticism, ''I 'm glad anyhow this is the Sunday there 's church at Shiloh, for Uncle William says I can ride Gray Pet there!''

This announcement, meant to bring envious disappointment to David, who adored riding Gray Pet, was a miscalculation. It but brought him the joyous certainty that he would get to ride to Shiloh on the back seat of the buckboard with Hallie.

A call to them from Aunt Mary, at the mo-

ment, made a reply unnecessary. It bade them leave the oak roots on which they were sitting and get ready for church.

Cousin Noah had just finished saddling Gray Pet, and was harnessing the roan to the buckboard. He winked solemnly when David and Hallie, in unaccustomed hats, climbed into the back seat, and said:

"Now, I don't want to be intrudin' on important affairs, but *if* there 's to be a weddin', I 'll advise you to kind of size up Brother Bone to-day, an' see if he 's the parson you want to perform the ceremony. He 's mighty strong on terrifyin' sermons, an' I don't mind tellin' you *I 'd* prefer another kind of preacher; but then *I* ain't old enough to get married yet."

The rarely used road to Shiloh was rocky and rutted, but it ran between green clusters of alder and walnut, under a sky whose blue would have celestialized the heart of the sorest pessimist. Perhaps too there was something pagan in the azure mood of the day—or was the paganism in David?

Whichever it was, the four-mile ride to Shiloh

held no shadow for him. He forgot Sunday and pointed out to Hallie moccasins coiled on creek banks, or a mother partridge who pretended, when surprised, to have a broken wing—in order to lead people away from her young. Of the humming-birds with iridescent bodies and ruby throats, he confided that he didn't see how God even could make them with wings that beat so fast. Then, with the anti-orthodox spirit growing in him, he added that "even if God *could* make the humming-birds, He oughtn't to have made snakes, like adders and rattlers, that didn't do anybody any good."

When they reached Shiloh, the neighborhood had gathered from all directions. At hitching-posts by the church many buggies, buckboards, and wagons were already standing. Near them unhitched horses and mules switched their tails against the large gadflies.

To a sophisticated city-dweller the owners of the animals, in their unaccustomed best clothes, would have seemed very much like potatoes, carrots, or pumpkins dressed up. They belonged too much to the soil to permit of a bright ribbon or necktie near them; and they eyed the citified

Ronald, who arrived first, with open-mouthed curiosity.

The little frame church, on brick stilts, had a small cupola which was half hidden in surrounding pine branches. A group on the steps before it stopped talking crops to welcome Uncle William and Aunt Mary.

"Good mornin', Brother Anson, an' you, Sister Anson; good mornin'. The Lord has granted us a fine day, shorely," they chimed.

David, Hallie, and Ronald, however, were not formally noticed. Meetings were occasions when children were to be impressed by being solemnly ignored.

"We was speakin' of you, Sister Anson, an' wonderin' if you was goin' to hold another healin' soon," a thin hickory-nut of a man asked reverently as they entered the church; and David, accustomed to hear Aunt Mary addressed almost as a saint, was thrilled to hear her reply that she *was,* on the following Saturday. For healings were great occasions, and he thought how Hallie would delight in seeing one.

He meant to tell her this as they were led to

Uncle William's pew in the "amen corner." But suddenly he had a shock which almost made him unaware where he was, whom he was with, or what he was doing. It was caused by a face in the pulpit with Brother Bone—such a face as he had never before seen.

The new-comer, who, David knew, would preach the sermon, was awesome and terrifying. He was as tall and powerful as a giant born of Jeremiah and the witch of Endor might have been. He had harsh, black hair, black eyes that burned fanatically under blacker brows, whiskers that grew from the sallow hollows of his cheeks up over the bones almost to the eyes, and hairy hands with fingers that hooked like those in pictures of the devil.

Fascinated by antagonistic horror of this person, David became oblivious to all else, even to Hallie. He forgot to sing the hymns, in which he delighted. Flies walking irreverently over Brother Bone's bald spot were unnoticed. Even the chickens and pigs, scratching or rooting under the church floor, and on which you could spit through the cracks if you were skilful, were as nothing to the fateful magnetism of that dark

dogmatic brow. David, as if sensing the immanence of evil, felt within himself for some means of defense.

When the new-comer rose to read his text, the boy was not alone in being profoundly oppressed. A heavy silence through the church made even bird notes without seem to demand reprobation, and the dark stranger, aware of this, looked up momentarily, to shrivel the subdued congregation with his eyes.

"'For a fire is kindled in mine anger,'" he began; and David trembled; "'A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.'" And then, pausing, he closed the large Bible as if by doing so he was shutting sinners up in damnation.

Then he cried in tones that caused David's throat to clutch with emotion:

"Brethren! . . . I have looked into the bowels of hell!"

Again he paused, searching his hearers.

"I have looked into the bowels of hell! . . . And it is laid upon me to tell you of their terror.

"Some of you say that the Spirit of the Lord is with you, that by its aid you can see the golden streets and pearly gates of the new Jerusalem. But I say to you, *Beware!* For the devil is ever ready to deceive you so that you may be lulled into believing that your salvation is sure."

David swallowed hard and looked around. He had heard words like this before, but they had only been words. Now they seemed things, principles, evils that should be denied. Yet no denial came, for all present seemed to shudder with excitement.

"There 's them," continued the dark evangelist, "that look on this world and its joys, that sow their crops on the edge of Gehenna, and expect to reap by pretendin' they have faith. There 's them that think gettin' to heaven is as easy as hoein' a field of potatoes. They enjoy the loves and lusts of this earth and don't smell the hell-fire in 'em."

Once more he paused, and David looked at Aunt Mary and Uncle William.

They were listening quietly and did n't in the least seem to feel, as he did, a hot hatred of the gloomy inveigher—a hatred that surged stifling

up to his heart. The congregation, too, seemed only fascinated with awe; though a few of the young men and girls, who danced and enjoyed themselves at corn-huskings or other rustic feasts, began to get a bit frightened.

"Yes!" shouted the voice again, more powerfully, "I have looked into the bowels of hell, and there I 've seen old men drowning in the lakes of fire, because they could n't let go o' the things of this world that weighted them down; and God was saying, 'Let them drown!'

"I have set eyes on fathers and mothers that had n't built tabernacles for the Gospel, or fed widows and orphans, and they was raisin' up brimstone towers in the pit, on which to climb out and get into heaven. But Christ blew on them all with His breath and they fell back.

"And I 've seen young men and maidens that had wasted their time courtin', when they might 'a' been fortifyin' their soul with the Scriptures against the day of judgment; and the bodies of the young men was fire, and they was huggin' pillars of salt like Lot's wife, and the demons was fannin' the fumes of hell into their faces.

"Yes! and I 've seen children," his eyes swept

around the church until they rested on David, whose unexpectedly aroused hate was beginning to change into rebellion,—"children sent there for lyin' and disobeyin'; for not keepin' the Sabbath day holy, and for goin' to sleep in meetin' when the Gospel was bein' given to them by God-fearin' men. I 've seen children, I say, in the bowels of hell, and their elders was with them," —he looked at Aunt Mary,—"and snakes of flames created by the Almighty, was bitin' and twinin' around their legs."

David started to his feet, but Aunt Mary quietly pushed him back into his seat. As he trembled, strangled, and coughed, the fiery speaker again looked at him.

"Beware!" the frenzied, fanatical voice fiercely continued, and this time the eyes fixed searingly on Aunt Mary. "Beware, you who say lightly that God is mercy and love, while the world is cancered with sin. Beware! For God has almighty hands that clutch the easy hearts of the wicked. God is thunder that deafens those who listen complacently to peace and joy. God is earthquake in the vitals of the happy. God is lightnin' blindin' them that delight in the beauties

of this world. God is a consumin' terror who . . .''

David rose. The indictment, turned as it was thus upon Aunt Mary, who represented all he knew of right, was beyond endurance. Choked by the terrible catalogue of the attributes of God, and driven by an aroused force in him of which he had been ignorant, he clambered across Uncle William into the aisle and cried:

''It 's a lie! God is n't like that! He does n't do that!''

Then he ran dizzily from the church.

When he reached the air outside he was aware of the awe-struck silence in the church behind him, and of how wicked his unexpected and unbelievable outbreak would be considered. This terrified and confused him the more, and so with eyes blinded by tears he hurried through the pines, past the hitching-posts, and on down the road home. His bare feet pattered through the hot dust, his throat choked; but helpless and hopeless he panted on, without stopping, until at last the farm came in sight. When he reached the yard he had no more strength left, but fell exhausted under the oaks.

Then it was that he remembered Hallie. He had disgraced Aunt Mary and Uncle William, but what would Hallie think of him? Had he committed the unpardonable sin? Should he go away at once, and never come back any more? Would she *ever* marry him now?

Two hours later the rest came home and found him there. No word was said to him, a lost soul, but he was lifted up and led into the house.

At dinner still no word was said. Only Ronald looked at him—with the pleasure he might have looked into the cage of a desecrating hyena. Hallie with fallen lids left the table, choking back her sobs. Aunt Mary kept putting her hand to her breast as if she were mortally troubled and hurt, though once she did reach under the table and tenderly touch David's knee.

When dinner was over David wanted to die. He crept out and wandered slowly down to the creek, followed only by Shep with chastened ears and tail. For an hour he gazed at the minnows and wished *he* was one, for he was sure they didn't have to think anything about sin. Then he heard steps, and Hallie, without a word, came and sat down on the weir by him.

Neither spoke for a while; then Hallie said, "I don't like his kind of God either, but it 's in the Bible, and it 's wicked not to believe what 's in the Bible."

As there seemed to be no answer to this, they sat silent, sticking their toes into the soft mud of the creek banks and not looking at each other. When they got up to go home, right and wrong, faith and doubt, were still fighting each other unintelligibly in the boy's breast.

CHAPTER V

"EH? Gone?" David heard Uncle William ask in the dog-trot, when he awoke the next morning. "Gone?"

"Yes, William," said Aunt Mary, whose troubled face David could see through the window as she stood by the dining-room door. "Here 's his letter. I found it in his room, when he was n't up and out at work as usual. He says it 's big out there, and that he 'll soon learn ranchin' and get rich. And he adds that some horses just have to buck and jump fences, and he guesses he 's one o' them. He went right on from Foxton yesterday, I suppose, not telling us good-by."

David leaped out of bed and into his clothes. He understood. Cousin Noah had done it at last! He had run away to Texas! This would be a grief to Aunt Mary and Uncle William surpassing that of his own irreligious rebellion.

By the dining-room door, Uncle William, who

had dropped his wide straw hat and who stood trembling in jeans and suspenders, was reading the letter dumfoundedly. Aunt Mary watched him with a resignation in her eyes that hurt more than Uncle William's pain. It seemed to sadden the very dew sparkling in the sunshine.

David ran to her and taking her hand began to kiss it passionately.

"Child!" she said, looking gently down.

"I didn't mean to be wicked, Aunt Mary," David stammered out, not knowing what to say to comfort her. "If I 'd known Cousin Noah was goin' away, I 'd never, never, never have done it. I 'll tell them all at the healin' that I was wicked and that I believe God *does* do all that about hell. Don't feel bad, Aunt Mary!"

For reply she put her hand on his unruly hair and said: "You 're a good lad, though prone to temptation. Wash your face now, and hands. As for hell, that 's as God wills. We 'd better think of heaven."

Uncle William folded the letter and laid it on the churn top.

"Well, Mary," he said, straightening his shoulders, "Noah 's on the flood now, and he 's

bearin' all the animals of earthly desire in his heart. But there 's Ararat! There 's Ararat!"

After breakfast David hung about until Aunt Mary went to her loom, which he knew to be a refuge for her in times of disquiet.

Then he ran to seek Hallie and Ronald, who were waiting, a little awed, in the front yard.

"I guess she won't have the healin' now," said Hallie sympathetically, "because she 's so troubled. Besides, she looks sick herself."

This had not occurred to David, and for a moment he was startled. Then he said: "She 'll have it, all right, an' she 'll heal better. She always does heal better when she 's worried. Maybe she 'll raise up somebody that 's dead!"

Ronald, whose credulity in such matters did not extend beyond the Bible, which he accepted literally, grew indignant at this imaginativeness.

"But if she can heal people," he exclaimed, "why did n't she keep Cousin Noah from goin' away? If I could make people well, I guess I could make them do whatever I want to."

"An' I guess you don't understand, Mr. Ronald. She does n't *want* to *make* them do anything," interrupted the sage Hallie, who unknowingly had

been absorbing knowledge of Aunt Mary during the weeks of her visit. "An', *besides,* Cousin Noah 's a *grown-up man!*"

Neither this discussion, however, nor the excited anticipation of what was to happen on Saturday, ended here. On the contrary, discussion but led at length to experiment.

They determined to try faith-healing themselves; and Shep, who had stolen off to an impromptu coon-hunt several nights before and had there got a thorn in his foot, was the first patient. They joined hands in a ring about him and, closing their eyes, said a secret prayer—while he licked his foot. The next day,—it was undeniable,—Shep was bounding along as joyfully as ever.

Then it was decided they should try to take a wart off Ronald's neck—a wart he had vainly sought to conceal with his collar. David and Hallie were to lay their hands on the wart, close their eyes, and say a formula. Ronald, somewhat convinced by Shep's quick recovery, was to try hard "to have faith as a grain of mustard seed."

With eyes closed according to instructions, the

prospective beneficiary set to work to get this faith; but in the midst of proceedings he opened them again to say he did n't know what a mustard-seed looked like. To his astonishment, however, exclamation rose on the instant from David and Hallie. They had discovered that the wart had gone before they had touched it! Which, they claimed, was again wonderful. For Ronald had not previously been aware of his infirmity's disappearance.

One more event also happened before Saturday to add to the mystery. They had gone to Boone's to ask *him* about it all, pausing on their way by the wood pools to see tadpoles that were becoming frogs, and staining their lips and clothes with berries gathered in sunny places.

"Faith-healin'?" replied Boone, who was nailing a coonskin—the trophy of the recent hunt—to a sweet-gum tree that shaded his cabin. "Faith-healin'? Well, I reckon it 's as sartain as faith-leadin'; an' I reckon I *know* about *that*. For you see I 've had expurience. I got lost one day down in the bottoms, ten mile from here, an' night come on. I did n't know which direction to take, for there 's bogs in them bottoms. So just when

I stopped to make up my mind, thar in the dark, a big horn owl lit sudden an' silent on a dead limb in front of me. His eyes was as big an' round as you please, an' they was like fox-fire. I says to myself: 'I 'll wait for a sign. If they wink in ten seconds I 'll go to the right, an' if they don't I 'll go to the left.' ''

He paused and looked at his hearers gathered around him in flushed wonder.

"Well," he ended, "they winked, them eyes did, an' I had the faith to go to the right, and in two hours I was home snorin'."

As the healing was to be next morning, the three went to bed early that night, and woke up at dawn, quivering with an excitement it was difficult to keep within proper bounds. David's mood, however, was tempered with a fear whenever he glanced at Aunt Mary. For, though he knew she always fasted and prayed before a healing, he had never before seen quite that look of pale farawayness about her; and, too, she shut herself up in her room.

By nine o'clock the barn and barn lot were full of vehicles, and the front yard and porch held two score of the sick, with their friends and rel-

atives. David, between Hallie and Ronald, went among them, fascinated by tumors and goiters, that distorted cheeks and throats, and by eyes with inflamed swollen lids.

Farmer Ledbetter, recently blinded by drink, it was said, had taken his place doggedly near the porch door, determined to be the first recipient of Aunt Mary's power. Brother Bone's epileptic daughter was just beyond him, bound to her chair. Her nervously twitching lips and bulging eyes were strained anxiously. Farmer Garston's little son, made dumb by a fall from the top of a wood-shed, clung to his father's hand and his soundless lips worked incessantly. But strangest of all was the presence of the dark preacher of Shiloh, who again brought terror and doubt to David's heart. He stood under an oak-tree by the gate, silent, scowling, and approached by none, but watching all with presageful antagonism.

Then Aunt Mary appeared in the living-room doorway. The dark linen dress she wore contrasted strangely with the deepened pallor of her face. David had never been afraid at the healings before, but now his heart seemed to clog. What was wrong?

He held tight to Hallie's hand, which was trembling, as Aunt Mary came forward and passed by the sick one after another. Farmer Ledbetter's blind eyes looked up appealingly, but Aunt Mary, like one in a trance, did not pause. She was murmuring prayers, inwardly preparing for the test.

She stopped first before Farmer Garston's little mute. The child, tense with the emotion he saw around him, looked up into the beautiful sweetness of her face and smiled. She murmured something which ended, "Suffer little children to come unto me." Then, after looking at him intently for a moment, the light of inspiration, which David knew so well, came into her face, and suddenly she cried out, "Speak!"

For a moment the child seemed dazed. Then his lips moved and he said, "I—I can't." After which, realizing that he *had* spoken, he looked uncomprehendingly at the quivering faith-filled faces around him. Then bursting into tears he hid his face from the gaping crowd against his father's knee.

"Oh, David!" cried Hallie, with tears in *her* eyes also, "he did speak; he did!"

But David, still troubled by Aunt Mary's pallor, was watching her move on. She was laying on hands now, which, with the secret sacred words she spoke inwardly, was her usual method of healing. One after another of the sick was touched thus, and told to believe. That none would go home despairing, could be plainly seen by the silent trust on their faces.

Then it was that she came to the dark stranger.

"Friend," she said, "are you here to be healed?"

"Not by mortal hands," he answered with fanatic solemnity.

"Then go in peace," she said, and was moving on when all in the yard heard him utter a thunderous "Stop!"

David dropped Hallie's hand, for Aunt Mary turned.

"Obsessed woman," the hell-fire thunderer then began, "your power is of evil. You raise the young up to blaspheme against the words of God in the tabernacle of the righteous. You call the sick and afflicted here to heal them. But do I not see terror in your own face? Do I not see that

you yourself are afraid of death and of going to the Almighty with sins unforgiven?"

He pointed at her and fixed eyes upon her like hot magnets. She shuddered helplessly.

David wanted to run to her, but he could not move. Then he heard her say confusedly, "My life is in my Lord's hands."

"Your Lord's?" rasped the attacker with wild doubt in his eyes. "Then you shall prove it. Here before this people I shall put you to the test."

He drew nearer as he spoke, and David looked around anxiously for Uncle William, for help. His hatred of last Sunday revived. Were these terrifying doubts and threats again to be cast upon her who was above all human beings in goodness?

"With this I shall put you to the test!" the hot voice again rang; and the fanatical evangelist, tearing open his shirt-front then continued:

"Here on my breast is a cancer—a cancer gotten in the service of the Lord. Heal it, or pretend no more to possess the power of the Lord!"

Those of the sick who were able to move now

gathered around the two who were taking part in this strange drama. Ailments were forgotten in the scene, which seemed that of a conflict between God and the devil; though which would win the glaring accuser's invectives seemed to make doubtful. Only the oak-leaves above the little throng broke the momentary silence with a remote rustle.

"Friend, your healing is not in my hands," Aunt Mary said, and then added numbly: "Nor is my own. May both be in the care of our Maker."

