To
MARY DERIEUX
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GOLDEN RUBBISH

PART ONE

"PRINTER’S PI"
CHAPTER I

ON an evening in May, back in 1906, "The Daily Telegraph" in Paris, Vt., published the following item under Personal Mention—

Among the new residents in town this week is Mr. Potiphar Buss, a journeyman compositor. Mr. Buss has secured employment in the mechanical department of this newspaper. He is boarding for the present in the School Street home of Mrs. Julia Matthews.

A circumspect item. No nonsense about it. A man had come to town, he had landed a job, he had found a place to live. No eulogies on this man's past; no encomiums on his prospects. Which omissions were not carelessness or paucity of space. If Mr. Buss as a journeyman compositor moved onward suddenly, no space of importance was wasted in his heralding. And he might move onward suddenly. Journeymen compositors had a weakness for such movings.

So the paper made no mention of Mr. Buss's physical endowments. It neglected to state his age, his affluence, his domestic entanglements. It was taken for granted that he had set no planets ablaze to date, overturned no dynasties, corrupted
no civilizations. Those concerned in his current attributes were the paper’s proprietors who wondered how long he would stick to the job, and the School Street widow who needed his board money. As for Paris at large, the “Telegraph’s” acquisition of another tramp printer aroused less interest than a meeting of the assessors, or that Ollie Frisbee—inebriate of note—was again in the hoosgow. The townsfolk might wonder what was piquing the assessors, or how Ollie, being in, would contrive to get out. But who was this Buss that a community should toot trumpets at his advent in its midst?

He was a rumpled little man, as hairless as an egg. Beneath a brow of Socratic grandeur were inoffensive, tin-colored eyes. His nose was bulbous and his spectacles foggy; his mouth was a vortex in a lacework of wrinkles.

The principal item of his raiment was a heavy, greenish ulster that covered a shirt whose pattern was vague. He had removed his hat on entering the office, women being present, and thrust beneath an elbow was a faded, fat umbrella. The paper’s workers beheld this ensemble, the flatness of his feet, the umbrella’s corpulence, and a quiet merriment ensued on those premises.

“So,” smiled the editor, “you think you want a job?”

He sank in a chair, this picturesque applicant. The umbrella was laid across ponderous knees.
“Mental processes don’t enter it,” he answered. “Long time ago I formed three bad habits—eatin’ food, wearin’ clothes, an’ sleepin’ in a bed. Providence may clothe th’ lilies o’ th’ field and feed th’ fowls o’ th’ air, but I give you my word, sir, I ain’t no posie though I have been a bird. So I must satisfy them, habits by th’ sweat o’ honest toil. I’m askin’ you, sir, f’r th’ chance t’ perspire. I do it right easy,” he ended with a wheeze.

A slender, finely seasoned man was Editor Sam Hod. His head was bald in front, his face was smoothly shaven. Time had grizzled his sideburns, softened his eyes, traced whimsy around his mouth. He went about his plant in rimless gold spectacles, rolled-up shirtsleeves and an unbuttoned vest. He was forty-eight years old.

“Where you from?” he asked kindly.

“Well now, there’s a question! Some days I’m from Here. Some days I’m from There. On the whole you might call it I come from Ancient Parts.”

“You come from where?”

“Speakin’ in simile and metaphor—language bein’ given us t’ cover up life’s facts. I might o’ been th’ galoot as went down t’ Jericho and fell amongst thieves. I been amongst ’em all my life anyhow, and relief’d be welcome. I might o’ led th’ Children o’ Israel acrost th’ Red Sea or chased ’em in chariots. At any rate, with th’ passin’ o’ time th’ tables is turned—whole armies o’ Jews is now
chasin' me regular, mostly for money on loans I can't pay."

"A sort of Wandering Jew yourself—is that what you mean?"

"Yes, I've wandered considerable. Now I'd like t' take root. I might o' drunk a highball with th' mad Nebuchadnezzar and seen 'em do th' hootchy-kootch in th' streets o' Gath and Ascalon. Up and down th' world I been—up and down—up and down! Anyhow, you meet me: a printer in Vermont."

"And what name do you go by, in your present incarnation?"

"Potiphar, sir—if it don't sound presum'shuss."

"It wasn't your wife who got frisky with a certain young Joseph in Egypt?"

"Well, women allus did hanker t' lay hands on my garments—though my last name's now Buss."

The printer had drawn forth a blackened corn-cob as he rehearsed this nonsense. He stuffed shag tobacco down hard in its bowl.

"What I mean," he went on, "th' place a man's from don't commence t' stack up with where 'tis he's goin'. Our lives, I've observed, is perty much alike. We've done th' same things, got ourselves in much th' same scrapes, knowed birth and love and pain and dreams, five thousand years back th' same as t'day."

"I suppose so," sighed Hod.

"So when you ask me where I'm from, I reply
‘from Ancient Parts’. I’m th’ sum and substance o’ all th’ race has suffered. I’m th’ Alpha and Omega o’ all men’s joys and sorrows. If you really pin me down, my likeliest answer’s the Garden o’ Eden. All o’ us started there origin’ly, most o’ us springin’ from Adam and Eve, here and there some coot aspringin’ from th’ Serpent.”