David saw her sway a little as she spoke these words with deepening pallor. Terrified, he broke from his place and ran toward her.

"Aunt Mary!" he cried. "What is it?" And clutching her skirts looked up into her face. But as he did so he saw her bend forward, then sink slowly to the ground.

"Quick!" some voice cried; "she 's stricken; bear her in." Then another muttered, " 'T is this stranger that 's done it."

But by David the stranger was forgotten. He only knew that Aunt Mary—Aunt Mary!—was ill, that perhaps she might be dying.

The little throng in the yard began to dissolve, and its faith to dissolve with it. One was heard to say that he would send a doctor from Foxton; another that he 'd like to send a hangman with him to get that black-hearted hell-howler and string him up. But the "hell-howler," passing through them, mounted his horse, which was hitched at the gate, and, swinging his saddle-bags straight, trotted slowly away.

Outside Aunt Mary's door David sat, not to be moved. Several women had stayed to tend Aunt Mary, and he scanned their faces hopefully as they passed in and out, bearing hot water, mustard, and other simple expedients. At length Hallie came and sat quietly by him, though he hardly knew she had done so.

Noon arrived. Flies buzzed in the hot summer sun, or lit on the rag-carpeted floor. He gazed at them sickly. Then Hallie was led away to dinner, where he half heard low hopeless conversation. He himself would not eat, and could not.

Amid comings and goings from the sick-room, the afternoon waned. Then, after a silence, followed by a strangled sob from Uncle William,

word was brought to him that all was over, that Aunt Mary was dead.

A storm of tears broke from him, fiercely, blindly; and though arms were laid around him, arms that sought to comfort and pity, he beat away their sympathy, broke from them, and rushed into the death-filled room.

"Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary!" he cried, flinging himself down by the side of the bed and seizing the cold hand that lay there. "Aunt Mary!"

They let him alone till he was exhausted. Then Hallie came at length and led him away out of the house, into the orchard.

"I guess," she said with instinctive feminine wisdom, "you're forgettin' about me, David. I want to cry, too,"—her eyes filled,—"but we must n't, because of Uncle William."

They sat down under an apple-tree. A woodpecker perched on a near limb, was driving his beak into a ripe red winesap. Hallie watched a moment, then got up and gathered several of the most tempting of the fallen apples in her skirt. Coming back, she sat down, put one into David's hand and began to eat.

CHAPTER VI

THE night before the funeral, David, Hallie and Ronald again sat on the front fence, and watched heat lightning play its spectral game in the northeast. Sheet after sheet etched the trees and horizon with momentary floods of flaring phosphorescence.

But, unable to talk, they soon went to bed, where David was awakened several hours later by heavy thunder, lightning, and rain. They made him feel very small and lonesome, and so, almost without knowing what he did, he got up trembling and went into the room where Aunt Mary was "laid out." The watchers gently led his white shuddering figure back to bed.

The funeral procession which followed Aunt Mary's body to the bleak home burial-ground on a near hill wore wraps and bore umbrellas. When it reached the dripping melancholy pines and cedars of the burial-place, the grave was found to be half filled with water and had to be

baled out. Among chill mossy tombs of the family's other departed ones, David watched this with numb horror. It seemed to him as if each one of the solemn evergreen trees above the tombs had absorbed some spirit of the dead.

Then, almost in a state of trance, he saw the coffin lowered and heard voices around him singing:

"Go bury thy sorrow,
The world hath its share."

The sound of the hymn and the scent of the funeral roses and lilies were like the stifling presence of death itself.

After all was over, food was set out for the mourners—food that for the second time in his life was utterly hateful to David. Even Hallie, partaking of it, seemed for the moment a coarse and heartless creature.

He waited on the front porch, therefore, and while he did so a rider drew up at the gate. It was Jeb Jayson with a telegram sent out from Foxton.

"Message to your Uncle William, from his

brother George, sonny," said Jeb, through a tobacco-stained beard and mustache. "He directs that his boy and gal be sent home at once."

As the old man passed on to the dining-room David's knees weakened, and he sat down on the edge of the porch. Hallie was to be taken from him now—Hallie too! The farm around seemed but a stretch of rainy hopelessness which would henceforth be eternalized.

A hen, stepping high and pecking proudly, walked close up to him, followed by a red-combed, feather-legged rooster, who suddenly crowed. Then Hallie came out, and, when she saw David's face, threw away her bread and jam—to the voracious satisfaction of the self-important fowls. She sat down beside him, distressed but unexpectedly shy.

"I—I guess *I 'll* die too, when you 're gone," David said.

For a moment Hallie did not speak but sat turning a little gold ring on her finger. Then she took it off and put it on David's hand and, after squeezing his arm, ran back into the house with brimming eyes.

The guests, having eaten well, went away.

Hallie and Ronald then packed, and the following morning the buckboard was brought around. David watched both get into it. Uncle William was to take them to Foxton where they were to be met and cared for the rest of the way home. Ronald's evident delight in going pricked David with a pang of jealousy.

"Good by, David!" said Hallie, "till you come to our house to go to school."

"Good-by, Hallie," replied David, through a sore lump in his throat.

He watched them out of sight.

And often, during the next four years before he was to see her again, did he climb up on the gate-post and look in the direction of their going. Indeed, it was only there that he could believe Hallie had ever been to Anson farm—only there he felt he should one day follow and find her.

To be sure, letters came to him for a time—letters that told of city play and parties, about which he knew nothing. He tried to answer, but his awkward attempts to do so caused him finally to desist, and so her letters, too, ceased coming. Ronald wrote but once, to tell him that he had won a prize for mathematics in school.

It was this news which set David to reading and studying. Each day in the winter he rode Gray Pet to Foxton and took his place in the little red brick school. There, in Professor Haines, his teacher, he soon found a friend whose small library was to prove a romantic gateway into the marvelous realms of the past.

At night after the cattle were fed he and Uncle William sat before the fire, the latter reading his Bible, while David pored first over his lessons, then later over the few great masters of literature the country teacher's shelves provided. Scott and Bulwer, Burns and Tennyson, were among these, and the reading of each was like a pilgrimage into wondrous magical lands, whence he brought back transfiguring memories.

In spring, summer, and autumn there was more work on the farm—much more, now that Aunt Mary was gone. Harrowing and mowing, plowing and pruning, harvesting and threshing, had to be done, with only Sundays at Shiloh, or days off for an occasional hunt, swim, or circus at Foxton.

Nor did the glowing book-fountain of romance David had discovered, a fountain so dear to the

isolation of early adolescence, always compensate him with drafts of unmixed joy. There were discouraging hours when poetry and chivalry seemed realms to which Hallie was native, but to which he, on the small homely farm, must always be an alien.

Unrest and yearning began, therefore, to grow in him the third year, and after a while they became at times very perturbing. To Uncle William, who had dropped into the groove of his loss, and who plodded along equably and silently, all this ferment was invisible. He would doubtless have been surprised had he known that David was less content than himself; for he had long ago forgotten that the young want the desires of to-day, not death and its long-looked-for hereafter.

Yet this was to change. For the sorest tragedy of Uncle William's days, a tragedy now near, was to bring the opportunity David craved. Cousin Noah, after shifting about in the West, had bought a small ranch near San Antonio and intended settling. For the last two years, however, his letters had been anything but settled. They had grown increasingly Western in tone,

and from time to time had intimately mentioned a certain Mrs. Hickson, the wife of his next-door neighbor. To a more sophisticated mind than Uncle William's, not only drink but dubious vagaries would have been manifest in them.

" 'T was three years ago she died," said Uncle William at breakfast on the anniversary of the morning the calamity befell. "I reckon I 'll not work to-day, but go over to Foxton and see if there 's any news from Noah. Finish plowing the tobacco, lad; then sharpen the scythe if there 's any time."

He went, in weather-worn homespun coat, on the mare; and David meanwhile harnessed Gray Pet for the plowing.

An hour later, as the boy swung on to the handles of the plow and sought with his honest young strength to keep a straight furrow, he paused near the Foxton road to kill an adder coiled in the fence-corner. While he did so, he asked, as he had asked himself on another morning four years ago, "Why does God make adders, anyhow?" But not finding an answer now, as then, he was about to turn to his plow again, when in amazement he beheld Uncle William returning

from Foxton with a haste which could only bode something tragic.

"She 's dead! It 's Hallie! Hallie 's dead!" was the thought that first leaped into David's mind. But when Uncle William reached him he knew that even a darker wing than Death's had brushed the age-worn face.

"Come to the house," the old man said, hurrying past; and David, quickly releasing Gray Pet from the plow, obeyed.

On the porch he found Uncle William, bewildered, spent, and overwhelmed. With an agony that only the simple and righteous can know, he had sunk into a chance chair and was holding an open letter in his hands.

"From Noah—your Cousin Noah," he moaned. "He—he has committed murder."

David took the soiled letter and read its ill-formed words.

I was in love with her [they ran] and she was the same with me. Hickson did n't care for her, and when he and I were drinking together he 'd say so. Then one night he came home sudden and I was kissing her. He started to draw, but I was quicker and shot him

through the heart. Then she went wild and give me up to the rangers, and now I 'm in prison. My trial 's in October; and unless you sell out and come help me fight, the gallows has got me. I know this is awful, but I don't want to go to hell because of self-murder, and you are my only chance. If mother was alive she could save me. I ought n't never to have left home.

Uncle William rose, unconscious of the tears that were running down David's cheeks.

"Get your clothes, son," he said. "I 'll leave the farm to be sold, and take you part way to your Uncle George before I start out toward Texas."

David, spell-bound, did what things he could before night, his last night on the farm, came. Then after supper, while Uncle William was at his accounts, he walked in the twilight to his old haunts. The creek was very lonely. A mocking-bird, oblivious that life held anything but music, sang in the top of a sycamore. The corn-crib was even lonelier, and its golden ears shut between the bars, brought up Cousin Noah's face.

He returned to the house, trying not to be happy at the thought of again seeing Hallie. It

seemed cruel to be so, and he was not yet old enough and worldly enough to be indifferently cruel in such things.

"Good night, Uncle William," he said, as he entered the living-room and was passing to go to bed.

The old man turned, lifted hexagonal steel-rimmed glasses to his forehead, and gazed at him.

"Eh, lad, the future," he said; then, looking down, shook his head. David waited a moment, then slipped away.

In the morning the two, after Mammy Caroline was given the keys to house and barn, left her weeping. Then, getting into the buckboard, they drove away without looking back.

CHAPTER VII

YOUTHFUL expectation can build a paradise in the midst of misery, as David now began to do. Yet on parting from Uncle William at the Foxton station next day this paradise seemed suddenly to crumble round him. His thoughts of Hallie had for three years been like migratory birds, coming and going, but the presence of Uncle William had been like a permanent shelter for his whole life. Past, present, and future, therefore, suddenly became desolate, as the time of parting drew near.

"You one way, lad, and I that other," said Uncle William, for good-by, "but to the Lord a thousand years are as a day." And suddenly the simple words made the separation terrible and inconsolable to David. He wanted to leap from the car as the train started, and run back to that which was bearing Uncle William westward.

Relief only came to him when the train smoke,

blowing cinders into his eyes, gave him an excuse for wet lids. Soon controlling himself, however, he brushed away the dust from the new clothes bought for his appearance in the city and sat very tense. He was like a young sapling whose roots, dug up, were being cruelly exposed to the air.

But adventure was before him, and David was adventuresome. Soon therefore the telegraph-poles, swinging long festoons of wires backward against fields and skies, brought soothing monotony, then an interest in the new world he was approaching and in his fellow-passengers.

Across the aisle from him sat a youth, his own age, dressed in the skin-tight trousers and pointed shoes of the day. He was continually buying—out of restlessness, or because of superfluous money in his pocket—the newsboy's apples, peanuts, and glass pistols of candy. Two dirty children in front of him constantly left their mother's bedraggled skirts to watch him do so, with envious eyes and finger-filled mouths.

Being handsome, gregarious, and bored, this youth looked at David and said with the sophistication of a commercial traveler:

"Goin' to Mertonville? Damn slow train we 're on. This road 's bum."

"I don't know much about trains," David answered. "My Uncle lives in Riverton. I 'm going there. He lives on a street called Barrett Avenue."

"Oh, jugs!" exclaimed the other, looking David over with a more critical interest and crossing the aisle to a seat beside him. "Barrett Avenue? That *is* rum. I live there myself. And, say," he blurted out with unintentional good-natured intimacy, "my girl does too. She 's a daisy; prettier 'n the lot down at Nashville where I 've been visitin'."

As David had no reply for this, his companion continued: "What 's your name? Mine 's Chester Morgan. My father owns the cotton-mills in Riverton—three of 'em."

He lit a cigarette adultly.

"David Anson 's mine," answered David. "I 've been living in the country with my Uncle, but now—"

"Ho, crickee!" interrupted the youth by him, again looking him over. "David Anson? Then I know you; you 're her cousin. Oh, pies!"

"Whose cousin?" inquired David, to whom the unexpected psychology of this revelation was not clear. "I 've only got one cousin, and another who 's only a sort of cousin. His name 's Ronald."

A brakesman entering ended this conversation with "Mertonville! Change here for the Riverton boat!" And David, who was to finish his journey by boat, not by the newly constructed railway, got up hurriedly and nodded good-by.

The small Riverton steamer, on which he and a score of other passengers embarked, wound to and fro in her tortuous efforts to avoid low-water sand-bars, as did his thought in avoiding Chester Morgan's evident meaning that Hallie was his "girl." But where the steamer succeeded he failed. With a thud his heart grounded on the thought that Hallie *might* be another's. He remembered that she had sent no letter to the farm for a year and a half; and as he looked over the steamer's side at the sandy yellow water he felt very downhearted and miserable.

The steeples and chimneys of Riverton, which appeared as the steamer at last rounded a wooded

bend, did much to dissipate these sick-hearted doubts, and David's imagination became busy with what was awaiting him. He had never before seen a city,—even so small a one as Riverton,—and excitement tingled tensely in his veins.

On the levee, which was piled with bales and hogsheads of cotton and tobacco, Uncle George and Hallie met him. Uncle George was large, jovial, and stylishly dressed, style being a jocular concession, it was known, to Aunt Sylvia's desire to be and do the smart thing. He gave Hallie, a white figure of inexpressible appeal and loveliness, time to say, shyly and somewhat formally, "How do you do, David," then he was all eruptive geniality.

"Well, well," he began, busily leading the way to a waiting carriage. "So you 've come to tackle Goliath, young giant-killer? You 've come to slay the city and take its brazen breastplate for a trophy? What kind of a sling have you brought along for the job, eh? A good brain in your head, and a brave heart in your ribs?" Then, as they reached the carriage, he called to its driver, "Here, Zeke, take Master David's valise, you ape, and get along home with us."

Up the cobbled levee they drove, and through streets of homes, churches, and public buildings strange to David, and confusing, because Hallie sat non-committally by him. Uncle George, however, continued to talk gaily, doubtless divining the boy's loneliness and uncertainty.

"That, my lad, is Trinity Church," he said, noticing David's eye follow a graceful Gothic spire to its gilded cross. "We worship there. Across is a deserted Baptist college which this skeptical daughter of mine denies is haunted by ghostly baptizers who don't like these dancing Episcopalians."

"Oh, Papa!" Hallie protested.

"Truth, my dear!" avowed Uncle George gravely. "Can't let this young giant-jumping nephew of mine come to town without warning him of the perils."

A moment later Zeke reined up, and David saw Aunt Sylvia and Ronald waiting, with indifferent curiosity, to greet him—the former in a gown of gauzy white becoming to her petitely pretty face and wavy blond hair.

"He 'll do very well," she said, scanning David's face, which was offered for her kiss, then

kissing him perfunctorily. "But," she added, critically viewing his clothes, "these won't do, George. Get him some city things to-morrow. His mother left him enough money to dress right while he 's getting his education here."

Uncle George said, "Tut, tut!" a bit impatiently, and David flushed self-consciously. Since encountering Chester Morgan, he had been somewhat dubious of the suitability of his Foxton purchases, but he was far from liking this way of being made aware of it.

"He can have my old ones till he gets him some others," said Ronald condescendingly.

Hallie crimsoned. She had shrunk with embarrassment at her mother's tactlessness, but this was too much.

"You don't look over-handsome in *yours*, Ronald," she flashed angrily. And David, exultantly though restrainedly grateful, remembered another night long ago when she had thus championed him in embarrassment.

"Well, folks," said Uncle George, whose eyes twinkled at this attack of Hallie's, "steak smells better than woolens. Let the boy wash up and *feed* up; then there 'll be time to talk of *duding* up."

So all were soon at table, where hunger excused their rather unsuccessful efforts at conversation.

In the moonlight, on the large side porch of the house, which, with its spacious yard, stood on a corner, the three young people sat after supper while Aunt Sylvia and Uncle George went to pay a call. There was constraint between them —the constraint which four years of separation and adolescence made natural. Only Ronald was talkative, explaining somewhat boastfully the nature of his new trick-bicycle, the second of its kind to be seen in Riverton.

"Chester Morgan got the first," Ronald ended. "And, say, if you 're still gone on Hallie, you ought to know that he 's her beau, and his father 's the richest man in Riverton. Hallie 's stuck on him, too, but she won't say so."

Hallie looked at Ronald scornfully, but did not reply. After a little she rose, shrugged her slender young shoulders, and went into the house.

A few leaves fell from the August trees. A lighted street-car—an object new to David—was drawn electrically past, its trolley spraying the darkness above with vivid green sparks. Then Ronald exclaimed peevishly:

"You can't tell anything about her any more, she 's gotten so silly and grown-up. But she *is* stuck on Chester Morgan, all the same; you 'll see."

David was silent. Coming to Riverton to find Hallie changed, or that she had indeed been won by another, was too much for him. He almost wished himself back at the farm with but expectations and illusions.

"I 'm rather ready for bed," he said, lonely and depressed.

"At nine o'clock?" Ronald protested indifferently. "Well, your room 's on the third floor. But I suppose I 'd better show you."

David, following, was taught how to light the room. Then, after being bidden a bored good night and left alone, he sat down by his window, which overlooked back yard and stable.

The moon floated fleecily to westward, where, not far away, was the river. The city's summer noises and the occasional sound of a steamer's whistle, prolonged as she made for the wharf, plunged him into sadness. All the lonely inexpressible sense of beginning life in a new place flowed to his heart. What did it all mean? Why

did he yearn so? What did he want—and what could he get?

From the moon came no answer; yet quietly she poured nepenthean silver into his veins until loneliness became heavy drowsiness. Then, half-unconsciously getting out of his clothes, he was soon in bed and asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

"WELL, lad, sit down and make the acquaintance of that cantaloup," said Uncle George, as all gathered for breakfast next morning.

The tone was as ripe, with cheerful kindness, as the cantaloup itself, and would have regaled a lonelier heart than David's. Uncle George, at least, was not a stranger, but was only a brisk, humorous, jovial Uncle William.

Aunt Sylvia, however, was different. David, who knew that her first marriage had brought her money, soon discovered that her one ambition was to emulate the style of wealthier neighbors. Social sophistications, therefore, which were wholly unknown on the farm, were of the most astonishing importance. Not, for instance, to dip your spoon away from you at table, and not to rise when a lady left the room, were infractions of laws more serious than the ten commandments. For the commandments came only

from Sinai, while this code came from Newport —or Paris.

It was inevitable that David, living in such a house, should make mistakes. As inevitable, too, was it that his mistakes should cause Hallie to blush, Ronald to giggle, and Uncle George to indulge in robust railleries. That Aunt Sylvia was, as he heard her say, "mortified to death by them," also made him sensitively apologetic. Not even her passion for dress, for a game called "progressive euchre," and for novel reading seemed wholly to soothe her.

But what troubled David more than this mortification for his ignorance was Aunt Sylvia's way of watching him and Hallie whenever they were together, and of saying coolly when Hallie offered some ready defense of his deficiencies, "Never mind, Hallie, your father and I have charge of David." He saw also that she seemed to enjoy making game of his slight rusticities before Hallie—when Uncle George was not present. Why she did this he was unable to fathom.

At high school, which he and Ronald attended, matters were simpler, for he quickly made friends with heterogeneous groups of American, Jewish,

and German pupils. Yet on the first rainy days of autumn memories of the farm crept over him, and he felt as strange amid all the unaccustomed faces as the "Caucasian" *looked* in the picture of racial types there on the illustrated wall-map. His homesickness, thus accentuated, was acute.

But on the bright days there was laughter out of doors at recess, and, after school, games of shinny, hum-bum, and foot-ball. Then, when the leaves began to fall, there were glorious bonfires to pile and kindle at night amid singing and hilarity.

Those fires, on October evenings, with the quiet moon floating up behind the church steeple on the corner, and with excited happy boy and girl faces grouped about them, were what David most liked. For Hallie, who went to Miss Dix's private school, and whom Aunt Sylvia would not often permit to "go with the boys," was often present; or, if not Hallie, then—be it confessed—*other* girls.

Chief among the latter was Emma Magee, who, with reddish hair and not as yet beautiful features, nevertheless possessed a body of such alluring shapeliness, and eyes so warm, intimate, and

laughing, as to enthrall David from the moment he met her. Despite the charge of boldness these characteristics brought upon her, his senses were soon stirring in a way entirely new to him.

"Come on with *me!*" she would call to him laughingly at the bonfires. And, having offered a handle of her basket for gathering leaves, she would be off up the leaf-strewn street, always to some darkly shaded nook of it. There they would gaily fill the basket between them, and as often as their hands touched in doing so she would look at him with provocative pleasure.

That he should soon reach out to clasp her, breathing, "Emma," was inevitable. But always she would pull elusively away, laughing, and answer, "No, you 're in love with your Cousin Hallie. Come on!" And back again to the group she would go, drawing him reluctantly after her.

In the circle around the fires, however, her tantalizing continued. She always managed to be next to him, with her hand in his, when the gay ring formed under the glowing shades of maple and sycamore. And especially so when

she saw that Hallie, aware of this fact, would quit the circle—or not join it at all.

The first climax of this growing intimacy between the two was precipitated, on the night of the last of these bonfires, by Aunt Sylvia herself—though with entire unawareness that she was having the good fortune to do so.

"I was at the Morgans' to-day," she said at supper, after having appeared to wait particularly for a moment of silence. "Chester, I 'm told, does n't like the preparatory school to which he was sent, so he 's coming home on the twentieth."

She paused and looked around to observe the effect of this, especially on Hallie.

"Too strict for him?" chuckled Uncle George questioningly. "Or too much money in his pocket to get knowledge into his head?"

Aunt Sylvia, to whom money was a topic not to be lightly spoken of, continued, ignoringly:

"They are to give him a large party on Hallowe'en—a cotillion. The favors are to be quite unusual. You, Hallie, and Ronald, are invited."

Hallie, who saw David's hurt, humiliated look, at once exclaimed, "But, Mother—!" and would

not, perhaps, have let an embarrassed second thought prevent her from saying more had not the mulatto maid, Jane, entered to clear away the meat course.

Uncle George, however, plunged disregardingly into the breach, though with an assumption of gaiety that concealed anger.

"A cotillion?" he echoed. "Well, well! Then we 'll have to introduce David to Terpsichore. We 'll have to dress him up like Bobby Shaftoe."

With indifferent serenity, Aunt Sylvia, as if unaware of Uncle George's kindly pretense, replied, "David does n't dance, my dear, so he 's not invited."

"But, surely,"—and manifest anger vibrated now under the level of Uncle George's voice,—"surely you reminded Mrs. Morgan—?"

Aunt Sylvia rang the small silver bell by her. It brought the mulatto in again. "Jane," she said, "the cake."

Amid the silence that followed, David swallowed his dessert, and then, excusing himself, left the room, though a pleading look from Hallie made him hesitate. In the hall he seized his cap and ran quickly out to the bonfire makers.

Emma, on the watch, left the group and came with exuberant greetings toward him.

"*Da*-vid! *Hel*-lo!" she called, Then as he did not answer, and as coming up she saw the hurt look in his eyes, she asked softly, "*What 's* the matter?"

He half turned away, biting his lips, and pushed together a little pile of leaves with his foot.

"Nothing," he muttered resentfully.

"There is! You know there is!" she exclaimed, taking hold of his waistcoat pocket engagingly. Then, as he continued silent, she drew her hand away with a sudden shrewd instinct, and cried: "I know! It 's the Morgan party! You 're not invited!"

David looked up quickly.

"*I 'm* not, either," she continued, slipping her hand into his. "*We 're* not stylish enough at our house. *We* live on a side street." Then tossing her alluring head she ended: "But, pooh! Who cares? Come on, let 's get some more leaves!"

A sudden, sweet, reckless desire swept away David's sense of injury and of Hallie—a desire that seemed to promise compensation. With the

basket between them they were soon at the shadowed spot of the street, when Emma, her breathless young bosom rising and falling, looked at him with warm, gay, summoning eyes.

Hidden from the arc-light at the corner they stood so for a palpitant moment. Then the girl suddenly, passionately threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, only to break away again, swiftly, before he could clasp her.

"Emma!"

All the ardor of his senses surged in the appeal. But she put up the basket as a teasing barrier between them.

"No, you want Hallie," she laughed, holding him off. "But you won't get her. Not you! Don't you see your Aunt Sylvia means to marry her to Chester Morgan, who 's got *oodles* of money?"

A comprehension, such as shocks us with the immensity of our previous stupidity, overwhelmed David. Aunt Sylvia was suddenly explicable now: her mockery of his mistakes; her irritation with him; her not letting Hallie see him. And Hallie's not infrequent aloofness and for-

mality also seemed but an assenting to her mother's plans.

"Come on!" cried Emma again, this time to scatter his thoughts. And, catching his arm, she pressed it to her breast before again taking up the basket to draw him away.

As they ran back to the leaf-gathering group, David's legs felt like pith under him. But a reckless pride came to his rescue, and soon he was laughing, shouting and leaping through the kindled flames with the most coltishly displayful of his companions.

Nor did he care when Hallie, among them, saw his madness and the glances passing between him and Emma. Even her slipping away from the circle and going indoors but increased his abandon. For now he wanted but one thing: for the flames to die down, for the apples to be snatched from the fire and eaten, and then for himself and Emma to be alone again and close to each other in the darkness.

When they were so, this time in the vestibule of her mother's cottage, a small brick abode on a narrow street, they stepped back into the

shadow; and the kisses he had meditated along the way were given with an awakening embrace. All Emma's soft surrendered body was against him, and the fragrant autumn sadness seemed to enclose both in a mist of ecstasy.

Upon leaving her he hurried home and slipped unseen to his room. There he sat long in a state of dreamy desire, unconsciously watching veil after veil of cloud slip away from the naked beauty of the moon.

CHAPTER IX

THE bodily uneasiness of infatuate seventeen is ever mixed with a similar uneasiness of mind and conscience. Associated as it is with the thought of mating for life, an entangling sense of danger and doubt are ever present. No intoxication of kisses and caresses can quite hush the unsafe stir of the future in them.

It was unconsciously so with David when his eyes opened next morning on the neatly furnished third-floor room which was his, but which contained nothing long familiar except two faded daguerreotypes of Aunt Mary and Uncle William. As his look fell on them he had a sudden hunger to be safely back at the farm, with its corn-stocked fields and creek-wound bottoms. A sharp thought of Cousin Noah, whose restlessness had led him to go away and get into that tragic Texas trouble, also crossed his mind.

Having washed and dressed himself languorously, he started down-stairs to breakfast. On

the second-floor landing, which was outside Aunt Sylvia's room,—"boudoir," she called it,—he paused to struggle with a yet unmastered four-in-hand tie. In the room he heard voices.

"You mean," Aunt Sylvia was saying, "that you will take him on *that* night?"

"I do, my dear," Uncle George replied with suave determination. "You 've made it necessary. And as he 's never seen a play his education in that respect may as well begin."

"But at Hallie's expense?" exclaimed Aunt Sylvia in the spoiled petulant tone David had come to associate with her wilfulness. "You know how important it is, George, for Hallie's sake, for us to be at the Morgans'. Everybody of consequence will be there."

"Well, I should n't say everybody," David heard Uncle George reply with unruffled equanimity. "A few of us, who are not swells,—or toadies,—may manage to survive elsewhere."

"It 's disgusting." retorted Aunt Sylvia angrily. "And it 's merely done to spite me. But I warn you, George, I 'll not go alone. I 'll ask Kenneth Graham to take me."

"Better not, my dear," a slightly colder answer

came. "Beware of old flames that are not burnt out. For, though Graham is our dear rector, his cloth would not protect you in this."

What Aunt Sylvia answered, David, suddenly aware that he was eavesdropping, did not wait to hear, but, shocked, hurried away down the stairs. Such boldness as Aunt Sylvia threatened was unknown in Foxton, though not in Riverton. But *would* she dare it? Surely not. Yet he thought of Cousin Noah again, and entered the dining-room disturbed and unhappy.

He found Hallie there, flushed and charmingly indignant, facing Ronald. One clenched hand was on her breast, and the other held a letter behind her. Ronald, trying to reach it, was taunting, through his narrow nose: "I say, David, she 's got a letter, a love-letter, from Chester Morgan. He wants her to let him have ten dances at his party. Ten! I bet you he does!"

Hallie pushed him away. Her eyes, darker since those far-away days on the farm, and her abundant hair, twined in a soft Psyche knot on her head, gave her a half-womanly dignity.

"Why not tell David something that interests him?" she replied. And this unexpected girlish

effort to imply that she knew how fully David was preoccupied with other attractions left him quite fatally unable to answer.

Uncle George, entering briskly at the moment with the morning paper in his hand, increased the besetting complexity.

"Well, early birds!" he chuckled cheerily, "here 's good luck for some of us. Keene and his company play 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Grand on Hallowe'en. *I* give a theater-party to those who have n't any other engagements. Speak up! Who 'll go?"

He did not look at David. But perhaps Hallie guessed the purpose behind his quizzical kindness, for, kindling, she cried: "Oh, Papa, can't I go? Can't I stay away from the Morgan party? You *know* I 'd rather be with you and—"

She broke off embarrassed and looked at David, who had choked with the realization of Uncle George's purpose, but who did not know what to say.

"Well, well?" urged Uncle George, "any other bids?"

"Could n't it be another night?" David asked, seeing Ronald's sullen disappointment, and re-

membering Aunt Sylvia's threat. Half the joy, too, would be in going with Hallie.

" 'Fraid not," Uncle George averred, with firm jocularity. "It 's too bad the majority of this happy household are committed to society and the swells on that night, but the minority must make the best of it."

"But I 'd *rather* go with you, Papa," said Hallie, sensing a slight bitterness and sadness behind his light words. "You *know* I would. Only mamma—"

"Quite so, my ewe lamb," Uncle George replied, taking hold of her little ears and lifting her face up to his. "But there 's to be no division under this roof-tree—only a difference of plans, for practical purposes. David therefore may choose some one else to go with us."

"Then it 's a free ticket for Emma Magee," gibed Ronald. "She 's the turtle-dove he 's cooing to now."

David's lips framed an angry repudiation of this, especially as Hallie looked at him half expectantly under wistful lashes. Perhaps, too, such a denial would have broken once and for all the net of difficulties which was enmeshing him.

Aunt Sylvia, entering at this juncture, ordered breakfast and thus prevented him from speaking. Then, before he realized it, Hallie, having finished breakfast, was off for school, and he did not get a single word alone with her.

So do what seem to be crucial moments come to us, quite confusedly and unexpectedly. Though in this instance Romance also stepped in that day to commit David's aroused senses fatally to the choice he was on the point of denying.

Reaching school late, he hurried to his desk, which was the second behind Emma's. As he took his seat, she looked back with the intimate memory of last night in her eyes. He tried to evade its attraction, but each time he raised an eye from his books during the class hours, his glance wandered to soft wisps of amber hair on a soft neck, to a budding shapely body, or to an alluring curve of ankle slipped out into the aisle. So despite his efforts, the languorous, uneasy yearning of last night again took possession of him.

When it chanced therefore that Emma, just before the noon hour and against the rules of the school, tossed back a note to him which read,

"Was n't it *sweet?*" he succumbed and tossed her a reply which fell under the sharp eye of Miss Elson, their teacher.

"Emma Magee, what is that? Bring it here!" rang out suddenly.

Then Romance, as mentioned, played her part. She inspired Emma to crumple the paper, to thrust it into her mouth, and, in full defiance of consequences, to swallow it!

The heroism of this wholly captured David's heart. For his sense-craving, already keen, only needed the stimulus of glamourous admiration to dispel doubt and hesitancy from his mind. In the thrill of it Hallie was forgotten. The feeling of half-guilty remembrance with which he had awakened no longer tinged the blissfulness of last night's kisses. Desire, sublimated into an illusion of love, became poetry without discord.

"It was just great, Emma!" he told her as they walked home after school. "And of course we 're engaged. I want you to go to the theater with me and Uncle George on Hallowe'en to see 'Romeo and Juliet.' He 's going to take us."

Emma looked up at him.

"And you love me better than Hallie?" she

asked, quickly taking advantage of the opportunity which had fallen like ripe fruit into her hands.

Hesitation overspread David's heart, but he yielded. He had not thought of the matter in those terms, and to say he liked *anybody* better than Hallie seemed half sacrilegious. But, as he chanced, on looking down the street, to behold Hallie walking with the newly returned Chester Morgan, he felt absolved of disloyalty.

In the shabby little parlor of Emma's home, a room of horsehair furniture and crass lithographs, his avowal was renewed. With his arms around her, and with lips warmed by her kisses, he exclaimed, as they talked of Chester and Hallie and the Morgan party:

"We don't care! We 've got each other! We 're sweethearts, Emma, and we 'll stick to each other, and that 's better than anything else. It 's better than all the money in the world. And you 're pretty. And we 'll never get tired of each other, and of loving each other, will we?"

Emma's answer was to lay her cheek against his. And so he continued his protestations of their sufficiency to each other, seeking thus, per-

haps, to overcome by very intensity a subconscious uneasiness. It seemed to him, as it will to young passion honestly desiring to be love, that he would be willing to live with Emma on a desert island. That *her* pleasure-loving soul might prefer a more enticing if less exclusively amative abode did not occur to him.

On his way home he was still ecstatic. He meant to tell Uncle George, the first thing, that he had asked *Emma* to go to their theater-party. But when he entered the house he saw Uncle George standing motionless by the library fireplace, with his back to the door.

Eager to be bold for the girl who had been so bold for him, he went in and said, though with some embarrassment: "Uncle George, I want to tell you—"

He got no further, for Uncle George turned, and his face, usually so gaily buoyant, was pale and grave. In his hand was a letter.

Neither spoke for a moment, while David looked at the letter, at Uncle George's face, at the books in the glass case around the wall,—books that David meant to read one day,—and then at the steel engravings of Abraham Lincoln and George

Washington hanging solemnly on the walls.

"David," Uncle George said at length, moistening his lips and motioning David to shut the door behind him, "I have had a letter from your Uncle William. Your Cousin Noah's trial for the murder of that Texan with whose wife he was intimate has resulted badly. I knew nothing of it until to-day. Noah has been sentenced to hang in thirty days."

If the words had been a noose suddenly thrown around David's own neck, he could not have cried out with more horror and distress, or sunk to a chair more helplessly. Told by Uncle William to say nothing about the murder,—since all might come well,—he had kept it for the most part out of mind. Now a sudden realization of the terrible consequence was not only overwhelming, but it somehow seemed to link himself and Emma together as Cousin Noah and that woman were linked.

"It is the fruit of passion," he heard Uncle George continue hopelessly. "Men indulge themselves to their ruin. . . . I 've mentioned the matter to you because your Uncle William wants you to know, to understand. I must go to him to-

morrow. We 'll not tell your Aunt Sylvia and the rest. A family trouble, like this, would—would upset her."

After saying, "Yes, Uncle George," David waited a moment, then rose and went strickenly up to his room. There, in the dark, he groped across to the edge of his bed and sat down. Imagination took possession of him, bringing before his eyes a figure swaying darkly on a gallows at dawn; and as it swayed he kept hearing the word "passion"—which he began to comprehend.

When the supper bell rang, he stumbled downstairs, but could not eat. He had once seen a public hanging at Foxton, and the black-capped body dangling in air got between him and every mouthful.

With drawn, miserable face he left the table and went into the library. Hallie, declaring she was not hungry, followed—a proceding which did not escape Aunt Sylvia.

"What 's the matter, David?" the girl asked with anxious sympathy.

He did not answer for a space, or look at her. When he did a sudden unreasonable resentfulness against her seized him. He wanted to pun-

ish her for being with Chester Morgan that afternoon, for withholding herself from him; and he wanted this the more because he wanted—Emma!

Yes, notwithstanding his sickening sense of the horror of Cousin Noah's fate, he wanted Emma, wholly, desperately, hungrily. Indeed, so unequivocal was his desire that it seemed to him that Hallie must be aware of it. But he did n't care. He turned abruptly and left her standing there, hurt and motionless.

CHAPTER X

THE next morning was Saturday, the day of the Morgan party. At breakfast Hallie did not look at him, or speak. But, as the only need he felt was to get away from both her and Emma to himself, this did n't matter.

After breakfast he sent a note to Emma canceling the theater-party. Then leaving the house by the side door, he sought Westview Park and the river,—as he had often, in times of perturbation, sought the banks of the creek.

Nor did the running water lack its accustomed power of alleviation. In the afternoon he found himself more composed, if more melancholy, by the levee, and getting aboard a tug he rode to the lower end of the city.

His way home at twilight lay through the factory and cotton-mill district, then along Garden street, which, in polite Riverton society, was never mentioned before the young or between the sexes.

Such streets, fascinating or fearful, are the measure of civilization's progress or failure in all cities of the world.

At the gate of one of the houses he was passing, a girl called invitingly to him. Oblivious of his surroundings he did not at first understand. But when he saw her bold, pretty, yet all-too-characteristic face, he blushed, shook his head, and hurried on. Yet the incident re-awoke imaginative desire in him; and his accustomed impulse to chastity, an impulse he had got indirectly from biblical training,—for direct teaching of the young in such matters was then taboo,—grew weak and seemed almost foolish.