Potiphar lighted the pipe and blew out the match. The tin-colored eyes locked glances with Hod’s. Whatever his past, he wanted it forgotten; closed like a book with weights on its covers.

“Well,” mused the editor, “I might find you a place if you showed me you’d stick. We’re tired of taking on new men only to have them travel when they’ve made a little money.”

“I’ll stick,” promised Buss. He whetted puckered lips. His shoes were very dusty. His heart, like his feet, was weary from plodding.

“We’ll see,” the other stated. “You come on out back.”

Potiphar Buss picked up the umbrella. He scuffed through the door. The composing-room received him.

The composing-room received him!

Allowing deductions for eating and sleeping, the printer-philosopher remained twenty years atop his ad-alley stool, spectacles skewed on his cauliflower nose, right arm swinging over the cases. And few
beheld Potiphar with sleeves neatly rolled or the front of his person properly fastened.

Month in, month out, he labored—spring, summer, autumn, winter—his faithfulness equalled by an antiquated press. So long as the proprietor possessed that happy combination, Potiphar Buss and an early model Duplex, he could always be certain of getting out a paper.

"Well," declared the comp, jostled amid the freemasonry of the first nightly washup, "this looks like a job and darned if I don't root. All th' same th' day's comin' when I ease from my labors and subsist on th' fruits o' my indigent husbandry."

Retirement from labors was not difficult to grasp. But what did he mean by the fruits of indigency?

The office grew indifferent at hearing him repeat it. For Potiphar repeated it. He repeated it when holiday work was heavy and his fancy prone to wander. He said it on dreary afternoons of winter, on quiet summer nights, on Saturdays in autumn when the week's toil was ended and the staff headed homeward to baked beans and brown bread.

"F'r th' love o' Pete, Old Timer, whatta you do with all your jack?" This from office newcomers who heard the trite assertion. "You'd oughta earned enough to retire a dozen times without indignant husbands to support you."

And yet Old Buss did not squander his wages. Until he bought a small cottage down the south River Road, he continued to board with the Matthews relict and he paid his bill punctually. Ten dollars a week covered his living expenses and the paper paid him twenty. His only extravagances were beer, when the nation was that unmoral, and silver-foiled packets of insufferable tobacco. For a time the office force believed he must be supporting relatives somewhere or perhaps the dependents from youthful indiscretions . .
ONE afternoon in the spring of 1908, the editor of "The Telegraph" returned from his lunch to find a strange youth on the steps before his office.

He was a sorry looking boy whose hair needed cutting. His eighteen-year-old countenance was feathery with whisker, for a score of nights he had slept in his clothes, and his badly mussed cap was losing its sweat-band.

As he sat hunched over, face bowed on his wrists, Main Street pedestrians glanced at him puzzled. He was either drunk or ill, Sam thought, entering his plant and shutting the door.

"He wants to see you," the office girl declared. "He's been hanging around here since a quarter past twelve. He fin'lly went out and draped the front steps."

Hod called the lad inside.

"Please now can I have work?" the nondescript began without further introduction. "I'll do anything to earn real cash. If I can't get work here I'm just about sunk."

A note of despair unsteadied his appeal. Aside from the corrosion of adversity which did not be-
long on the face of a boy, one of his eyes was queerly filmed with white, obviously a cataract despite his adolescence.

"Where you from?" Hod demanded—the customary question.

This applicant however, indulged in no persiflage.

"I now been working on and off lots of places. But I came to Vermont to see folks in Wickford." Wickford was a hamlet ten miles above Paris. "They didn't have anything for me to do though, . . . or they wouldn't let me do it. They said to see you. Please, please, can I have work? I'll do it faithf'ly—I promise I will!"

"Why come to a paper? Do you claim to know the business?"

"I can do anything 'round a printing office, once I get the chance. That's exactly the trouble. I can't get the chance!"

A real estate man named Fred Babcock entered while Sam was considering this appeal.

"What you lookin' so glum about?" he demanded of the editor, scribbling an ad in the latter's private cubby.

"That boy wants a job—and I can't make him out."

Fred viewed the youth through the half-opened door. "Pretty young to be a booze hound. All wrong as a tramp. You better go careful. He may have a 'record'."
“No, I don’t think so.”
“What the devil ails his eye?”
“Got a cataract over it, or at first shot I’d say so.”
“I always thought a cataract was a sign of old age.”
“I’ve heard of poorly born youngsters getting ’em. Still, they’re usually rare.”
Fred paid for his ad. But he said anent cataracts—
“Old man Haslett had one. I think they cut it off.”
“Yes, it’s done often. Though the operation’s delicate.”
“Gonna try him out?”
The editor sighed. “I suppose so,” he said.
“Somehow, to turn down a chap with that ring in his voice stacks up with pinching orphans or kicking crutches from underneath cripples. Yet—oh why should this business scoop up all the misfits?”
“’Cos you’re fool enough to let it,” Babcock answered truthfully.

“So you claim to know the printer’s trade?” Sam Hod repeated when Babcock had departed.
“What might your name be?”
“George Robling, sir. I only wisht you’d try me.”
“Set ads, George Robling?”
"Yes, sir!"

"We'll see."

"You mean you'll give me work?"

"I'll give you a break, if that's what you're after. I'm willing to try you out."

"But now, the wages. How much could you let me have for— for setting ads—or anything?"

It nettled Hod, this splitting of financial hairs when the giving of employment was largely a charity.

"Nine dollars a week should be pretty fair pay—for a fellow your age—little more than apprentice."

The stranger's lip tightened. "You—you couldn't make it twelve?"

"I can get half the boys in town for nine. Why should you want twelve?"

"I now couldn't explain so anybody'd get it. But—I'd rather have nine than nothing at all."

"I said we'd see first how much you can do."

"If I work my darndest, I wish you'd make it twelve."

"Here's a Classified ad Fred Babcock just wrote. Suppose you go set it. I'll have you shown the cases of six-point."

"Yes, sir. I'm now terribly grateful. You'll see I'll do my darndest."

"Well, on the other hand, don't do your darndest too much. Nothing's more nuisance than
someone out back working like a family man trying to hold his job.”

Young Robling followed into the composing room. He was shown a hook for his cap and coat, introduced to Potiphar, and loaned a black apron. Climbing a stool—after a lengthy fuss about a suitable composing-stick—he commenced the disagreeable, picayune task which all the compositors avoided as they could: “sticking” those daily Classifieds from the nonpareil case of needles and slivers.

Babcock’s ad made a four-line announcement. He would pay a trifling reward for a lost ring of keys—with a tag marked Charles Stevens. Potiphar stewed at the new boy’s slow speed . . .

While half a dozen persons leaned about the “stones” watching the last forms going together, young Robling put a question.

“How does it happen that a man named Babcock has lost some keys with another man’s name?”

“B’long to th’ Stevens place, them keys do, prob’ly,”—this from the “make-up” intent upon his work. “Fred’s caretaker, winters. Stevens folks live in N’York through cold weather. House stays locked from November to May.”

“Furnished?” George asked faintly.

“Guess so,” growled the other, bothered by a form that sagged in its center . . .

The queer boy commenced his labors on a Tues-
day. Through the balance of that week he worked with application. By Friday night however, the proprietor was troubled. He must send the lad onward.

He had brains of a sort, this frenzied young journeyman, yet he had to hunt his cases with a vision that was faulty. Continually on his “blind side” he ran into forms or knocked galleys floorward—and he nettled Sam Hod by more references to wages.

“Suppose,” the latter told him, “you sort of look ’round and watch out for something better.”

“You now mean—I’m fired?” The white face went whiter.

“Not exactly—yet. You can stay on awhile and do things like sweeping up. But find another place without too long a looking.”

The boy worked out the balance of his time blindly, dully, given to small tempers. Once Potiphar came on him sniveling in the stock-room. He became so expensive as another week ended that Sam considered presenting him with nine extra dollars and asking him to travel—to cut office mishaps. Meeting Mrs. Matthews, he questioned the widow about the youth’s boardbill.

“Land’s sakes,” she exclaimed, “he ain’t livin’ to my place. He et one meal o’ vittles an’ bunked in along Potiphar. Next day he went off an’ I ain’t see him since.”
Pinkie Price, the paper's news cub, tried to get better acquainted with the nondescript. The two washed alone at the battered corner sink.

"Where's your folks?" demanded Pinkie. "Do your father and mother know you're up here in Vermont?"

"I never had any father and mother." And Robling turned away, staring out the back window.

"No father or mother! How the devil was you born?"

"I mean, both of 'em died when I was a kid."

"You been traveling ever since? Who was it raised you?"

"My uncle and aunt. My—my uncle drove a truck."

"Drove a truck where?"

"Trenton, New Jersey. Do you know a good job in this town—where a fellow could make twelve dollars a week?"

"Where are they now? Couldn't they help you?"

"No, we had a fight. I mean, I did—with my uncle. He took it out on me—that Pa went to the Klondyke—"

"Your father went where? Did he get any gold?"

Robling shook his head. "All Pa got to the Klondyke was a knife between his shoulders. Ma
married again when she heard he was dead. Then she passed out too—when she had a new kid.”

Pinkie was summoned and biography halted.

The ensuing Saturday the office girl figured eighteen extra dollars into the payroll for Robling—at the editor's instructions—drew a check for the whole, got Sam to sign it, cashed it, and left the money in the safe while she went home to lunch. She had done the same thing on countless other Saturdays despite the office jest that the ancient green strong-box could be opened with a hairpin.

When she came back, the payroll was missing. So too, was Georgie Robling.
CHAPTER III

THE Monday following the theft of the payroll, Potiphar Buss returned from his luncheon. With hat and ulster hung away behind the Duplex, corncob drawing smoothly, he read the Boston paper spread open on his cases. Thus he noticed, directly on a line with his eye, the black cambric apron loaned to young Robling. It hung limply by the window, a crepe to malfeasance. And from one of its pockets protruded some envelopes.