He reached home at supper-time and found all in a buzz of preparation for the party. Hallie's hair had been "done" for the occasion; and Ronald displayed new pumps and dress clothes, for he was to escort to the Morgans' a swell "new" girl, Violet Vernon, whose father, evidently wealthy, had recently moved to Riverton from New York. He was consequently in high favor with Aunt Sylvia.

When the latter, preceding Ronald, went upstairs to dress, Hallie, who lingered behind, said

with averted eyes, "I wish *you* were going to the party, too, David."

The conflicting emotions of the day again stirred in David, and his lips trembled.

"I don't want to go," he said bitterly. Then he added: "I wish I was a million miles away from here. I wish I was back at the farm where I was happy. You were happy there, too, and if we could go back there again— Oh, Hallie, let 's go back! Let 's run away and get married before —before— Let 's run away! Uncle William has n't sold the farm yet. He 'd let us live on it."

Hallie, startled and frightened by such wild words, could only breathe, "We—we can't, David; you know we can't." Then she turned and escaped through the library door.

Three quarters of an hour later, after David had seen her float gauzily down to be driven away by Chester Morgan himself, he would perhaps have gone up-stairs to his books had not the bell rung immediately to admit the Rev. Kenneth Graham. That gentleman, elegant, ingratiating, and Episcopal, was soon greeted intimately by Aunt Sylvia, and, being given a wrap to throw

around her shoulders, managed to do so with a manifest caress.

David looked after them in disgust.

"She 's done it!" he said aloud. "While Uncle George is away!" Then he left his chair in the darkened library and wandered into the hall, lonely and disturbed.

Too restless to work, he thought of going to Emma's on the chance of getting to see her. Then he decided he would not, that he would go to "Romeo and Juliet," for which he had enough money to purchase a seat in the gallery.

Without more ado, or without even brushing his ruffled hair, he crammed on his hat and went out. The stars, webbed in bare branches of the trees, shone appealingly pure and beautiful; but he saw only the ephemeral theater lights ahead, and moth-like he hurried to their flame. With ticket bought he climbed the long outer flight of steps to the gallery, and groped his way down to a seat in the front row.

The gilded, romantic trappings of the proscenium fascinated him so much for the first few minutes that he did not recognize the girl next him as being the one who had called to him as he

passed her in the afternoon. A less preoccupied observer would hardly have failed, as he did, to see that, though rouged and defiant, her dark eyes held a poetic yearning which her sordid experience had not as yet quenched.

David had never read "Romeo and Juliet," though he had learned something of its tenor from Uncle George. But from that night Shakspere was to become his literary god. So absolutely and instantly did he fall under the spell of the play's magic that when, after its second scene of incomparable beauty, the girl next him asked bewilderingly, "Say, what 's it all about?" he could not at first find words to answer. But, in doing so, he recognized her, though she showed no evidence of remembering him.

After the balcony scene,—which enchanted David unimaginably,—he heard his companion, now also enthralled, breathe with almost bitter ecstasy, "My God! that was pretty!"

He turned. Their eyes met. The glamour, the illusion, the romantic glow of the story did away with reality and bridged the gulf between them.

Thrill after thrill of beauty followed for them: the asceticism of *Friar Lawrence's* cell, which

but accents the headlong passion of the young *Romeo; Juliet's* chamber, with its rope ladder, sleeping potion, and moon-lit prescience of peril; the pallid apothecary's shop at Mantua.

David—and with him the girl—surrendered to the immortal magic that swept them into a world which excluded all but the illusions of love. They unconsciously leaned nearer to each other; their knees and arms touched. The past life of his companion had evidently dropped away from her, as did his world of Hallie, Uncle George, Aunt Sylvia, and even Emma. When they had seen *Romeo* enter *Juliet's* tomb with crowbar and lantern, when the final baleful tragedy had been enacted, they were still too sublimated by the spell to separate, and descended the stairs into the night together.

At the exit on a side street, David, half-awaking to his position, hesitated. But the girl held to the intoxication of her illusions with vehemence.

"Where you goin'?" she asked, as he started to turn away. "Ain't you gonna see me home?"

He let her lead him along the water front in the direction of Garden Street. They did not speak. The bent moon—which, he remembered,

Aunt Mary had once called a shaving from God's workshop—hung sad on the horizon. A lighted stern-wheel steamer, paddling resonantly down-stream, was announcing her arrival with a long mellow whistle. As she swung around to make a landing, with bow up-stream, her lapping waves came to shore like love whispers.

David suddenly stopped.

"I can't go on," he said, ungracious and abashed. "I 've got to go back."

With a bitterness of shame rather than resentment, the girl, who had told him her name was Daisy, exclaimed: "Why? What you 'fraid of? Ain't I good enough?"

The strong and peculiar appeal her life represented, together with his repugnance to it, left David unable to answer. He hung his head while she continued:

"Aw come on! That show done me up. I wanta talk some more about it with you. Don't you wanta come? Don't you like me?"

The demand, half fierce and sullen, was wistful and pathetic. Her manifest dread of being repulsed caused David, half yielding, to say:

"I like you lots, and I think you 're pretty, too.

But I don't want to go when we 're not lovers or —or anything.''

''Lovers!'' cried Daisy, with a sudden choke in her throat, and tears in her eyes; ''I can't never have a real lover, like that *Romeo*. I can only—''

She looked up with desperate, inarticulate bitterness at the house ahead.

''Maybe,'' said David, his heart a turmoil of guilt, desire, and pity, ''maybe you 'll find one. Maybe somebody will come along. I—I hope so. But I must go back. I—I—good night!''

He walked quickly, insecurely away. But, turning at the corner, he saw her still standing there in the shadow, mute and motionless, and was seized of an impulse to go back. And why should n't he? Was n't it mean to leave her, if she felt like that? He did n't love her, and there ought to be love, he knew; and, too, he was engaged to Emma. But were other people so scrupulous? Did n't Aunt Sylvia want Hallie to marry Chester Morgan, whether she loved him or not? And had n't Aunt Sylvia herself looked at Mr. Graham as if—?

Hurrying faster he reached Barrett Avenue,

where fallen leaves rustled mournfully under his feet. Scenes, lines, and colors of the play, recurring to him, began to mingle with his thoughts of Daisy. Across them, however, as he reached Trinity Church corner, came a stark memory of the dark-faced stranger at Shiloh, who had railed against the lusts of the flesh that Sunday long ago.

Did he rail so, David suddenly wondered, because *he* was fighting strong desires himself? Did everybody have to fight that way? If so, God had certainly made a queer world.

Across from the church corner he paused. The steeple, a steel-gray shadow against the starry blue of the sky, rose tapering and still. David, who had once climbed up inside of it to the top, felt a religious awe at the remembrance of the view the height had offered.

When home was in sight he realized how late it was and that he would have to slip in by the side door very quietly. Skirting the front porch, which was screened by a clump of foliage, he was suddenly brought to a stop by hearing low voices above him.

"Can you blame me, dear Sylvia?" one asked,

with tender ecclesiastical intonation. "Being with you to-night is—is like Dante's finding *Beatrice* in purgatory."

"You must n't say that, Kenneth," fell the answer, more in invitation than in reproof.

"But I must," the intoner ingratiatingly avowed, "because it 's true. A rector like myself receives many attentions from the ladies of his parish. But believe me, my dear, I have thought only of you. Your husband is a good fellow—well-meaning, no doubt; but *his* love—"

"I married him," Aunt Sylvia broke in with self-pitying resignation, "because he was *good.* My first husband was a brute, Kenneth; you know that. And of course you are the only— But we must n't talk here of what might have been. George does n't understand me, as you would. I like position and style, and I don't care who knows it. But you must go now; you really must."

The hand she held out was clasped ardently, as David, peering through the bushes, could see.

"Well, perhaps we can't turn back the years, my dear Sylvia, and make it otherwise. But at least kiss me, once, before I go."

David was hardly able to restrain the "No!"

that rushed to his lips. He could only stand overwhelmed as the pair stepped back under the shadow of the porch.

"I ought n't to have let you do that, Kenneth," he then heard Aunt Sylvia breathe. "You must go now, at once. Hallie will be wondering."

"Then good night, my beautiful one," said Mr. Graham, and releasing her hand went down the walk to the gate, while Aunt Sylvia stole around to the front door, which closed softly behind her.

Shocked, angry for Uncle George's sake, and sensuously overwrought, David wanted to laugh. Young people must be circumspect; they were solemnly taught to be. But older ones, even preachers, even Aunt Sylvia, Uncle George's wife, could—!

He leaned against the wall of the house. He was suddenly very weary and disillusioned, though his pulse throbbed feverishly with excitement and unsatisfied craving. Everything seemed permeated and changed by what he had experienced during the last few hours, and his imagination was strained. The stars, through fringing tree limbs, burned like the eyes of *Juliet,* of Emma, of Daisy.

The wind was but a want, an ache, that blew upon him.

For a space he stood thus, shivering, and emotionally exhausted; then he crept quietly into the house and up to his room. Into the alembic of his being had been poured elements that brew life's deepest uncertainties.

CHAPTER XI

FOR weeks after his introduction to Shakspere, David's besetting thought was "to be or not to be" alone with Emma. He was impatient because Mrs. Magee, a buxom widow who spent much of her time "window-shopping" or in imagining how much better she would look in other women's fineries than they, had made it a rule that Emma should not "have any boys calling at night." Yet this gave the afternoons, when David walked home from school with Emma, a peril that a little more care on Mrs. Magee's part might have prevented.

Their walk home usually led them past the Venus Gardens, Riverton's substitute for vaudeville in pre-vaudeville days, and a source of anxiety to many fond parents with promising, or unpromising, sons. Of German, beer-drinking origin, its "abandoned" music and skirt-abandoning "artists" exerted a glamour of temptation almost irresistible to the youths of the town.

"Look, David!" cried Emma one afternoon as they approached the place. "Who 's that with the crowd around him? It 's Chester Morgan! What 's he doing? Why, I believe he 's drunk!"

David, walking very close to Emma and seriously pondering whether getting married would n't be better than getting an education, unwillingly looked. Her excitement and loose, delighted curiosity with the scene was an interruption keenly displeasing to him.

Nevertheless the much-besought heir to the Riverton Cotton-Mills *was* in front of the forbidden Gardens, and *was* very bibulously happy. His rakish hat and collar were as libertine in appearance as himself, and one hand held a roll of bills which he was magnificently dispensing to those around him, or tossing up to be scrambled for. Fifty feet beyond was Violet Vernon, watching the scene with contemptuous sophistication, and with her was Ronald.

As David and Emma also paused, the inebriated young man caught sight of them and evidently felt quite large enough to extend the sphere of his benefactions.

"I shay," he called." "You David Anson,

come an' get some money. Got plenty of it, an' let her come too, Emma Magee. My mother did n't 'vite you to my p-party. But I got money, an' I 'vite you to have some."

Emma laughed and shook her head in her provocative way. But David, flushing, said with dignity: "We don't want any of your money. And you—you ought to go home."

"Wh-why don' you want any?" insisted Chester, who with a walking-stick in his other hand importantly made a way through his companions to where David and Emma stood. "Wh-why don't you? Money 's a' right. An' shay, I, I 'm stuck on your cousin, an' I can g-give it away to the fambly, if I want to."

Emma laughed again at the grinning face. But David, at the mention of Hallie, had become tremulous with indignant anger and shame.

"You ought n't to talk about my cousin, when—when you 're this way!" he stammered. "I won't let you!"

" 'Cause you 're in love with 'er yourself?" grinned Chester, pleased with the scene he was providing, and with his part in it. "Well, I 'm in love with *your* girl, too," he added, and leaned

over uncertainly in an effort to kiss Emma on the cheek.

There was a burst of delight from his companions at this, and Emma, though she stepped back, was not averse to the conspicuous attention. But David, a male with a too light mate, roughly pushed Chester off with suppressed rage and cried, "Get away!"

Chester, just sufficiently intoxicated to be flattered by Emma's unobjecting attitude and to be violently emboldened by it, responded: "Won't get away! Get away y'self, giant-killer!" and with raised stick he struck David across the cheek.

Perhaps it would have been as well if David's self-control, strained during the last few weeks by all the forces of adolescence, had given way here. A good fight might have released the turmoil of incomprehensible desire that had harassed his heart since the night of "Romeo and Juliet." But, though pale with rage, he merely snatched the stick from Chester's hand; then, when all were anticipating a stinging return of the blow, broke it on his knee and flung it in the gutter.

"You 're drunk," he said. "I won't hit you because you don't know what you 're doing.

Your friends ought to get you home." Then turning to Emma, who was still enjoying the sensation of the contest in which her attractions were concerned, he grasped her arm and led her away.

There was audible giggling behind them as they moved on, and mocking, half-abashed "wows!" But, as they came to where Violet Vernon stood with Ronald, the former, whom David had not met, said with the admiring nonchalance of an aesthete:

"That was clever of you, Mr. Anson. I 'm Miss Vernon. The Morgan boy is too fresh."

David blushed his thanks. It made him want consoling praise from Emma, too, for her attitude during the affair had not been satisfactory. She ought n't, he thought, to have laughed that way. Yet her very wantonness in doing so was more provocative of a craving, hitherto controlled, to make her so much his as to preclude such conduct in the future.

Neither spoke until Emma's gate was reached; then she said, looking meaningly at him:

"Mother 's not at home. She said she 'd be down-town late, buying a hat."

He followed her, with throbbing comprehension, into the small shuttered parlor. There, on a low horsehair sofa, ineffectually disguised by a crocheted cover, they sat down.

"What 's the matter?" she asked, but with a tone that told well enough that she knew, and that she knew how to dispel his gloom. "Are you mad because he wanted to kiss me? Don't you want anybody even to *want* to kiss me but you?"

He did n't, so that *was* part of the matter. But the sense of her tantalizing closeness, always difficult to resist since the night he fled from Daisy, was more so. He made a half-instinctive effort to escape it by leaning over with his face in his hands, but there, against his own, was her engaging ankle.

"David," she said yieldingly; and as he looked up into her eyes it was not hard to see that she knew his thought, or that the embrace which followed revealed a craving that met his own.

"We—we ought to be married, Emma," he said, when he could speak. "We love each other. I want us to be."

She smiled into his feverish eyes, and again pressed her yielding lips to his.

"If we could have each other now," he continued thickly, "you 'd be mine always, and I 'd be yours. It would make us belong to each other. Then neither of us would care for anybody else —for any other boy or girl. We 'd be satisfied with each other."

The old logic of passion!—which might have sounded less convincing had Mrs. Magee been in the house. But to the two young people alone in a darkened parlor, and in each other's arms, it was irrefutable. . . . When therefore David was leaving, half an hour later, his faith in it bravely continued.

"Now that we are just the same as married," he said, "it won't be so hard for us. We 'll be each other's, and when I 'm twenty-one and have finished college we 'll get married in church and have a little home of our own."

Emma listened lightly. That she regarded this ardent talk merely as the sentimental trimming of their adventure, and that the future was not concerning her, did not occur to David. Only

when he looked back from the gate and met her undisturbed smile did the first pang of doubt and guilt go through him. He didn't exactly want her to feel that they had done wrong, but somehow it would have seemed more befitting if she had been unhappy or solemnly exalted, like himself.

At the supper-table he was alternately self-conscious, perturbed, or distracted. He would look up suddenly out of his thoughts as if he felt that some one had guessed what had happened. A dawning realization of the period of waiting until he and Emma could really marry—in church—also began to oppress him down a vista of difficulties. What, for instance, would he do when he was away at college? And Emma, whose mother, in limited circumstances, would want her to marry early—what would Emma do about going with other boys, or men? What, too, would Hallie think, if *she* knew? . . . Feverishness that had not left him now for days was on the point of becoming real fever in his veins.

When Aunt Sylvia, at the close of the meal, said, "Light the fire in the parlor, Jane; I 'm expecting company," he would not, perhaps, have

noticed the assumption of indifference in the remark but for his own uneasy secret.

"Who 's coming, Mamma?" asked Hallie, as they all went from the table into the library, where she sat down by David.

"Only Mr. Graham, my dear," replied Aunt Sylvia, as if bored with the prospect. "He wishes to consult me about a bazaar at the church for the King's Daughters."

As the look Hallie gave her was not reassuring, she told Ronald she wished to see him up-stairs, and left David and Hallie alone, a thing she had never done before.

The two got school-books and sat for half an hour, feigning to concentrate, but secretly stealing glances at each other across the table. When, however, the door-bell rang and the sleek rector had been shown into the parlor, Hallie said, frowning:

"I don't like him to come here. I wish he 'd stay away!"

David, also frowning but chastened by a disturbed realization of his hour with Emma, declared with parched lips that he did n't either, and that Mr. Graham was an old hypocrite.

"I heard what you said to Chester Morgan," Hallie next murmured, blushing, but not lifting her eyes. "Thank you for not letting him talk about me—when he was that way."

The tenderness of her tone made David suddenly gulp hard to hold down a sob of emotion. It moved him as it did on the day when, after his guilty irreverence at Shiloh, she had come to him on the creek bank. Was it too late to fall down there penitently on his knees and tell her all he felt?

A key, inserted in the front door lock, caused both to look up before he could speak. To their astonishment the door opened to admit Uncle George and a dusty, but characteristically generous-looking, valise.

"Papa!" exclaimed Hallie, scattering books and pencils away to run and fling her arms about his neck. "You did n't let us know!"

"Nope, nope!" Uncle George agreed with a gaiety not wholly divested of shadow. "Meant to give you a surprise, my chick. It 's good for the complexion, you know, good for the complexion."

Then, leaving off pinching her cheek, he asked,

"But where 's your mother?" and shook hands with David, into whose quivering, questioning eyes he looked sadly.

The parlor door, which was closed, opened, and Aunt Sylvia appeared. The look of confusion on her face was strongly reflected on that of Mr. Graham behind her.

"You *are* provoking, George!" she exclaimed, kissing him with abashed petulance. "You go away without telling me why, and return without writing or telegraphing me when to expect you."

"Quite so, my dear, quite so!" the ironic jocularity of Uncle George's answer came. "I 'm a wicked husband."

He coolly scrutinized both her and Mr. Graham, whose hand he did not offer to shake.

"But now," he continued, "I 'll reform and tell you, especially as it may be of particular interest to a—shepherd of souls."

He was looking straight at Mr. Graham, who appeared less than comfortable. David's hot brow chilled.

"You may remember, Sylvia, that my brother William had a son, Noah, who went to Texas to make his fortune. Well, I 'm afraid that, instead,

he got into wild habits—having, I fancy, few ecclesiastical influences to guide him. He began, I 'm told, to pay attentions to the wife of a neighbor, on the ranch next his. A pretty woman, Mr. Graham, but vain, I fear, vain. A type, however, that would interest you—of course, as a clergyman."

David, poignantly fascinated, saw that Hallie, too, was trembling.

"Well, he was with her one night," Uncle George went on. "They were drinking, and her husband found them in each other's arms. As pistols are a part of costumes in that vicinity, the result was inevitable. My nephew, being quicker, shot—and in fact killed—the lady's husband."