Puzzled, certain they had not been therein when George was loaned the apron, wondering if they held any clue to the miscreant, the printer reached over and lifted them out.

Jersey City postmarks cancelled all of the stamps. But the addresses were different; they revealed the boy’s Odyssey in quest of employment. Compassion mingled with the printer’s curiosity. He read them in the hope they might unsnarl a riddle.

When he had finished them, his lacklustre eyes were fixed on vague distance.

“Poor son of a gun,” the man whispered softly.

In the time-mellowed office with its golden-brown walls, with no noise disturbing but the sim-
mer of metal cooking in the linotype, Potiphar Buss re-read one fraught paragraph—

... what's more, I don't believe a word you say, about living in any closed country house to cut down your expenses. I could swallow that once but my eyes have been opened. You don't want us with you, either me or the baby. I don't see where your heart is . . .

"Closed country house!" Potiphar exclaimed. "Where could he o' took t' livin'? An' somewhere they's a baby!"

Then the vortex-mouth in the wrinkles dropped open. Could the youngster have found that lost bunch of keys?

The employes drifted in for afternoon labors. Potiphar said nothing of what he had discovered, but he did listless work that drab afternoon. The sadness of ages lay upon his countenance. He was given to long moments of gazing from the windows.

At half-past four came early spring sunset. A nipping wind blew up; clouds overcast the sky. The night would be blowy and shot with dank rain. Six o'clock arrived. The last carrier boy departed, the forms were washed up, the customary jostling prevailed about the sink. Only the talk tonight concerned young Robling, how much he had taken, where he had fled. Potiphar Buss did not join this converse. He kept to his cases distributing "dead"
ads. And some of the types went in wrong compartments.

When his last fellow craftsman had departed, the printer trudged homeward and ate his supper silently. The clouds were oppressive; much slush lay underfoot. Nevertheless, having arrived at a decision, he buttoned his ulster on his fat little stomach, fortified himself with a pipe of fresh tobacco, took the baggy umbrella and departed in the night. He went out through School Street and turned into Main. Down through the business section he trudged, down West Main Street, up Prospect Avenue hill. He reached the hilltop finally, crossed over an avenue lined with summer homes, at length reached a backroad that forked northwestward.

No street lamps lighted this eerie backroad. The sidewalks ran out; the thoroughfare narrowed. Wind loaded with rain tossed the baggy umbrella, the puddles were continuous. Once a lonely auto splashed him. Yet the cob pipe burned cheerily. It burnished the end of a queerly splayed nose as sparks whipped away on the curves of the gale. When the fallen arches fell in several wretched holes, the expletives resulting weighed eleven to the pound.

Like the lines of a structure seen in a dream, the Stevens house showed as he came along its fence. He opened its gate and went up its walk. Wherupon matches were struck, on its veranda.

Each brief yellow glare disclosed naked flooring,
closed storm doors, boarded fastened windows. Cobwebs, leaves and old cocoons were frowsy in the shutters. A skeleton woodbine, lashed by raw gale, whistled and sawed against ice-encrusted posts. Trying the front door, the printer found it fastened even as the windows. Quaking on fat little legs, from window to window along the eastern side he groped, testing each in turn.

He was about to try the doors and windows along the western side when naked maples paused in their swaying and the printer's blood turned suddenly to clabber. He heard sounds from inside not made by the gale. Through that vasty void of night came a low broken babble. Then the wind started up; the trees lashed anew. A small bough snapped off and crashed down on a fence.

"Shucks!" cried Potiphar. "I ain't afraid o' Georgie!"

Firmly he clutched the dutiful umbrella. Despite the dark, the ice, the puddles, he felt his way around to a porch at the back. Twice he slipped and went down, completely down, on the seat of his person. But the ulster preserved him from calamitous wetting and without much ado he recovered his hat. Regaining his feet he groped to the porch. He found what he had scarcely hoped to find—an unlatched kitchen window.

Whereupon stout little Potiphar Buss, in the raw March night with no one to see, heaved himself up and over the sill. Barking his shins, sprawling
inside, he slid the sash down and nervously listened. “Nellie!” came a cry—like the wail of one damned.

It echoed through the rooms, the hallways, the pantries. Then a senseless muttering ended in a moan. In inky blackness Potiphar scraped a match.

The kitchen had a shelf between two of its windows. On this shelf was a lamp. In this lamp was oil. Lifting the chimney, the printer dabbed the wick. Then through that strange house he crept forward on tiptoe, scuffing at times, nerding himself to open each door. Closer and closer he explored toward that babbling. It came from a chamber in the southeastern corner.

“Georgie!” he called. He held the lamp high. “It’s only me, Georgie. Potiphar Buss! Don’t be scairt, Georgie. Potiphar Buss fr’m th’ printshop has come.”

The boy’s body rolled on a low wooden bedstead. A heavy gray blanket was half on the floor. He stared at the other from glassy bright eyes.

“Oh!—so you’ve come?” he addressed the first. “That’s right! You’re right! It’s Potiphar Buss!” “I won’t hurt you, Georgie. Don’t you be scairt.”

“Good old Potiphar Buss! I know you, Potiphar Buss. You now gave me two dollars to get some grub last week. Nellie—this is Potiphar—Potiphar Buss—a good old scout, old Potiphar Buss!”
The startled printer peered about the chamber. But aside from themselves the cold crypt was empty . . .

The man closed the door. Shutters and shades were already drawn; no one could see the light from the road. He set the lamp down on a near-by chair-seat.

"I see," he remarked, "you found Babcock's keys."

"No—didn't find 'em—remembered the place from the ad I set—got in through a window—found Nellie here waitin'—for me—to—"

"Yes, yes," soothed the printer. He drew a chair close.

The lamp flame flickered and had to be adjusted. The wind made the house creak. Piecing together such parts of the tale as came out in interludes of sanity, coupled with information given by the letters, the boggle eyed man got the sorry boy's story . . .

"Were you ever in love, Mister Buss—with a girl—with a girl—and did everything go wrong—did happiness seem to have a grudge against you?"

"I know what it's like," the compositor admitted.

"I'll tell you about it—everything—I'll tell you just what happened. We were alone, sort of, Mister Buss. I was nineteen, going on twenty. She was four years older—going on twenty-five—"
“—and prob’ly twice as wise,” the listening man thought grimly.

“But that diff’rence in ages didn’t mean much, Mister Buss. I loved her and she loved me. She lived with her stepmother and worked in a store. I set ads on a paper and was learning ‘machine’. When I got it learned, I’d take a job somewhere—at man’s wages—and I’d send for her and we both have the fun of a home of our own.”


“One night we took a walk, Mister Buss. We came out above the river across from the city. It was one of those misty nights, Mister Buss. We now looked at the lights across the dark water, the lonely ferries, the great high sky with the city glow against it—and it seemed as though it was just us two against the whole earth. She wasn’t happy with her stepmother, Mister Buss. We were both now alone.”

“Yes, Georgie,” said the printer, his throat growing husky.

“A great big ache came over me then, to keep her by me always, just for company against the loneliness. It’s funny how that ache comes over a fellow. It’s funny how a woman keeps it away. There was no one to care what either of us did. I was ’fraid of the years, they seemed so long and empty. I wanted someone by me—and she felt the same. We reckoned it wouldn’t have happened, she and
I coming together like we did, if it wasn’t intended for us to go on.”

“Which one o’ you suggested th’ two o’ you hitch up?”

“It was this way, Mister Buss—we got talking about our room rent. Her stepmother wanted to go to Ohio. Nellie had to move—which meant a hired room. Seven dollars they asked her, for anything decent. I was paying five for mine. Twelve dollars between us was a lot every week. By living together we could get one for six, because married people didn’t have to be so careful where they lived as a girl. That’d leave the other six to go in a bank.”

“That sort o’ figgerin’, son, has ruined more fellers than bettin’ on hosses.”

“Well, that’s why we got married—the money we could save. You see, I didn’t tell her how bad my eye was bothering. And I never expected I’d lose my job so quick. I tried my darndest, but I couldn’t find another. I had to try outside, and that’s how I left her—”

“You didn’t have th’ money so’s she could go with you?”

“I now only had the money for a license and a minister—and the boarding house room where we spent that first week. So after that night above the river, we got married. I married her next noontime when she came out for her lunch—O
God!—years and years it seems—and she went back to work as though nothing had happened—it was all done so quick it hardly seemed lawful. She—she clung to my neck that last morning, Mister Buss, when I started for Elmira where I hoped a job was waiting. Just like I was leaving to go to war, it was. And I had a wife somewheres—it seemed as though I’d dreamed it—"

"It was bindin’, Georgie. Bindin’ for life. I know, boy, I know!"

"I left her, I went away. I took jobs, Mister Buss. You see how it was. They thought I was a man, from the letters I wrote. When they saw I was nineteen, they refused me man’s wages. I could do a man’s work yet they paid me like a kid."

"And th’ new wife kept writin’ to know when she should join you?"

"That’s it, Mister Buss. She couldn’t leave her job—she mightn’t get another. Yet I couldn’t have her come. I had no place to keep her. I could hardly keep myself."

Potiphar recalled the twelve-page closely written missives, the first of the lot he had read that noon. Bitterly he thought how the pages had thinned—to single page scrawls. But the boy was rambling on—

"I tried to make her see how it was. But she claimed I’d stopped loving her, that was the hard part. She said that I’d tricked her—that I’d only
wanted to sleep with a woman—that I didn't want her with me—that I'd never intended to have her with me always. She'd ruined her life, marrying me on impulse!"

"I know all she said," the older man concurred. 

"I worked, Mister Buss—O God, how hard I worked! But my eye bothered more and—and her letters kept coming—she claimed I'd never loved her—that was the hard part!"

The printer sat sloughed in the comfortless chair. He stared straight ahead—into still more cheerless distance. Verily he knew. As a trade it was hard, the wages were slender, boys of nineteen were apprentices indeed. Even had he received the payment due a man, it would not have gone far when divided by two and the wife's share remitted to finance her maternity. Add the urges of a boy to enjoy himself a bit as an offset from his worry, and the youngster had burdens which have broken strong men.