David saw that Mr. Graham thought he ought to speak, but that, like Aunt Sylvia, he was unable to.

"Murder, Mr. Graham." pursued Uncle George; "it was murder. And I 'm sorry," he finished, to Aunt Sylvia, "to tell *you,* my dear, that five days ago the murderer was hanged for his crime!"

"Oh, Uncle George!" David broke out, unbearably horrified and distressed. Then he tried to control himself. But he found that he could not,

that, dizzy, sick, overwhelmed with the tragedy, which he had been unable to sever from his own love-experience, he was sinking down to the floor.

"Why, boy!" Uncle George said apologetically bending over David, whose presence, and Hallie's, he had doubtless forgotten. "Why, dear, dear! What 's this?" Then, aware of the lad's hot hands, "Fever? Tut, tut! This won't do."

Lifted and led to the couch in the library, David declared that he was all right, that it was only the suddenness of hearing about Cousin Noah, whom he loved, which upset him. To which Uncle George, busily feeling his pulse, replied:

"Quite so, quite so. But you just lie still. We must have some physic in, a big nasty dose. I 'll go for Dr. Dunby myself."

He took up his hat.

"Sylvia," he turned to say coldly, "get the boy's bed ready immediately." To Mr. Graham, whom he then bowed out, "You, sir, will excuse our little domestic upset. No, no, we need no assistance. We 'll get along. Hallie will take care of David for the moment."

He went out through the door, after the rector. Aunt Sylvia, as if glad of an excuse to es-

cape, hurried up-stairs. Hallie, whom the scene had shocked to paleness, drew a chair up to the couch.

"Poor Cousin Noah," she said, and her eyes filled consolingly.

David burned with hotter shame at this consolation, which he felt that Hallie, forgetting herself, was giving because she thought his distress was due only to his grief for Cousin Noah. He shook his head miserably.

"Never mind," she said, taking his hand timidly. Then added, as if his suffering eyes wrung her to regret, "Oh, David, I won't have Chester Morgan for a sweetheart any more, if—if you don't want me to."

This was the last straw for overwrought David. For such a declaration to come too late, after all his passion, doubt, and remorse, after Aunt Sylvia's disloyalties, and Cousin Noah's terrible death, was too much! He felt that he was unfairly caught in a net of fatality, and he was bitterly ready to think that Emma had thrown the net.

He saw Hallie's face change as she waited for him to speak, but speak he could not. He could

only let go of the little hand he clutched, and turn his face to the wall.

Not until he knew that she had got up and moved away did he realize how unspeakably hurt and humiliated she must be.

"Hallie!" he groaned, and would quickly have flung himself from the couch at her feet had not Aunt Sylvia come in to say that his bed was ready if he could get up to it.

Holding to the banisters, dizzy with anguish of body and mind, he dragged himself up to his room, refusing help. There, before Dr. Dunby arrived, he succumbed, and his fever rapidly increased to the point of delirium.

For a week his mind tossed with his body on the sea of distraught adolescence. The names of Hallie and Emma were like ports at which his storm-swept desires could find no anchor.

Then one morning, after a quiet night, during which the first snow of the year had fallen, he awoke. His fever was gone, as if under the cool coming of the white flakes which lay on the world without. He looked at the snow, at the calm uniformed nurse standing by the window, and asked for a drink of water.

CHAPTER XII

DAVID was not often alone with Emma during the weeks that followed, for winter, a "white one," and winter festivities, took precedence over all else in Riverton. Snow followed snow, and sleet packed each down as if with intent to make it permanent, until the place was like a city of the Ice King in which old and young held happy revels.

On street and pavement there was skating to school, or even to business. The adventurous had, also, delicious danger along the way; for trees, ice-sheathed, were as tricky creations of polar gnomes, from which hung glistening boughs that might at any time crack and shatter down.

The river, a mile wide, froze over. Steamers, ice-bound and smokeless, hibernated at the wharves. Hunters, booted and furred, thronged across to the other shore to shoot wild ducks. Down the motionless ice to the hills on the city's edge went hilarious coasters. Finally, sleigh-bells,

which made every day sound Christmasy, and sleighing parties ending in dances, gave rhythm to the nights.

A novitiate at these parties, David nevertheless soon found himself not only a part of them but timidly popular with the merry-makers. Though he was still but an overgrown boy of seventeen, his mind was truly beginning to awaken, and an indefinable promise in his steel-gray eyes, under their shock of chestnut hair, pleased even the critical. At an evening given by Violet Vernon, no less a person than that exclusive young lady herself taught him to dance.

This popularity, however, brought penalties. It gave Emma, not seriously jealous but rather flattered, an excuse to indulge a promiscuous inclination to flirt. Even Ronald, never fascinating to the other sex, was favored, which brought a protest from David that led to recriminations.

"You let them hold you," David constrainedly accused, "not just as if you were dancing, but as if you liked being in their arms!"

"And didn't you like to have Violet in your arms?" retorted Emma. "Hallie evidently

thought so. When she saw the way you rushed Violet, she let Chester Morgan dance with her again, though he *had* talked that way about her at the Venus Gardens."

Not convinced or deceived by this, David was silenced. He said no more, especially as any mention of Hallie now sufficed momentarily to subdue him. Moreover, on this, as on other occasions, Emma evidently found it pleasanter to tantalize and subjugate him with her physical charms than with words. At her door she surrendered herself completely to his caresses; then quickly, and as if impelled by some coyness, escaped from his arms into the house. With disturbed senses, and feeling that she was supremely necessary to him,—far more so than he to her,—he turned away. He thought himself hopelessly and finally in love, Hallie notwithstanding, and began to seek honestly to idealize his passion and bring Emma into line with those ideals.

When spring came, turbulently warm and alluring, he found ease from all these sensations amid growing things. He would walk alone into the country and recall how Aunt Mary, with a basket for "herbs" on her arm, would take him out into

the woods and fields and reveal what was going on.

She would tell him that spring was resurrection time and that a voice was running under the earth and crying, "Rise from the dead!" That the sleeping sap heard, woke, and began to mount to tree buds. That roots of grass and flowers listened and faintly stirred with a forgotten delight. That seeds, sheathed like Lazarus, and laid away in the tomb of earth, began to break their covering and come forth alive into the air. His imagination, requickened by such remembrance, brought hours of peace and incipient aspiration. He would return home pondering some way of getting Emma to share these thoughts with him.

The floating loveliness of Trinity steeple, casually beheld on a return from one of these nature renewals, seemed to suggest such a way. Tapering up to its golden cross against the pale blue of afternoon, it awakened in him a sudden desire to be thrilled again by the panorama seen from its radiant height. And with the desire came the thought of having Emma enjoy the glory with him! Up there he might make her understand better what love ought to be.

Following his impulse he hurried back, with high innocent purpose, to secure from Ephraim, the friendly colored janitor, permission for his project. But on nearing the church corner he beheld a joyous group of boys and girls, dallying in the spring sunlight, and among them Emma, laughing amid the banter about her, and plying all the arts of youthful enticement.

When she saw him she detached herself from the group, with a demonstrative welcome, and ran to meet him. There were jeers behind her, together with snatches of the Lohengrin wedding march, and such cries as "Has he bought the ring? Does it fit?" But Emma only waved a light hand laughingly back, and drew him to a flight of the church's steps fifty feet away.

"Where 've you been?" she asked, giving him ardent eyes.

David told her, describing with emotion the beauty of the country. Then he revealed his plan.

"The steeple!" she exclaimed, entering into the dubious venture with delight. "Gorgeous! We 'll go to-morrow!"

The enthusiastic abandon of her acceptance somewhat dashed David's hope of making her

take love a little more seriously and loftily. Nevertheless at the appointed hour the next afternoon, they met, and, eschewing permission, slipped into the resoundingly empty church.

Tiptoeing through to the steeple's narrow door of strong oak in the rear vestry, they unlocked it and mounted steep stairs to a passageway over the large auditorium, whose space was doubly impressive when looked down upon through the main light-vaults. From this passageway they began to mount other stairs, which, together with ladders, led past weather-stained windows and shutters, to the steeple's high trap-door two hundred feet from the ground.

At a landing half-way up, Emma, aglow with delight in the forbidden, paused panting. Then as she looked at David, she cast herself with a sudden ecstatic endearment into his arms.

They were thrillingly alone, with only the mating coo of pigeons in the shuttered spaces below or above them, but David remembered his purpose, and said huskily, after a moment, "We 'd better go on."

They climbed the last ladder and came to the trap-door, which, unlatched, swung open with a

creak and revealed the verdant sparkling vision before them. The delirious rapture of it swept over them, bearing the breath of spring.

"Oh!" cried Emma in transport. "Oh!" And, from a narrow beam forming a seat, she gazed out over the emerald circle of earth between sky and water.

"It 's like paradise!" she continued.

This was what David hoped for. Now was the chance for his appeal.

"Emma," he began, "we *could* have a paradise, just you and me with our love, if—"

"If what?"

"If we only—"

"Only what?"

He could not frame the right argument for his moral suasion. After a moment, therefore, he merely exclaimed yearningly, "Oh, I wish we could live up here alone, always!"

It was again the old note of passion, aware of the tests to which life would put it, and foresensing unhappiness and separation unless there is escape into some safe "solitude for two." David felt, also, some prescience of the *nearness* of this unhappiness, though Emma, he saw, was

wholly unaware of it. Chattering little ecstasies of excitement, she exclaimed upon the appearance of the world below; of houses dwarfed to toys, people to ants, boats on the river to cockles. There was no use, David saw, in even trying to discuss ideal love at such a moment.

But she did not forget to draw his arm around her, as she chattered, and so they sat till sunset approached. Then, satisfied with stolen delight, she exclaimed:

"It 's been fine, but we 'd better go down. Mother 'll be wondering. We 'll come again—lots of times!"

Descending quickly to the passageway over the auditorium, they soon reached the oak door which had admitted them, but which, notwithstanding they had left it open, was closed. David, though with a sudden sinking of the heart, thought it was only stuck, and tried to force it, but soon found this vain. Somebody, Ephraim perhaps, had locked the door, and they were shut in!

For a little while they stood thus in the dark, abashed. Then David said helplessly, "We 've got to call," and began not only to do so, but to pound on the door.

As this proved of no avail, they gave it up after half an hour and sat down desperately on the steps. They were in for it.

"Jeminy!" then came from Emma, querulous and accusing. "We 've *got* to get out!"

"But we can't!" David answered with a note of fatalism that angered her.

"Well, we can't stay here all night!" she retorted. "Mother 'll have the whole police force looking for us. She 'll go to your Uncle George. She 'll ask *everybody* if they 've seen us. The whole town will hear, and there 'll be an awful mess. I know her!"

David could not deny this. And what scandalized Riverton tongues would say of two young people who had spent the night in a church steeple was imaginable. The religious community especially would be shocked, and indignant beyond measure. And Hallie . . . Hallie would inevitably hear the story, without its attenuating circumstances. She would say nothing, but he could see her ashamed and averted eyes.

Emma's chagrin, however, was by this time changing to recklessness. She now exclaimed with bravado:

"Well, I don't care! If we 're caught, we 're caught." She laughed sullenly.

"If we could only find some way for *me* to take the blame," David said, beginning to plan how they should meet the situation when morning should bring it to a head. But after long discussion none was to be found, and so they gave it up and made ready to pass the night, Emma with her head resting on David's folded coat.

The night went, Emma sleeping, save for an occasional stir of unrest, but David hardly losing consciousness until just before dawn. For after what seemed to him but a fraction of time both were suddenly startled from slumber by the sound of voices in the vestry.

Emma immediately and without thought got up and began to call and to beat on the locked door.

A moment of silence ensued; then a hysterical scream came from the other side—a wail of mingled relief and anger. The door, hastily unlocked, was thrown open and revealed to their blinking eyes Mrs. Magee, Uncle George, Mr. Graham, and two policemen.

Under looks of scrutinizing reprobation the

two came forth without a word. Then Mrs. Magee demonstrated that Emma had in no wise misrepresented her. She sank upon a chair and gave herself over to a melodramatic outburst of rage and tears.

"He 's compromised my daughter!" she accused. "He ought to be arrested! He got her to go up there. He can't deny it. His people ought to send him to a reform school! Because they 've got money is n't any reason why they should n't! Nobody ever said my family was n't decent, nobody! even if we don't live in a snobbish house on a swell avenue!"

David listened, dazed.

"But we only went up there to *see*, Mrs. Magee," he choked out, confused, ashamed, guilty. "And we just sat on the steps all night."

Mrs. Magee repudiated this with more tears, whereupon Uncle George made little sucking noises in his throat, sorrowfully, and Mr. Graham, as befitted a clergyman whose church has been desecrated, looked properly shocked.

David, who now remembered what his real relations with Emma were, was at a loss, and Mrs. Magee's conduct did n't seem unnatural. He be-

gan to think it would be mean and cowardly not to offer to do *anything* he could to relieve her. Therefore he stammered: "We—we can get married, if you 'll let us. We want to!"

"He sha'n't marry my daughter!" burst from Mrs. Magee, with hysterical revulsion, for she had evidently begun to realize that she had gone too far in declaring that Emma had been compromised. "But he 's got to be sent out of town —that 's what he has—luring innocent girls into church steeples!"

Rising from her chair, like a fat fury overtaken by grief, she turned to Emma, who watched her with silent, indifferent contempt.

"Come with me!" she said, and with outraged finality swept from the room with Emma in front of her.

There was silence. Then Mr. Graham, who thanked the police, expressed a hope that his church would not be mentioned in the matter, and Uncle George sadly motioned to David, who followed him out into the spring sunshine.

Though Uncle George said nothing, David knew too well that the affair could not end there. For Aunt Sylvia, on learning the facts, let it be

clearly understood that it was nothing more than was to be expected. *She* had not wanted David in the house. And Hallie, as Ronald was quick to inform him, was not to be permitted any further conversation with him.

"Your Uncle William," said Uncle George, two days later, "has returned to Foxton, David, and is pretty lonely. Perhaps you 'd better go over and see him. You can finish your studies for this term at the high school there, and next year go away to prepare for college. I 'm sorry, my boy."

"Yes, sir," said David. And before the week ended he was bidding a choked good-by to Uncle George at the steamer.

So Riverton disappeared, half an hour later, as the little vessel, this time unhandicapped by low water, made her way behind the trees and banks of the river bend. Trinity steeple vanished last, and David was left alone with thoughts that flowed away toward a sea of uncertainty as turbid as the muddy current itself.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next five years of David's life were years in which aspiration fought youth and importunate desire. He discovered his mind—and also that mind can discover the universe. Bodily energies, turbulent and incomprehensible, were gradually converted by him into burning absorption of knowledge—which in time was transmitted into vision and ambition.

Yet during this period, which matured him beyond his years, many wants and obligations, as well as memories and affections, steeped his heart. Riverton, like a dream through which he had passed, seemed always the predestined scene of his future. Letters from there were like tentacles sent out of a still growing past. He could, perhaps, have torn them from his heart, but he always ended by carefully unwinding them, and waiting.

The first thing he did on returning to Foxton after that Mayday's "disgrace" was to write

solemnly to Emma: "When I 've got my education, I 'll come back. Nothing your mother says or does will make any difference. We belong to each other, and I 'll be true to you, always. And I hope you 'll go to school more, too."

The reply he got was from Mrs. Magee, who told him that her daughter was forbidden to have "any further correspondence with him whatever," and that "if he was *honorable*" he would not "*bring any more trouble into her family—which had no man to defend it.*" From Emma herself, only a brief secret word came, saying, "Good-by—till we can marry."

Perhaps the first of these five years, at Wister Preparatory School, was on the whole the hardest. David's room in Hatfield Hall overlooked from one side a creek like that at Anson farm, and on its current his heart would inevitably float off at times to Hallie. From the other window the steeple of Wister's Episcopal church was visible, and into its arrowy top his imagination would as inevitably steal at times with Emma. Yet there were lessons and athletics, friendships and rivalries, as well as long walks under moon and stars, to appease the past—not to mention a

plunge, which was this time to be permanent, into the realm of great English and American literature. This plunge set the bent of his ensuing college years.

It was during his freshman term at a neighboring state university, to which it was decided he should go, that he first heard news of consequence from Riverton. Uncle George had written him with friendly business brevity from time to time during the Wister year, always ending with, "Hallie and your Aunt Sylvia are well and send love." But a keen trembling pang of surprise seized David one day when he found himself tearing open a letter from Hallie herself, and reading avidly:

Dear David:

I can 't help writing to you for I know you love papa—and he is in so much trouble, and you will understand and sympathize with us. The trouble is that mamma wants to get a divorce from papa—who is so good—and I just don't see how I can *stand* it. She says she made a mistake in marrying him, because he does n't like the things she likes, and that when you find out you 've made a mistake, the only thing to do is to *unmake* it. I think it 's awful, and she wants papa

to agree to let her have me half the time, and him half. I 'm so unhappy!

There is n't any news. Violet Vernon has gone to Bryn Mawr, and Ronald has a position in the Cotton-Mills with Mr. Morgan. Chester Morgan is at Yale. I wish I could go somewhere too, but I have to stay with papa. I 'm studying hard though, and just love books. Have you read "The Mill On The Floss"? Is n't it just too splendid and sad?

Wishing you much success,

Your cousin,

HALLIE.

P. S. The Magees have inherited some money or something in Tennessee. They 've had to go down there, but Emma says she won't stay, but means to come back. Her mother did n't want to go either.

P. P. S. I did n't tell you that Mr. Graham has been offered a fashionable church in Chicago.

H.

This letter caused David to brood unquietly for days on the uncertainty of the married state in general, and upon his particular obligation to Emma, an obligation which the news of Uncle George's unhappiness seemed but to increase. Anyhow when his college-mates, seeing his aloofness, twittingly referred to Emma's photograph

on his dresser as that of his wife, he only smiled. He would not let them tempt him to join their hilarious dinners, picnics, and "hay-rides"—otherwise known as "squeeze-parties."

Yet it was lonely and difficult to be thus faithful, and he had often to tell himself, with ascetic sternness, that if Emma was a nice girl, as he believed, *she could n't* marry anybody else, and therefore it would n't be square for him to let himself get tangled up with other girls. It would be like Aunt Sylvia's going with Mr. Graham—which he hated bitterly. His reply to Hallie consequently was not without nobility, nor without unconscious revelation of his yearning reverence for her; and that, somehow, alleviated the cloud of his matrimonial brooding.

From Emma herself a scribbled note dropped into his box just before Christmas. It said in part:

I 'm tired of being told I can't see you or write to you. Mother just forbids me to because she wants me to marry soon, so she won't have to take care of me. She invites older fellows around and they take me out, but I don't like them. I 'm going to Mertonville, though, for the holidays, to visit my cousin. She 's

rich and I 'll have a grand time. You can come there too, and see me, if you want to. There 'll be lots of dances and larks.

You ought to have been here last week. There was a play and I took part in it. They said I was *great*—that *I ought to be on the stage.*

Good-by now. Love,
EMMA.

To this David replied that he *would* come down to Mertonville. For the invitation was a spark to the long-suppressed cravings that beset him.