"But I tried every week to send her what I could. I asked for more wages and only got laughed at. I tried to tell them I had a wife and baby. Some of them cursed and said I was lying. Others replied I had no business with a baby—if I'd gotten in a scrape it would teach me a lesson. They never seemed to think they were making Nellie suffer—"

"And so you just went travelin'?"

"I had to, Mister Buss. There was nothing, nothing else. I got job after job. It was always the
same. I had married men’s expenses but all they let me draw was the wages of a boy. The time came, I’m saying, when I hated to go to bed—in fear of the panic that came with the dark.”

“Every man’s knowed that panic, son—not that it helps so much at the time.”

Potiphar recalled the hard unreal ring in the wife’s final letters. He thought of the long list of the baby’s outfit as the girl had compiled it, with prices noted carefully, expenses for this and that, bargain offerings lost. He recalled her relinquishment of work, how the baby had come in her agony of helplessness. Where was his heart? How could a man be a father to a son and manifest no interest in either son or mother? Such queries rang sharp as travail pains. The older man sensed that not once had that father written of his troubles, his trampings from place to place, the injustice of the wages, his panic in the nights. Not a word about his blindness. Only suffering as men suffer, doing their best, making no outcry.

Potiphar likewise thought of bitter ultimatums. The doctor from the institution had said that the little son’s death might possibly be averted if certain things, all costing money, were immediately provided. But there was no money—at least not enough. And the letters no longer contained endearing phrases or enshrined the future in glorified mist. They told instead of many wild and
shameful things their writer meant to do. And
they must have gone like iron nails, all of them,
straight through the father’s naked young heart.

“And so you stole Sam’s payroll t’ save your
baby’s life!”

“There wasn’t any other way, Mister Buss.
There wasn’t. There wasn’t.”

“Still, you might know you’d end up arrested.”

“I just didn’t care.”

“Where’s th’ money now? What’d you do with
it?”

“I mailed it to Nellie as soon as I swiped it—so
they wouldn’t find it on me. Oh I wish I could
die! Maybe with me out of the way Nellie’d get
busy and marry someone else. Nellie’s pretty, Mis­
ter Buss. She could marry if she tried.”

“She’s prob’ly had plenty o’ marriage for a spell.”

“Well anyhow—our baby—it had the right to
live. And so I took the payroll. I hated to do it,
after Hod had been so kind. But I’d got to the
end—the very, very end. Tell me, Mister Buss,
why do such things happen? Why is it that some
of us are born only to find that no one gives a darn?
Why’s life so hard when—we’re perfectly willing
—to play—the game?”

“ ‘Tain’t that,” responded Potiphar. “Folks do
care. They simply don’t know. A long time ago
some wise feller says, th’ heart knoweth its own
bitterness. Th’ world’s kind enough, boy. We’re
all in it t'gether. Folks help each other, far's they understand. Th' big thing they lack is a sort o' heart tellyphone!"

The house was chill, sinister, full of spookish creaks and footfalls. The flame of the lamp continued to flicker; at times it smoked badly. Potiphar’s shadow was grotesque on the wall.

"O God!" groaned the boy. "I want to do so much. Inside me, it's here. But it's all bottled up. I started all wrong and can't seem to get right. I'm no crook, Mister Buss. You'll believe I'm no crook? I got it in me to be famous—yes, sir, famous!—if I only had the chance. That's always the trouble. I can't get the chance."

The old printer stared, though his eyes failed to see. On the bed rolled the boy with fire in his brain, this father too young to have title to a baby, and yet with an uglier burn in his heart. Did the older man's soul, mellowed by its own years of happiness withheld, know more of such tragedy than the lad knew himself? Did Potiphar read into that recital, long long paragraphs from his own book of knowledge? Or was he merely visualizing the vast numbers of humanfolk who plead for a chance at the good things of life and when given that chance, even as this boy had been favored by Sam Hod, deport themselves incompetently and thieve in despair? What could have made old Potiphar Buss sit so silently with that look in his eyes, and not mind the cold, the wind,
the footfalls of phantoms, the lamp that burned blue? . . .

The boy's fever came from incipient tonsillitis. That Potiphar recognized when Robling dozed fitfully.

"Sonny," he whispered, as the wind died with dawn, "you can't be sick here. Besides, someone might find you."

"I know," groaned the youth. "I stole money, I remember. I'm a thief—a common, ordinary, low-down thief. Well, I'll go back. I'll give myself up. But—I've saved Donny's life—though I'll prob'ly—never see him."

"There's more'n this you've got t' face, 'fore you're done with life, son. I got my idees on all such subjecks. You try t' stand up. We'll get out t' th' road."

"Where'll we go, Mister Buss?"

"You trust ol' Potiphar. You'll perish here. And you musn't perish anywhere. Potiphar won't have it. B'sides, they's this new-born infant you got t' raise t' manhood. You come along with me. We'll unsnarl th' tangle."

"You're not kidding me, Mister Buss?"

"Potiphar never kids, Georgie. He ain't th' kid-din' kind."

The fever plagued lad was raised from the bed. There were risks to be run, transporting him so, yet greater risks threatened if he stayed on those
premises. A wrap was soon found. The lamp was extinguished and the corpulent umbrella did service as a cane.

"Where you taking me?" Robling cried shrilly when they reached the crooked backroad.

"Just down t' th' boardin' house, Georgie. You lean your weight on Potiphar Buss."

With the boy's arm hooking his little round shoulders, they came up West Main Street to a gray, empty town. Potiphar stumbled often.

"Hard tellin' which one o' us is furtherest all in," he greeted his landlady. "See t' Georgie, Julia. I'm goin' up South Maple Street and interview my boss."

Leaving the motherly widow to get the lad to bed, Potiphar Buss trudged back out School Street. Again he crossed through the business section, turned the bank corner, went up Maple Street hill.

The newspaper owner, aroused from his slumbers, came down in a bathrobe to confront his compositor. They went into the sitting-room. It was warmer in the sitting-room.

"What's the large idea?" Sam demanded groggily.

"I got somethin' for you, Sam Hod. I wanted you should have it up here t' your house."

From an inside ulster pocket came a fat little wallet, fat yet battered with existence like its owner. Out from the wallet came certain dog-
eared banknotes—on a corner of the sofa the printer spread them out.

"It’s your payroll, Sam Hod. Georgie Roblin’s give it back."

"Now I’ll tell one, Potiphar!"

"You heard what I said—Georgie Roblin’s give it back."

"Where’s the boy now? When did he do it?"

"That’s nobody’s business but Georgie’s and mine. Point is, you can’t prosecute—"

"Can’t I, though? Money back or not, he compounded a felony."

"Well, anyhow, you won’t!"

"What happens if I do?"

"Prosecute him, Sam’el, and I swear I quit you cold!"

"You’ll what?"

"Quit you cold, Sam Hod. Walk out without notice. Fire up my job!"

The editor gaped. Then he smiled wryly.

"Of course, Potiphar, if that’s the way you—"

"That’s perzactly how I feel. What’s more you’ll take him back—"

"No, I couldn’t quite do that."

"Then I quit you cold, Sam’el. I fire up my job!"

"But Potiphar—"

"Sam’el, you listen. I’m a man who’s took notions. I’ve saved a little money t’ provide for
old age, but it’s youth who needs its benefits, not an old coot like me. I’d far better use it t’ fix up these young folks—"

“What young folks, Pot? What the devil are you saying?”

“Found some letters o’ Georgie’s in an apron t’ th’ office. Made me b’lieve he was hidin’ out towards Bancroft’s—”

“Bancroft’s Hill? Whereabouts?”

“—sick or somethin’. So I went out t’ see. Found him all right. But gettin’ tonsillitis. I been there all night. I learnt all about him.”

“What is it you’ve learnt?”

“Enough, man—enough! And I’m goin’ t’ loan him boodle t’ fix a little house. Then if I can raise it, I’ll loan him some more—t’ let him get that eye fixed. Swell doctors can do it. And when he comes back t’ th’ wife and baby son—”

“To the who? And the what?”

“You heard what I said.”

“That blind boy’s got a family?”

“A wife and baby son. And if th’ Lord sent ’em, it’s right for him to have ’em. You see, Sam’el Hod, I’m old and played out and my life’s gone t’ seed. Nothin’ but an ol’ tramp printer—me—who’s wasted his substance in riotous livin’. Figured it out as I set by that sick boy’s bed this night, that lackin’ any folks t’ be sorry over me, I owe it t’ society t’ give th’ lad a break. A real break, Sam’el. I got t’ make a man o’ him, a better man
than I be, t' take my place in life when I'm screwed in a box and worms is havin' hijinks, feastin' off my carcass. When I come t' stand up 'fore God Almighty and He says t' me: 'Potiphar Buss, what th' blankity-blank did you ever do back on earth t' entitle you t' a grandstand seat in Paradise?' I got t' have an answer, Sam'el. I want t' say: 'They's a young chap back down in Vermont, Lord, who's growin' into a good man and father, a lovin' husband, an honest citizen, 'cause I helped him. They's a woman back down in Paris saved from monkeyshines, a satisfied young mother in a little house where love is—'cause I dug down and found 'em filthy lucre. And then there's this Tad Donald, whose life was saved by th' payroll I give back—though I doubt if you'll find Sam Hod ashellin' up here, Lord, 'cause he aimed t' prosecute. That's my record, God,' I want t' answer, 'and I hope it's strong enough t' let me stick around these heavenly parts a spell, and meet my folks, and hear th' singin'. That's what I'm up to, Sam Hod. And I ask you not t' hinder when what I'm really after is a milk-and-water alibi t' prowl 'round Paradise. You see, I've took notions!'

The six o'clock whistle blew a long approving blast down on the knitting-mill.

“All right,” Sam answered weakly. “If that's the way you feel. But take these dam' banknotes. I never want money from a man who's got notions.”
CHAPTER IV

POTIPHAR BUSS did ragged, ragged work in the day which then ensued.