Ardent impatience for the arrival of Christmas then began to burn in him. College obligations and aspirations, as well as the ascetic restraint of the last year and a half, gave way to restlessness. Reading also became impossible; even Shakspere and Victor Hugo—his latest literary idol—were put aside. The thought of again being with Emma filled his days and nights with irresistible anticipation and speculation.

But at length, after dragging days, he found himself in the fire-lit and holly-adorned parlor of Emma's cousin. Emma came down, more dashingly pretty (with the aid of cosmetics) than

ever; also more skilful in tantalizing him amid the gay rush of Mertonville festivities. For though she did not withhold herself from him he had to go to the dances or other parties alone or with others if he wished constantly to see her. Her cousin, she said, had accepted escorts for her; and she excused her evident flirtations with these escorts by saying that she just *had* to be popular, for her cousin's sake.

After the holidays, therefore, David returned to college doubly obligated in loyalty to her, but more unsatisfied in mind and body than when he left it. Not for several weeks could he get back into the harness of studious calm and steady work. Indeed he only succeeded in doing so by indulging in strenuous athletics and by badgering his mind with the transcendental but sexless moralism of Carlyle's essays. The Carlyle method, however, had the disadvantage of reminding him of Emma's distaste for books and "all that college stuff." A line of Shakspere's—"Let me not to the marriage of true minds"—also fell under his eye, and he depressedly wondered if he and Emma could *ever* be married in mind.

An event consequent on a message that came

to him just before commencement accentuated yet further this difference in tastes. Violet, from whom he had not heard since leaving Riverton, wrote him that an old friend of her family, Mrs. Andrew Clarkson, lived in his university town and that she would make a visit there during commencement week.

She came, and Mrs. Clarkson's social prominence was not needed to make her instantly the rage. Her dazzling skin, set off by brilliantly dark hair and eyes, her manifestly chic and expensive gowns, worn with a dash of sophistication, would alone have proved calamitous to a score of youths already sentimental with the valedictory season. Yet in the midst of this popularity Violet suddenly withdrew herself—with an indifference far too consummate to give offense to her admirers—and told David she was bored and wished to see more of *him*.

David, stammering, blushing, flattered, tried to say something about the other fellows being able to do lots for her—more than he could.

"For you see," he confessed, "I 'm a sort of

grind, except for athletics. I really *like* books—and reading."

"That 's just it," Violet answered enthusiastically, "that 's why I wish to talk to *you*. I read *all* the new books—especially those that are n't afraid to say things. I 'm reading one now—the letters of Marie Bashkirtseff, telling about her love affairs. Have you read her?"

"No, but she 's a Russian, is n't she?" David returned, having only heard the name.

"Yes, and a *genius!*" declared Violet. "Everybody 's *mad* about her. Of course over here we 're all too narrow and puritanical to live like she did. But it must be fine to be a writer or painter and be so free, don't you think? I intend to be a writer some day, don't you?"

David had not; indeed he had hardly considered *what* his vocation was to be; but the question made him suddenly feel that he *did* so intend, and he said so.

From which it resulted that a desire to write, to express things, took hold of him. Nor did this ambition wane when Violet went away. In Uncle William's small cottage at Foxton that

summer, he began to scribble, to read with a more literary eye, and to study the various human types around him.

In the autumn of his sophomore year, during which he began to explore much that was not set down in his classes, another letter arrived from Hallie:

It 's over, David [she began], but I don't see how mamma could do it! She got the divorce on the grounds that papa was *cruel* to her! Papa cruel! He would n't let her use any other grounds. He just sat there in the court while she made the charge, and I think she almost *believed* what she was saying, she wanted the decree so much. He did n't say a word, but just came home with me. I nearly cried my eyes out.

But you 'll want to hear other things than our troubles. Chester Morgan was awfully kind. He was home from Yale. I think he 's improved, some. The Magees have come back and Ronald goes to see Emma often. She 's so pretty, lots of boys go. Ronald is inventing something at the cotton-mills. He is to live with mamma, but he 's asked me if he can't come to see me sometimes. I think he likes Violet, too. Mamma is going to Chicago in January for a visit to a friend there. Mr. Graham accepted a church there last May,

and is quite a swell, they say. I can't write any more, I 'm so unhappy. I believe people who live on farms are happiest. They're away from so much. Good-by. Write papa sometimes, he 'll be so lonely.

Love from him.

Your cousin,

HALLIE.

With this unsettling letter at his elbow, David found the attempt to grapple with the chemistry he was studying futile, therefore he sat down and wrote to Uncle George. Then he took up his cap and slipped out of the dormitory for a walk into the country under the stars. He wanted to think things out.

The divorce had awakened in his mind a question that had lain less dormant with each day's realization that he and Emma were drifting further apart. To be sure she wrote him from time to time—brief, shallow, immature missives, that in no wise responded to his attempts to communicate his thoughts to her; and so he held quixotically fast to the belief that they would and must some day marry. Yet a flutter of skirts past his dormitory window, or the sight of a pretty face, teased his lonely cravings.

So he asked himself as he walked, whether, if he and Emma were to be happy, he had not better quit college at once and marry her, before their tastes became *too* different. Jealousy as well as perplexity also made it impossible to avoid asking himself the question whether she, who seemed so content with things as they were, really wanted to marry him.

These uncertainties were still with him the following Christmas when he saw Emma again, and when, by reason of their intimate hours together, he came back to the university with a triply accumulated sense of the difficulty of his position. Body and mind fought for possession of him, and there were times when it did n't seem to him much to matter which should win.

Then in the spring came another letter from Hallie. It told, with sad disillusion, that Aunt Sylvia had married Mr. Graham.

He has given up his church in Chicago [it continued] and is going into business, with mamma's money, papa thinks. She wants me to come and be with her there, but I can't. I just can't, and she 's angry. I think Mr. Graham 's just horrid, even if he is a preacher. I wish I were in college, like you. But papa 's so sad

and needs cheering up. Ronald comes to see me sometimes—but I won't let him often. His invention is to be patented. Chester Morgan 's going into the cotton-mills with his father. He 's given up college. He 's awfully kind to me. The Dramatic Club had a play here last night and Emma Magee took the part of a boy. They said she was awfully cute in tights—and that she scored a . . .

Humiliation, hot and furious, blotted out the rest of the letter from David's sight. Emma, the girl he was being true to, the girl he was to marry, had gone out on a stage—before other boys and men—that way! It was strangling.

He sat down, bitterly angry, and wrote her a note that ended: "A man would n't let his wife do it, and I can't let you. Hallie would n't do it, you know, nor would other nice girls. If we 're engaged, we belong to each other; and if you do things like that how can you belong to just me?"

He got no reply to his outburst for several weeks. Then a large pink missive arrived which bore no reference to tights, but merely said accusingly:

Of course I see you 're getting tired of me, because I don't like books, and all that. But if you are n't going to marry me, I don't see why you should get mad just because others think I 'm pretty—and like my figure. Anyhow Mother wants us to go away from here to San Francisco, and I 've said I would. I don't know what our address will be, but I guess you don't care for it anyway. When you 're through college, if you have n't found anybody else to marry, and want to keep your promise, you can. I was a fool to believe . . .

Not waiting to read more, David replied instantly. He *did n't* mean to break their engagement, he told her, and she ought n't to *say* he did. But if people *were* engaged they ought to *try* not to do things that each other did n't like. Then he poured forth his ideas of how a boy and girl ought to act if they expected to be happy when they married.

This letter was returned to him unopened, for the Magees had gone and had left no address. Nor did any further development mark the situation for the next year and a half, except that Emma sent him at different times several photographs of herself, each lovelier, and more theatrical, than the last.

Work, however, and ambition eased this period

of his college life, especially when he found himself on the point of surrendering to some pretty visitor's charms. A leader of his class, popular in his fraternity, editor of the "University Bulletin," he was making his way toward a victorious graduation. Then a third letter from Hallie, followed by a pathetic one from Uncle George, snapped the thread of this consummation.

Mr. Graham, Hallie told him, after speculating with and losing Aunt Sylvia's money, had deserted her and gone away, nobody knew where. Aunt Sylvia had returned to Riverton, hysterical and helpless. Uncle George's letter, that followed in April, read:

My dear boy:

Am sorry to tell you that the money your mother left you was used up some time ago. I expected to be able to supply enough of my own to enable you to finish your education, but have failed in my business, and don't see how I 'm going to be able to pay out without the help of your Uncle William, who can ill afford it. I will now also have to help provide for your Aunt Sylvia, whose husband has deserted her, after losing all her money.

It 's hard for me to write you this, but I do so hoping you can borrow enough from somebody to finish college.

Then perhaps I can help get you a position on "The Herald," a newspaper Mr. Vernon has recently established here. It won't pay very much at first, but Hallie and I will be glad to have you back in Riverton. God bless you, my boy. With love,

UNCLE GEORGE.

David did not delay an instant. Education? Graduation? They were nothing. The thought of spending another week on such purposes, under the circumstances, repelled and hurt him. To leave college and get to work at once became a feverish impatience. That Uncle George, crippled in business and done for by Aunt Sylvia, had already been paying his way, cut him with shame; and this shame was increased when he remembered that Hallie had written him a year ago saying that Uncle George was having a bad time financially.

Against all professorial persuasion and offers of assistance, David sold his college effects and said farewell to chums and associates; and when he had done so he felt a sense of exhilarating freedom. Life was really to begin now, and his pulse beat romantically at the thought of rising to eminence in the newspaper world—to a height

from which he could protect and provide for Hallie and Uncle George.

That Hallie herself should bring him down from these heights of hope to sick hopelessness before a day passed, he could not have imagined. Yet this happened when a letter came from her that night.

You will be glad to hear [the early part of the letter ran cheerfully] that papa has been offered a position in the cotton-mills by Mr. Morgan. He seems happier than for a long while, and of course that makes me happier. He keeps on saying, though, that you ought to have finished college, and I think so too. Oh, David, why did n't you?

Did I write you that Violet is home? She is *so* fascinating. She 's the leader of the literary coterie here. I go to her house sometimes and read the books they talk about, but I don't like them as much as I do the older ones. But I suppose I 'm "provincial."

Violet told me Emma Magee had gone on the vaudeville stage, and the papers this morning say she is to play here at the Venus Gardens some time soon. I thought you 'd like to know. Her mother—I mean Emma 's—died four months ago.

But I have a great piece of news for you—and I hope you'll be glad. *I am engaged to Chester Morgan, and we 're to be married next fall.* We 're to go with Mrs.

Morgan to Cincinnati to-morrow, and I won't be here when you come home. I think I 'm going to be happy, but I don't know, for sometimes everything seems so strange and sad.

Good-by. Your loving cousin,
HALLIE.

Complex as were the emotions roused by this letter, only one thing—Hallie's engagement—seemed to have the slightest consequence. For David had managed somehow during his college years to ignore the possibility that Hallie would one day marry, though why he had done so he hardly knew. Now her announcement, just when he was going to begin to do great things,—partly for her,—suddenly seemed to rot the very foundations of all that could make life worth living.

He took up the letter again, remembering other things in it that he had but half taken in. Emma, it said, was on the vaudeville stage, and was to appear at Riverton. Perhaps that meant that she no longer had an idea of marrying him.

Did he care? Did he want to be free of her? He did n't know, so confused were his senses. But if Hallie was going to marry why should n't

he marry Emma, if she wanted him? What did it matter if the marriage *should* prove unhappy?

Well, there would be work anyhow, he told himself, his ambition resurging, and Mr. Vernon should see that he had ability and purpose. With Violet, too, there would be talk of books. He had been reading many translations from seething new foreign literature lately, and a free discussion of ideas would be a relief from whatever should happen. To-morrow he would start for Riverton, to turn a new page in *his* life book.

CHAPTER XIV

IT rained heavily during the night, and portions of the rail beds over which David passed were under water. At way-stations the country folk, unable to plow or sow in the mud, lounged with primitive stolidity, listening to the intermittent click of telegraph instruments, or staring into train windows. An occasional one of them had got drunk, as a protest against the fixed dulness and monotony of existence. To David, as the train sped on, the grind of wheels was at times a relief from the sense of gloom into which their faces and his own strained heart temporarily plunged him.

Excepting Hallie's engagement, what most intensely occupied him was the realization that Emma was coming back to Riverton at the same time as himself. He decided that it was either a very strange coincidence or perhaps that she had heard of his intention and still wished to marry him. This thought was consoling, and he

took out the last photograph she had sent him.

This consolation, however, was brief. Before he knew it the grind of wheels became the subconscious grind of the thought that Hallie was to be married. Hallie! . . . who had always been hitherto the incentive to his aspirations, but who now must cease to be, at the real beginning of his career.

How had it come about? What was it that had always come between them? Aunt Sylvia? Chester? Emma? His own folly? . . . It was the old question, never to be solved, as to which thread of our lives is wholly in the hand of Destiny. He had to give it up.

At length his train, whose smoke streaked the wet azure of a sky into which had come the sudden radiance of sunlight, swung into Riverton station, and on the platform Uncle George met him. He was shabby and slightly shambling, but had something of the old note of geniality and facetiousness.

"So, lad, it 's you, is it?" he exclaimed cordially. "And how are you? Not so fat, not so thin, I see; and still with a colorful crop of hair. Well, well! And are you ready for work? Then

we 'll be business-like and go straight to Mr. Vernon's office. No doubt you are as full of itch to begin nosing out news as a hound pup for sight of his first rabbit. And then, too, Mr. Vernon may be having a hard time getting along without you. Eh? Eh?"

"Ask that in two months, Uncle George, when I 've made good," David replied affectionately.

"Right! Right! But come along. Here 's the bus; jump in."

A moment later they were rumbling past familiar, yet changed, landmarks, to the Riverton Hotel; thence, without getting out, to the "Herald" offices. There, in the circulation department, David left his valise, and they mounted to Mr. Vernon's up-stairs sanctum, about which were scattered proof-sheets, books, and open periodicals.

Mr. Vernon, a keen, round, intense little man, who, having taken to editing as a fad, had found in it a passion, met them agreeably. He had formed some conception of David from private inquiries, as well as from Violet, who, by chance or otherwise, was in the office when David and Uncle George entered.

"How nice!" she greeted David instantly, with arched brows and lazy graciousness. "You 've come at the psychological moment, too! I 've just been trying to convince this stubborn parent of mine that he 's behind the times. A newspaper 's for more than political prattle and murder mysteries! I tell him he should start a literary and dramatic page, David, and let you edit it. I 've lots of ideas."

The little man, pleased with this impertinent cleverness, grunted humorously and remarked to Uncle George:

"Young ladies nowadays are very wise. It 's a comfort to know, Mr. Anson, that when I 'm superannuated I shall have such a capable successor in the family."

"Oh!" Violet flashed back prettily. "You can jeer, but you know I 'm right, Papa! Men in their forties *do* get behind, even when they look as young and handsome as you do! But you 're in a horrid mood, and I 'm going to take David off for a drive right now. You 're dying to get rid of me, anyhow,—you know you are,—because you 're so disgustingly busy."

Uncle George accommodatingly offered to take

care of David's valise, and so she led the way to her smart trap, which, with its restive bays, waited in front of the office. Their drive was through Westview Park and the southern end of the city, now rapidly building up. The air was lyrical with spring, and Violet's impersonal and amusing comments on people and houses ran soothingly through David. He felt it was good to be back. But as she reined in the bays on a new street, which had but recently been a wooded meadow, he suddenly caught sight of Trinity steeple straight ahead,—as he had done on another memorable spring day,—and instantly his pleasure was suffused with a tumultuous flood of passionate memories.

Violet, to whom the spire or some intuition may also have recalled the half-forgotten church episode, turned mischievously and laughed:

"I had n't thought what a lark it will be, if you 're given the dramatic news to do! You 'll have a chance to write up an old flame of yours."

David tried not to comprehend, but in spite of himself replied, "Miss Magee—you mean—Emma Magee?"

"The same, my dear," she gaily continued.

"Her engagement here is next week, at the Venus Gardens!"

"Oh!" said David, still warily.

"Yes, funny boy; didn't you know? But why," she rippled on, "why so solemn? Bless my soul, I believe you—!"

The astonished look she bent on him gave her horses an opportunity to stop at an elaborate residence overlooking the river. To turn from the conversation was therefore natural, but she did so with a sudden thoughtful decision that indicated purpose.

"This is our new home," she said. "You must come in and see what father derides as my 'salon,' because I have literary and musical evenings in it."

With no excuse to escape, David hitched the horses and followed her through a handsome hall and up two flights to a large chamber extending across the front of the house. As he entered he was aware that it was adorned with various exotic trappings, such as are picked up here and there on a journey around the world, and that among these were photographs of various literary, musical, and theatrical celebrities.

Before he had time to remark on the room's appearance, Violet walked over to a console on which was an open magazine and, picking it up, turned to him deliberately.

"Here," she said, "is something that may interest you. It 's a reproduction of one of Miss Magee's latest poses, with some news about her."

David took it. He was accustomed to the thought of Emma on the stage, but had not chanced to visualize her in stage costume. It was not strange, therefore, that semi-fascination rather than anger first seized him as he looked upon the scantily clad beauty who smiled over her shoulder at him from the page. But this fascination was as immediately overwhelmed as he read under the picture the information:

A fetching photograph of Miss Emma Magee, the promising young vaudeville star whose affair with a scion of a wealthy and exclusive Philadelphia family has recently scandalized that peaceful Quaker village.

He read it again, then looked up, inwardly trembling. Violet, though lighting a cigarette,—a thing he had never seen a "lady" do before,—was watching him with keen affectionate questioning.

"Thank you," he said, "I had n't heard this." And something in his tone caused Violet to say with concern:

"I had no idea that you were still interested—there."

"I am," said David, "because I have to be. But I don't know what I ought to do. You see we were engaged, though we have n't seen each other for a long while, and it 's never been actually broken off. If she 's coming back here I 'll have to see her."

He had sunk into a chair by the window, and Violet, with a half-comprehending "Oh!" dropped into one opposite him.

"I promised to marry her," David stammered, seeing that he had trodden on delicate ground and must go farther or be misunderstood, "promised to, that is, when I should get through college. And I 'll keep my promise, if she wants me to. I could n't let her——"

He stopped. Violet's look was changing to one of slow admiration—the admiration of a connoisseur. Suddenly, as he turned from looking out the sunset-kindled window toward her, she got up, went to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You *are* a dear!" she exclaimed, genuinely. "You 'll tell me next that you 've been true to her all this time! Don't! It would be too wonderful!"

"It 's *not* wonderful," David answered confused, perplexed, and a little angry at his innocent position. "I *had* to be. For if I 'd gone with some one else, would n't it have been—?"

He could n't find the right word, and was beginning to realize too, with a sense of shame, that he had already betrayed too much to Violet. He bit his lip and frowned at himself.

"But," exclaimed Violet, still with admiring wonder, "what of *her,* all this while? Do you know anything about the life of vaudeville stars, you blessed dear?"

"I know they sing shady love-songs and wear short skirts," David answered dully, defensively. "But don't other girls wear them, too, at the seashore? And is it any worse to wear them in your profession than for pleasure?"

This was sophistry. He had seen little of the variety stage during his college days, but he was not unaware of its reputation. Yet his return, the photograph, Violet,—and yes, Hallie, too, for

he felt unreasonably that *she* might have prevented all this,—had upset him.

Violet was still looking at him with affectionate sophistication. She blew a little whiff of smoke through her red lips, then, discarding her cigarette said, as both rose:

"*Why* did I ever let that Magee girl have you? But never mind; that 'll keep. If she plays here next week, we 'll go to see her—you and papa and I. Now I must dress for dinner. But wait; did your Uncle George tell you? He does n't live where he did. He and Hallie have taken the little house the Magees used to live in."

Concealing the shock this information gave him, David led the way down the dim-lit stairs and left Violet at her front door. Emma's picture and the shadowy implications of the conversation just ended were enough to cause his mind and heart to writhe; but now he had to face making his home, as Hallie had been doing, in the house where he . . . and Emma . . . !

He hurried along, aware of being glad that Hallie was, for the moment at least, away. He did not see how he could have endured to sit in that room with *her*. He was glad too, when he

reached the house, to find Uncle George in a reminiscent mood during supper, for he was absorbed with the fact that he would soon meet Emma again, and that upon that meeting his happiness and probably his future success would depend. The tyranny of consequences had brought him to this finality. What the result would be was hidden in a fog which he could not penetrate.

CHAPTER XV

ONE necessity is the world's salvation: work. Under its stimulating obligation David found ready relief from his emotional problems through the week that followed. Even the flaring announcement of Emma's prospective appearance at the Venus Gardens, and her picture on every bill-board, ceased to contract his heart. He would merely hurry past, more keenly on the lookout for that dearest of all opportunities to reporters, a scoop.

Mr. Vernon, it was evident, wished to try him out, for the news assignments given him were varied and difficult. In one instance a more experienced reporter was sent over his tracks to cover a story he had fallen down on, and in others what he wrote seemed to shrink, under the hot eye of criticism, like a bladder in the sun. Nevertheless, the city editor, Mr. Carter, informed him that even more promising cubs than he had "split their infinities"; his fellow-reporters came

to his assistance with suggestions, and Mr. Vernon's blue pencil was kindly as well as quick.

What he learned of Riverton, of himself, and of his kind during that week made him wonder how he had hitherto been so blind. Police court and jail, hospital and factory, school and asylum, residence and brothel, all came immediately under his notice. The whole complex tragi-comedy of life was visualized for the first time on the stage of his thought, and from his point of view behind the scenes he was profoundly and amazedly thrilled.

But there were times when all this would suddenly become unreal. On his way to an assignment some tree, house, or corner would remind him of his former intimacies with Emma, and he would instantly be in the toils of an anticipation that humiliated him. At night, also, when he came home to the cottage so inseparable from his relations with her, he found it almost impossible to sit quietly in the parlor and talk with Uncle George. Emma, as she had been, would float into his imagination and blend with the bespangled beauty who was soon to disport in the spot-light before the eyes of all Riverton.

This vision would bring him to his feet with a restless determination to go to her, before she should thus expose herself, and have their obligations to each other defined once and for all. Then it would seem better not to go, but to wait until he could judge by seeing her what she was and what future, if any, could exist for them. Hope that her interest in him had long ago died alternated with wild thwarted desire, not now for her, but for romance, tragedy, a ruined life, if need be. Anything at times seemed better than a continuance of his ascetic and lonely aloofness.

The night for Emma's appearance came. He told Uncle George that he was going to the Gardens with Mr. Vernon and Violet, and would probably be late getting home.

"Dear, dear," was the grave and suddenly questioning reply he got. "You mean to see Miss Magee? I hope nothing. . . . But no doubt you will have a pleasant evening."

This anxiety of Uncle George remained with David as he took his way in the moonlight to the Vernon residence. It haunted him—under trees where the shade was deepest and where

he and Emma had more than once paused in their love-making.

At Barrett Avenue, while passing Aunt Sylvia's former "establishment," he was reminded of Mr. Graham, on the night of "Romeo and Juliet," and of Daisy. Wondering what had become of Daisy, he found himself almost asking what it was about her that was like Emma—a speculation he was quickly ashamed of. He put it away only to begin murmuring wistfully, "If Emma were only like Hallie!" Which thought also had to be suppressed.

By the Vernon gate the bays, now harnessed to a victoria, champed restively. Violet and Mr. Vernon, waiting, greeted him, and soon the trio were being driven toward the Gardens.

Mr. Vernon, evidently in a light ironic mood at the prospect of seeing a small native celebrity appear in Riverton's undistinguished midst, remarked tolerantly on the way:

"This Miss Magee is the usual calcium beguiler, I suppose? the kind at whose heels infatuate youths are in the habit of hanging—as ours will, no doubt. . . ? Little fools."

David, who instantly saw himself classed

among those stage-door danglers, was chagrined. But Violet came to his rescue.

"David," she avowed, "will *have* to look her up, I fancy. He 's an old friend of hers. But why not? I rather think I 'd get in the game too if I were a male."

"It 's well I have a daughter then," Mr. Vernon laughed.

It *was,* thought David, who was hoping that since his employer ignored the first half of her remark he had forgotten the steeple incident, if he had ever heard of it. Nevertheless, as their carriage neared the Gardens, already thronged with other vehicles and foot-farers, a nervous prescience of coming consequences attacked him. He could only counteract it with the desperate thought that many would envy him his possible opportunity.

Getting out, they pushed through the crowded, gaudily lighted and postered entrance of the resort to its slanting, tanbarked floor. Through open doors on either side this floor extended out under rows of trees, where in summer ices and drinks were served at rustic tables. Already lively curiosity and chatter pervaded the place

as they were ushered to Mr. Vernon's seats, down the center aisle, and near to the stage.

David knew as they settled themselves that Emma could not fail to see him there immediately, and he knew that Violet guessed this, for she whispered:

"I thought you 'd like being near—to see her close. But I 've half a mind to drag you away now, before she bewitches you again. Shall I?" Then, laughing at his troubled face, "You *are* such a dear fool—and *so* solemn!"

He could not deny it, especially as the once-proscribed place in which they sat had begun to awaken conflicting sensations in him. He was glad, however, that the rasping see-saw of the orchestra, tuning up, made further answer unnecessary. It was followed by the then inevitable strains of "There 'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town," whose words,

> Please, oh please, now do not let me fall;
> I love you, I love you best of all.

were hummed by portions of the audience, amid whom, three rows back, he beheld Ronald and Aunt Sylvia.

They bowed,—a formal recognition of his return to Riverton,—then looked away. But seeing them reminded David unpleasantly of a statement, in one of Hallie's letters, that Ronald, who was now said to be a devotee of Violet's, had once been very attentive to Emma. Speculation on this, coming just at the rise of the curtain, did not tend to simplify David's emotions.

As vaudeville was, however, still a novelty to him, its inevitable clogging, topical singing, and black-face banter served somewhat to keep down the tremulous tension in him. Then at the arrived moment the garish forward drop rose, purple velvet curtains behind it parted, and Emma appeared in the glamourous frame of the spotlight.

Glad impetuous applause greeted her instantly, and in recognition of it she bowed smilingly, courtesied in a way that tossed her skirts a few inches higher, and waited for quiet.

David's face flamed, for he knew that hundreds of masculine eyes were fixed on the charms she was displaying so silkenly. He wanted to get up and leave the scene, despite the fact that a

closer look at her smiling face seemed to reveal something unhappy, even desperate, under it.

Violet, evidently sensing his turmoil, laid a hand on his arm.

"Don't," she whispered. "Face it out! She *has* to act—if she 's to get along in vaudeville. She *has* to appeal to the crowd in that way—and she *is* clever!"

Of that David could not doubt. He had decently and loyally played the game of not breaking out of the trap in which nature had caught him five years ago, but his very faithfulness now made every rhythmical arrestive movement of Emma's fascinating. Even while disillusion as strong as the spot-light was being thrown from his repulsion on her, he was thrilled.

Her more than piquant rendering of song, jest, and dance delighted the flushed, clamorous audience. All through her act she gave from time to time a word, a glance, or toss of her head to some former acquaintance. But it was not until after her fifth and last encore that her eyes met David's in full recognition. Then she did not smile, but retired and refused to be recalled.

It left him a bit dazed. But immediately he

realized that the audience had risen and was scattering—the young people with eyes still turned lingeringly toward the stage—and that Mr. Vernon was manifesting impatience to be off for home.

As they took their way out, Violet, at his side, looked questioningly at him, but he did not respond to her look. He was desperately occupied with a feeling that he must see Emma—at once—and bring some sort of finality to the suspense of their relations. He determined to excuse himself and go to Emma's dressing-room, her hotel, anywhere, and tell her they must have things out. Only the approach of an employee of the theater, who tipped a deferential cap and handed him a note, prevented this.

Violet, keen for the romance of the situation and perceiving the missive, must have surmised its source. At the carriage door she turned, gave David a significant look, together with her hand, then said quite naturally:

"Well, we 'll let you off going home with us, since you have another engagement. Good-by. The show was *jolly*—and I think your friend Miss Magee quite a hit. Come to see us soon."

The note, which David opened under a lighted bill-board nearby, was written in pencil and read:

I could see what you thought. But you need n't suppose an actress has such an easy time of it. I 'm stopping at the Riverton—and you can come there after the performance, if you want to. But you need n't if you 're interested in the Vernon girl—or anybody else.

E.

Unexpected pity and remorse struck David. She was n't happy, that was clear; and if it was because of him he could n't fail her now, but must see the matter through. Without debating further he headed for the hotel, and sent up his card. Miss Magee, he was soon informed, would see him in her apartment.

She admitted David herself and greeted him in a manner defiant, dissatisfied, and a little desperate.

"I did n't know whether you 'd be ashamed to call on an actress," she said, giving him her hand and a chair by a pink-lighted table. "Some people are ready enough to scorn us. I 've found that out. But reporters, like you, are used to things, I suppose?"

He sat down, surprised that she knew his vocation, and was offered a cigarette, for she was smoking. But when he declined she crushed the light from her own and tossed it away. Somehow this touched him.

"You knew I would come, Emma," he said simply, "if you wanted me to, whether I liked your being on the stage or not."

She looked at him appraisingly as he spoke—looked with all her beauty alive. Then she said bitterly:

"You never were a cad. I 'll say that, and college does n't seem to have made you one. You 've learned a lot there, I guess, that I don't know. Well, I 've learned a lot, too, but not in books. They are n't everything."

"That 's true, Emma," he said quietly, "but they 've helped me to get a good position, at least."

"Oh? I supposed the Vernon girl pulled that wire for you. Is n't she soft on you?"

The shrill, tired tone of her voice suddenly impressed David as having an over-acute knowledge of life behind it. He did not like it and did not answer.

"Well," she continued, "it does n't matter, and it does n't matter whether she and that whole crowd thought I cared for their clacking so much. And *you* need n't think, either, that I came back here to get hold of you, if you don't want me."

Her eyes filled resentfully. She got up, clasped her hands behind her head, and began to walk. David saw her bosom heave unhappily.

"I promised to come," he said, "though I had n't heard from you and don't know whether *you* want *me*."

"And no doubt you 've 'promised' a dozen others since then!" she exclaimed, with a violence that seemed to have some source unrelated to him.

"I have n't gone with a single other girl," he answered, though the words sounded stupid. "I did n't have a right to, if—if I had promised you."

She turned and looked at him incredulously. Then, as if fretted with herself for being on the point of believing him, she brushed the tears from her eyes and flung out angrily:

"Do you take me for an ingénue who will swallow anything? Do you think I believe you 've

held off—to give *me* a chance? Men are n't that sort!"

Made to understand *that* by Violet, when she had shown him Emma's picture, David merely flushed. Then:

"I *have* waited," he answered, "whether you believe it or not. I may have been a fool, but I have."

"To marry me—if I wanted to?" Emma almost sobbed the question at him. "You mean you 've waited though I did n't write—and did go on the stage? Oh, my God! I believe I *do* love you, I believe I *could*—as I used to!"

Her cry, which seemed one of relief springing from some bitter source, chilled David.

"We ought to understand each other," he said. "There ought n't to be any one else you like." He was thinking of the young Philadelphian. "And you 'd have to leave the stage."

She again turned to him. "The stage? Other men?" she cried. "Damn them all!"

Then she sat down desperately, hopelessly, and added: "But it 's no use—you 're only doing it because you think you ought to. You don't care; you think I 'm merely a tough common actress."

The passion and pathos of this, together with the physical charm of her beauty, which had helped to hold David during the years of their alienation, had its effect on him now.

"We could try," he said thickly. "The old love might come back, if we did."

She thought gloomily for a moment, then looked at him strangely. "Well, I will, then. Why not? I took the chance once when you wanted me, and I paid for it. It 's only fair for you to take it now—when *I 'm* unhappy. I 'll quit the footlights all right. Actresses are only prey anyhow, and I 'm sick of it."

She broke into sobs and flung her arms suddenly around his neck. He clasped her, trembling though perplexed, and began pityingly to caress her.

"We 'll try," he said. "We 'll marry, though I make only a small salary. We ought to be able to love each other again—and to learn to please each other—even if we are different."

"And you won't be hard on me?" she appealed through her tears. "You won't despise me, David, if you can't love me? I 've saved money. I 've got some. I 'm not like you are,

but I won't hold you, if you don't want me. I wish I was dead!''

He quieted her, though he grew more confused, because the sources of her misery seemed so much more intense than he could understand. He told her he would arrange for them to be married to-morrow afternoon, at a magistrate's. Then, leaving her, he walked homeward.

The night had grown sultry and oppressive like the smother of his emotions, but he strove to think against the noise of his senses and against the strange unsatisfied intimations of uncertainty stirring in him. At home and in bed purple blotches swam and faded under his strained hypersensitive lids, and his dreams, when sleep at last came, were of arms about his neck—arms that clung and clutched and strangled.

CHAPTER XVI

TO be light-hearted or apathetic in obtaining his marriage license was perhaps too much to be expected of David. Many men more fortunate have confessed to a feeling of panicky solemnity in performing that simple act.

From the moment of waking, therefore, to that of pocketing the nuptial paper, he found it impossible to inhibit smothering upheavals of doubt. Not, indeed, until afternoon, when he started for Magistrate Blake's office, where Emma, veiled and taciturn, met him, could he take up generously the rôle of bridegroom.

Magistrate Blake, a thin, sallow, tobacco addict, sat at his desk against a background of dusty legal statutes. Seen through a litter of papers, he was like a grave judicial worm who had chewed leaves out of the tomes behind him for future leisurely consumption.

Before witnesses summoned from the next room,—witnesses who sleeked down their hair

out of respect for Emma's comeliness,—the ceremony was performed. Then, after embarrassed felicitations and feelings, David led Emma back to her carriage door. There they stood a moment, not looking at each other or knowing what to say.

"You 've told the manager of the Venus Gardens?" he asked at length, "and you 've packed?"

"Yes," she answered listlessly, getting into the carriage.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked. "Anything else, I mean?"

So little like a marriage had it all been that he felt a dull pity for her and for himself.

"You 've treated me fair," she answered heavily, "and if we 're not happy it won't be your fault. But I don't want to talk or I 'll cry. I 've got a headache."

His heart sank at this in spite of him. They were married, but they seemed by reason of it more incomprehensibly apart.

"I 'll go tell Uncle George, then, and Mr. Vernon, at the office," he sighed. "And I 'll come for you at the hotel in plenty of time for the

train. I—I want us to be happy, Emma. Good-by, now."

He closed the carriage door and was about to step away, but she cried, "Wait!" with sudden convulsiveness. Then she leaned out, took his face in her hands, and pressed her lips to his. For a moment it almost seemed as if the old Emma gave the caress.

He walked rapidly away from her through streets that now seemed strangely alien. At home he swung back the gate, opened the front door, and was hurrying through the small parlor to Uncle George's room, when an appealing, tremulous voice at the window behind him called, "David!"

He turned as a sleep-walker might. By a chair from which she had risen stood Hallie, in traveling dress. Her rippling hair seemed radiant as she looked at him with affectionate joy shining in her eyes and cried:

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you, David, and to have you back here with us! You 've been away so long!"

Not a word could he utter, for joy and pain clutched at his throat, and clamped it. He re-

membered, too, what he had come home to tell—remembered with hopeless, helpless desolation.

"We did n't know you were coming," he managed to choke out at length. "We thought you were to stay with the Morgans another week."

Her face clouded sharply. "I could n't stay," she said; "there were reasons; so I came home alone. But where 's papa?" Then as she saw his lips shake distressedly, "Are n't you glad at all to have me back, David?"

He sank down on a chair and bowed his face in his hands. The color left her cheeks. At a loss, then alarmed, she asked quickly:

"Is anything the matter? Is papa ill?"

"No, no. It 's nothing. . . . It 's only me," he groaned. "You see, we—we did n't expect you and—" He got up. "I 'll go out and telephone Uncle George you 're here."

He was making for the door stumblingly when her hurt, puzzled gaze stopped him.

"Hallie! Hallie!" he breathed, turning passionately, going to her, and caressing her hands with kisses. "Hallie!"

The responsive joy that met his caresses brought him up sharply to a realization of his

position. He dropped her hands before she could say anything more and hurried away out of doors with a sob.

Down the street with anguished, aching eyes and heart, he made his way to the "Herald" office. At the door, still battling with the emotion which had so unexpectedly overcome him, he paused irresolute. Then he pulled his hat over his eyes, went in, past clerks in green eye-shades, and up to Mr. Vernon's office.

"Well," said the editor, who wheeled in his chair after a few moments and took in David's desperate appearance. "What is it?"

"I think I 've got a scoop," David heard himself saying, with a miserable attempt at humor.

"Rather an obituary, to judge by your manner," was Mr. Vernon's succinct rejoinder.

"No, sir; congratulations, I hope. And if you please, I 'll have to ask for three or four days' absence. You see it 's this: Miss Magee—Emma Magee—and I were married at five o'clock this afternoon."

Mr. Vernon did not take the cigar he was smoking from his lips.

"I 'm surprise-proof," he said, "and I thought

I was fool-proof. The scoop will do, but will the wedding?"

"I 've known her a long while, sir," David palliated; "as a matter of fact, we 've been engaged. But I can't say any more now. That is, any more than I 've put in this write-up for the paper."

He took an envelope from his pocket, rose, and laid it on Mr. Vernon's desk.

"Will you tell Violet, sir? We have to catch a six-thirty train. I 'll write to Uncle George."

"Well, young man, this is haste. But get along," he held out a hand, "with my good wishes." Then he added, "But unless the stage has become a nunnery I fancy you 'll need more than good wishes."

He turned to his work, and David, thanking him, went out, feeling very numb and lonely.

Nothing else had to be done but to write to Uncle George; and after doing this he started for Emma's hotel, to which his valise had already been sent. As he walked, words from his "scoop" began to break, mockingly now, into his mind. "Miss Emma Magee . . . the popular vaudeville star . . . married Mr. David Anson . . . a

"Herald" reporter . . . yesterday afternoon. . . . The young couple were old friends. . . . They will reside in Riverton after a brief honeymoon in Chicago. . . . Miss Magee, it is understood, will give up the stage."

Obsessed by the sentences, he reached the hotel lobby. There Emma was waiting, her face fixed, pale and unhappy, and without was a coupé which she had ordered and in which his valise had been placed.

Neither could find anything to say on the way down to the station, but as they neared it Emma drew from her bag a ticket. "It 's for the drawing-room," she said. "I got it for us. We'll have to talk."

David scanned her firmly set face. "We 'll try to do so like reasonable married people then, won't we, Emma?"

"Yes," she answered morosely. "But—"

He reached over and took her hand with pity, and perhaps with remorse. For thoughts of Hallie kept coming to him.

She drew away sharply.

"Don't!" she exclaimed, "Don't! I can't stand it! Wait till you hear."

He said no more, for the coupé had stopped. They got out and went through the drab waiting-room with its bored occupants, to the train, David with a realization, now, that what had appeared strange in Emma last night had some ominous significance.

"Give our tickets to the conductor, and don't disturb us," he told the porter, who had placed their luggage in the drawing-room and was closing the door. Then he sat down silently, opposite Emma, until the train, clearing the city, was puffing northward through the spring fields and woodlands.

At length she rose and, taking off hat and gloves, tossed them recklessly aside.

"If you 're going to supper," she shrugged, "you 'd better go. I don't want any."

Her tone was sullen, wretched. And David, looking at her, was helplessly bewildered.

"Do you know what you *do* want, Emma?" he questioned. "I thought you wanted me to marry you."

"Well, I had a right to, had n't I?" she flung back, as if he had accused her, and as if angry with the tears that sprang to her eyes.

"My waiting five years testifies to that, I think," he answered.

"And how could I know you would wait, if you did?" she flared again, belligerently. "Men are n't usually such angels."

"Or fools, you mean? Well, I did, and we 're married now. So it 's all right, is n't it?" he appealed.

"No, it is n't, and you know it!" she went on. "You don't love me, and I don't love you."

She sat down desperately.

"But if you leave the stage, and if we try?" he again suggested.

Her look became bitter.

"Will that undo hell?" she exclaimed with fierce innuendo.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. But he began to realize that nearness of fatality was behind her manner, and dread gripped him.

"And I don't suppose you know about that Philadelphia man I was engaged to, though it *was* in the papers? Well, even if you don't, I had a right . . . !"

Desperate sobs strangled her conclusion.

"Things like that are always said about ac-

tresses, but I thought there was n't anything to it—or anything more," David said, "since you wanted to marry me."

"And there is n't!' she cried furiously, "for *him*. He 's left me; he 's cleared out for Europe all right, with his damn Quaker pedigree. His family got him free; they saw to that! But what about me?"

She struck her hands against her breast and gave him a look that made it impossible for him not to see that the tragedy into which she was plunged was yawning for him also; that their marriage was not merely a matter of patient adjustment.

"But if you love him why did you marry *me?*" he only asked.

"Because you owed it to me!" she cried, determined to have it over. "Because the child I 'm expecting has a right to a name! And if *he* would n't give it one I thought *you* ought to."

A slow, cold, yet angry revulsion suffused David's whole being. All the fine fairness of his five years seemed to become a mockery, which the memory of his withering disillusion at the theater last night increased. The blue of his

eyes became a hard gray. There was justice in her position, yet he felt so outraged, so cheated, that the little mahogany and plush drawing-room suddenly seemed to be a cage which was being whirled through a country whose farm lights, beginning to glow, were but mockeries of home lights.

"So I 'm to pay that way!" he said hoarsely. "I 'm to be your husband for the sake of another man's child!"

"Don't," Emma moaned, contracting with pain and putting her hands to her face. "I had to. I could n't face it. I 'm not asking any love, or asking you to be anything to me. I could have gone away and hid it, but it would have got out—later—and the child would have learned. Oh, my God! I hate you, I hate you, I hate myself!"

She rose and flung herself face down on the long seat of the compartment. Anguish, superinduced by her physical as well as moral plight, tore one sob after another from her breast.

David, with hands clenched, sat looking at her. He felt very old—and very young. The other man's desertion of her was no doubt her main

preoccupation, but he could not escape the sense of her pitiable difficulty, and of the strangeness of her mother instinct.

The train clacked rapidly on, and the last pallor of day died sadly. The window-pane by him no longer framed the fleeting outer world, but a sickly reflection of his own face and of the drawing-room's gleaming mahogany. The hysterical sobbing of the outstretched figure on the seat gradually died down.

Neither spoke again. There was nothing to say. Five years before they had had their hour of youthful passion, of unreckoning joy. Now, at twenty-one, they were bound fast by a marriage that but separated them in mind, heart, and body. They were in one of life's blind alleys from which there seemed to be no way out.

It appeared incredible. There she was with a body beautiful and once ecstatically dear to him, but now only a sad alien shape from which he unconsciously shrank. The best would have to be made of it, he knew; but he did not see how the best could ever be tolerable. With disillusion, disappointment and longing he went over it all,

past, present and future, as the express rushed through sleeping villages, until at last, drugged by exhaustion, his eyes closed in profoundly hopeless sleep.

A jar, as the engineer stopped the train unskilfully some hours later, shook his lids apart. Chilled and cramped, he rubbed his eyes, but could not at first realize where he was. When he did so, he got up still unseeingly and determined to ring for the porter and have his berth made.

But consciousness fully returned to him as he looked across to where he had left Emma and found she was not there. Her traveling satchel, hat, and coat were also missing. Where was she? Had she gone to another part of the train, angry, offended?

He was on the point of accepting this solution, when in the dim lamp-light he saw a sheet of paper pinned to the plush seat opposite. Relieved, then fearful, he loosed the sheet and sank back into his seat. On it was scrawled:

I 'm going to get off. I 'm sick of it all. It 's no use hoping things will come right. You'll get a letter from me in Chicago.

Very cold, numb, and remorseful, he read the ill-formed words again. The thought struck him that she might kill herself, even that she *had* done so; but he dismissed it. He looked at his watch. It had stopped, unwound. But the concentrated stillness at the station where the train had paused told him that dawn was approaching.

When the engine started again he flung himself down on the seat where she had lain, and tried to decide on his course of action. His senses, however, were too poignantly disturbed for thinking, and so he only lay wide-eyed, feeling at one moment that life consisted only of creaking wheels, and at the next of inexplicable miserable fatality.

Outside the gray dawn grew imminent. Farms sped past and an occasional windmill hung black wings against the creeping light. Then railway tracks multiplied, factory windows caught the wan gleam, and tall grain elevators told of the near city.

But even after the porter, knocking at his door, had called "Chicago!" David lay there, until the train, slowing up, pulled into the noisy

cinder-swept station below the city's thronging streets. Then he rose, took up his hat, coat, and valise, tipped the porter, and, reaching the station's entrance, inquired the way to his hotel.

CHAPTER XVII

THE great lake city in which David so distressedly found himself was like a magnet whose rays reached out over the land and drew to it millions of hearts and hopes. Some were caught irrevocably by the power of its attractions. Others, vitalized or devitalized, dropped away again. By David the attraction and necessity which held him there were never to be forgotten.

Having eaten an unwanted breakfast, he wandered out among these human particles. Until Emma's letter should come he knew he would have to remain in this magnetized maelstrom, and so he tried to forget himself in the surge around him. On State Street he bought a paper, but the huge head-lines seemed to have nothing to do with the world of his thoughts. After staring at it blankly for a moment, he put it in his pocket and wandered on.

Coming unexpectedly on the river, he stopped, and for a while watched the lift of bridges to

let tug and freight-boat go by. The dirty current, so accustomed to suicide, reminded him of his fear for Emma last night. Might she not indeed take her life, if she had not already done so? Or, if not, what could he expect from her letter? Complete uncertainty concerning the course she might pursue faced him; and a ruined life, swept by the winds of this uncertainty, stretched out wretchedly before his imagination.

He turned away from the river, and, after a detour, became aware that he had chanced upon the theater district. Glaring advertisements of feminine stars met his eyes everywhere, and a strong repugnance to their lure rose in him. Yet one picture fascinated him for a moment—as Emma's no doubt, had fascinated many others—perhaps at this very theater. He passed on, feeling very lonely, and destitute of love.

At noon, when thousands of clerks poured out of big buildings and rushed into restaurants to wash down heavy sandwiches and pies with strong coffee, he also went into one, less crowded than the rest, and ate his lunch. Physical hunger, however, was stifled by hunger of heart. So when he came out on the streets again he felt

unable to endure the thronging solitude and returned to his hotel.

He hoped to find there a letter from Emma, but none had come. None might come, he realized, until to-morrow or the next day. So, thinking he had better provide himself with more money against an emergency, he determined to pawn his watch. When night came he went out to do so, pausing near the pawnbroker's to stare at a Salvation Army lassie, who alternately beat a drum and sang, or prayed and talked intimately to God, for the benefit of the unhappy human drift gathered around her.

With the money for his watch pocketed, he again returned to his room and to bed. The fight for sleep was a hard one, as the restless roar of the streets and of his own thoughts long tossed him from side to side.

He got up at seven, ate breakfast ravenously, and asked for his mail. Getting none, he again went out on the streets, only to return at eleven o'clock because of an intense feeling that some message had come for him. Nor was he mistaken. The clerk handed him a telegram.

Trying not to tremble, he took it, and, not

trusting himself to open it at once, went to his room. There, between dingy walls that seemed to have absorbed the unwholesome personalities of many occupants, he flung his hat on the bed and broke open the message.

So confident was he that it was from Emma, and that it would at least bring relief to his suspense, that the words of it were at first but jargon to him. Then their meaning flashed upon his heart. Signed by Uncle George, they told him to come at once to Foxton, that Uncle William was dying!

Stunned by the shock of the news, he stood with lips open and shaking. Much on which his life was founded had been razed during the last few weeks; and now the oldest, and in some ways dearest, support was to go. He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Soon, however, the thought that he must go to Foxton recurred to him, and, getting up, he hurriedly prepared to do so. But in the midst of his preparations he stopped irresolutely, remembering Emma. What should he do about her? What if she should change her mind and follow him to the hotel?

Disturbing as these questions were, he did not hesitate long. Uncle William had been a father to him, and Uncle William was dying. For Emma he would leave a note telling her she could follow him to Foxton, if she cared to.

On inquiring of the hotel porter, he learned that a train south was not to be had until seven o'clock. But as remaining in his room would be unendurable, he determined to go to the station and get his ticket, with information concerning connections.

On the way back from the station he suffered another heart-twist. A girl coming from a store in front of him looked so much like Hallie that he almost called out to her. When he saw he was mistaken, his eyes filled with the renewed realization of all he had lost.

At the hotel again, he wrote his note to Emma and left it, together with his Foxton address, to be handed to her if she inquired for him. Then, though there were still three hours until his train should start, he gathered up valise, coat, and hat, and, with bill paid, hastened back toward the station. There in the smoky, gaseous, clanging air of the waiting-room the minutes dragged inter-

minably. Amid the confusion of porters, passengers, loungers, and baggage, he felt lonely and desolate—and as if he had been in Chicago for ages.

On the train at last, and rushing through free level fields, with the city behind him, it seemed as if a world-heavy nightmare had been lifted from his heart. He lay down on his berth without undressing and sank into an oblivion that lasted until he was called for Mertonville, where he was to change for Foxton, and where, meeting up with Jeb Jayson, he heard news of Uncle William.

"Your uncle," the old driver said, "has been goin' downhill right smartly since he had that shock last March. In *my* opinion his illness was brought on by that hell-fire preacher who imprecated on your Uncle William's wife that day of her last faith-healin'. You see, your uncle did n't know the ranter was goin' to preach, and he come home all tremblin' like, and sank down in his chair. Then he begun to say to ole Caroline, who was there, 'I want my Mary, Caroline. I want to see my Mary.' "

David turned his face away and drank back his tears.

They got into Foxton at two o'clock and were the only passengers on the little station platform. Jeb offered David a seat in his buggy, which was waiting, but David said he wanted to walk.

He struck out, and the feel of the rutted road under his feet brought a sense of healthy relief to him, as did the May air with its momentary news of budding. Hardly had he gone a hundred yards, however, before he saw a figure approaching and knew, this time without a doubt, that it was Hallie.

She was very pale and composed and said at once:

"Papa thought you might come and asked me to meet you. Uncle William is very low; there is no hope. I 've been nursing him and am to nurse him to-night. He may live several days."

David could only look at her as they walked down the street, but she seemed to expect no more from him. She did not mention Emma, nor did he. What indeed could be said? They were in the sun-born, leafy world of May, and yet

how much unhappiness it held! Why were n't human hearts allowed to be blissful in spring and summer—as the earth was? Did n't everybody deserve to have at least half the year free from the shadows of sorrow and failure and guilt?

At the little tree-sheltered frame cottage where Uncle William had lived for five years, Uncle George awaited them sadly. He led them into the cramped parlor which contained what the old man had brought with him from the farm: his Bible, the old clock, still solemnly ticking, the linen chest, and Aunt Mary's spinning-wheel. As David's eyes fell on them, a sense of immemorial purity, sweetness, and peace swept over him, as if from the wings of her spirit.

"It 's David, Uncle William," said Hallie, bending over the shrunken figure on the bed in the next room. "David 's come to see you."

The old eyes opened, and a fugitive light glowed in them. "He 's a good lad," the feeble lips murmured. "He loved his Aunt Mary." But before David could reach the bed he had drifted off again on the river of unconsciousness which was bearing his spirit toward the unknown.

"You, Papa," said Hallie, when night came, "must go to bed. David will watch with me while you get some rest. If there 's a change we 'll call Dr. Warner."

Uncle George let her have her way, and the two took up their watch. They were silent, but David felt that some rhythm in the solemnity of approaching death drew their hearts into a communicating nearness, despite all that had happened to separate them. As Hallie moved about the old man's bed, smoothing the cover, adjusting a lamp-shade, holding water to his lips, or laying a hand on his brow, her instinctive womanly tenderness reminded David of his childish wonder whether she, too, would be a "healer" when she grew up. Now he knew that she *was* one, that the gift of all consolation emanated from her very being; and he was healed as he watched.

But her healing was not for Uncle William. At dawn, while they still sat, unwearied, it seemed to David, and comforted in all the uncertainty of their position, they saw his eyes open and heard his lips murmur: "Mary! . . . Noah!"

Hallie, going to him, answered softly, "Yes,

Uncle William." But though his eyes were fixed on her it was evident that his look was on something or some one far beyond.

They waited for a moment, bending anxiously over him. Then they understood. The gentle spirit of the old man was gone; it had slipped from life as quietly as a star at dawn.

Hallie straightened up, with swimming eyes: "Oh, David!" she said, "he saw her."

Two days later the meager funeral cortège, a hearse followed by a small line of buggies, took its way to the little home burial-ground on Anson farm. As David, who was to drive Hallie, got into the buggy, a letter was handed him, which he saw was from Emma, but which he put uncaringly into his pocket.

Along the road to the farm the country had put on a glad vesture of living green, watered by brooklets and joyous with bird-song. Even the little burial-place, when they reached it, seemed beautiful with a peace that transcended sorrow.

When the grave had been filled and all had turned away, Hallie said to David:

"Can't we walk over the farm again, by the house, and down to the creek, before going back?"

They told Uncle George this desire and, leaving their horse hitched, set off down the well-known road. Each tree, rock, and fence-corner along the way seemed redolent of a beloved familiarity; and at the bridge they leaned over the rail as of old and looked at their reflections in the water.

Hallie was the first to speak.

"I hope you 're going to be very happy in your new life, David," she said haltingly.

A crow flying over them cawed.

"There 's not much prospect of happiness for me anywhere," David answered gloomily. "But *I 'll* stick it out if *she* will."

"Stick it out? Why, what do you mean?"

She turned a grave, startled look upon him.

"I mean she does n't love me, Hallie, and I don't love her," he broke out. "She married me only because she was—in trouble—with another man, and wanted the protection of my name."

"But if you did n't love her why did you go back to her?"

"I had to," he said bitterly. "She had a claim on me. And I told her when we separated five years ago that I 'd marry her when I got through

college if she wanted me to. But she concealed the truth about herself from me until after we were married. It was n't fair of her, Hallie. She pretended she was thinking of *our* mistake only, and that she wanted to get off the stage. She did n't tell me about the child she was expecting until we were on the way to Chicago."

"I see," said Hallie coldly, after a pause. And, though David could feel in her tone repugnance to Emma's procedure, he felt more her shocked disappointment in him.

"And then?" she asked, after they had paused.

"Oh, while I was asleep she got off the train," David continued wearily, "and left a note saying she would write. Her letter came this morning."

A wind ran softly through the trees overhead, then blew a little harder and set the leaves dancing and the water rippling. Down the road came half a dozen geese with awkward, leisurely waddle. From the bottoms a shot resounded—perhaps from the gun of Boone.

"Why did I ever leave this place?" David exclaimed with passionate wistfulness. "I was

happy here—happier with you that summer, Hallie, than I 'll ever be again."

She trembled as he looked at her, but did not lift her lids.

"If you had stayed here, David, there would have been trouble and problems just the same. Life 's that way. . . . But had n't you better read your letter—before we go?"

David drew out the letter and tore it open hopelessly. He read what it contained, reread it, then cried, with a gulp, as if strangled by an overwhelming tide of relief:

"Oh! . . . Oh!"

Moved by his face, by his voice, and perhaps by the reconciling pathos of the death that had so recently united them despite all complexities, Hallie's restraint, too, gave way. His past was forgotten.

"What is it?" she almost implored. "I, too, must know!"

The burden lifted from David's heart was too great. He could not answer with the measure of decency which he tried to command.

"She 's gone away for good," he stammered.

"She does n't love *me,* she says, 'or anybody.' She does n't love anything but the stage—and she intends to go back to it as soon as she can. I 'd better apply for a divorce for desertion, as soon as I want to, she adds, in a postscript."

The mist in his eyes kept him from seeing that Hallie struggled in the throes of relief, pain, and joy. After a moment she said low:

"I left the Morgans and came home, David, because I found I could n't marry Chester. I wanted to tell you, but you left me and went away and wrote me you had married Emma. I could n't believe it, as I could n't believe what they said the time you were locked up in the steeple, for somehow you seemed to belong to me. And now it will be so hard to forget, for I 'll always fear you are thinking of her. . . . But I *am* happy. . . . I believe I could understand now what all the birds and wild things are saying to-day—as Boone used to tell us *he* could."

David looked into the clear depths of her eyes and found there what he had so long desired above all else.

"Yes, Hallie," he replied, with ineffable tenderness, "and I can too, for they are only saying

one thing now—the thing I have always wanted to say to you, the thing I 'll soon be able to say every day of our lives. . . . But we must go."

They walked back up the road, past the house, —now a stranger's,—past the barn, the corn-crib, and the carpenter shop.

"Do you remember," Hallie asked, pausing before the latter, "what you said about the shavings and tools and dove and Bible the Sunday we went to Shiloh?"

David did not, but other words from the Bible, words that had been buried under the silt of the years, burst again into his heart, and as they got into the buggy and drove away he kept saying them over to himself while he looked at her:

"Whither thou goest I will go . . . where thou lodgest I will lodge . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

THE END