He went home in twilight ahead of the others and mounted the stairs of the rooming house in School Street. Satisfied that George had been given proper care, he opened the door of his stuffy little chamber, a chamber that smelled of matting and shingles. Arriving in this room, he sank on the bed.

He seemed at a loss to know why he was there. His mind was distraught, his sensations elusive. The room grew dreamy while he sat there, picking at his palms, his chin on his chest.

High over Bancroft’s flamed the spring sunset. It turned to dull saffron and softened to pearl. Up from the kitchen came the fumes of frying supper. The printer heaved a sigh, a sigh long-drawn as though freighted with pain . . .

He arose, pulled off the greenish ulster, dropped it on a chair and discarded his hat. He moved toward the closet. Groping around, he brought out a bag, an old-fashioned telescope bag dragging many leathern tails. On the bed the man set it, then ran up the shade.

He needed all the light remaining to illumine a packet he took from the bag. Sausage-like fin-
gers untied its faded ribbon. The ribbon bound some letters—letters bedimmed by the musty lapse of time yet perfumed with the sachet of many years ago. Old Potiphar shuffled them. Twice he tried to read them—as though he did not know their contents—as though their sentences were not written on his soul.

For the letters were penned in a woman's hand—love letters, forsooth, inscribed in an era when Potiphar Buss was not old and seedy and bald as an egg. The sun had shone warm in that forenoon of life. Birds had sung sweetly across hilltops of heart hopes; months had been made of rich freighted moments; years had been something to pass as deep music. Shadows and nights might have closed upon the writer; death might have halted the hand with the pen. Yet now in life's evening an old printer kept them. Love letters once. Now Whispers from Beyond.

The sun sank at last. The corpulent compositor sat onward in the dusk.

Whereupon, amid the envelops, his fingers found a photograph. Almost in a starlight now, Potiphar Buss saw the features of a woman. A dark-eyed young woman, she was, her hair done quaintly, with bangs upon her forehead.

And in the hollow of her shoulder lay a baby's wobbly head.

"Nanny! Nanny!" the printer whispered huskily. "If only someone had done it for us!"
Darkness came. The heart of evening. Potiph­har Buss no longer saw the features—not the features on the cardboard. Supper had ended in the dining-room beneath him, up from the kit­chen came the clinking of washed dishes. The printer’s big fingers slid the picture in the packet. “He’ll make good, Nanny,” he declared—as some men pray. “Just like Jamie would o’ done—our Jamie—if I hadn’t lost that job and—found an­other one too late.”

Then a long time later, with the bag put away: “—someday we’ll see it was well worth th’ price!”
PART TWO

BREAD ON STRANGE WATERS
CHAPTER I

On an August afternoon in 1928, a stranger rode up the Green River valley. He traveled aboard the train from the Junction that reaches Paris at six o’clock nightly.

The valley enticed with Arcadian lure—a green bowered, far from the madding crowd enticement that would grow into shameless seduction by autumn. The smoking coach was odorous, sooty; yet subtle fragrances, old as the earth, blew in at raised windows or wafted down aisles. Scents of deep glens they were, of moist meadows, spruce pastures, dried uplands. And when the train halted, the quiet was profound. It was quiet composed of small pleasant noises: whimpering steam, cattle bells on a nearby hillside, the sudden laugh of a station loafer, brown water purling beneath an old bridge.

He was a tall, gaunt, heavy boned stranger with iron gray hair and ragged moustaches. His soft hat was black and so was his suit. Both too were rumpled. About his neck was a loop of black ribbon, which suspended his glasses on an ash bedaubed vest. His profile showed strength—even lines of
past cruelties from the corners of his nostrils to his big steel trap mouth.

The conductor sang out the end of the run . . .

“H’m!—so this is Paris?” echoed the traveler, following the trainman out on the platform.

“Yaas, so this is Paris!” echoed Fred Hartshorn. He was weary of hearing that eternal paraphrase. “But don’t go lookin’ for Napolean’s Tomb ’cos just at present it’s used for a dog pound.”

“What say?”

“I said—we pulled down Notre Dame Cathedral ’cos we needed the stone t’ wall up th’ reservoir. And Chomps Ulysses has been changed to Frog Alley—”

“You thought I was making fun of your town?”

“—otherwise it’s Paris and we’re here for the night.” Fred swung from the steps to turn in his ticket-box.

Jim Pease, station agent, leaned cambric cuffed forearms on the inner bench of his telegrapher’s bay-window, and took note of the stranger alighted on the platform.

“What ails him, Fred?” demanded the agent.

“Looks like he’d seen corpses fresh from the grave, don’t he?” Hartshorn grunted.

“Or was an animated corpse himself. I’ve heard o’ such things. Reminds me of that freaky toad down t’ Arizony. Shoots drops o’ real blood right out of its eyes.”
"That man's sick inside, Jim. He's a duffer who's had trouble."

"Yeah, he gives me the creeps. And he'd better vamoose or he's gonna get wet."

"Does look like a swell shower's comin'. Here's where I scoot 'for I need a Noah's Ark."

It was vaguely appropriate for this grizzled man to arrive in town in the vanguard of storm. Higher and higher over Bancroft's Hill the thunderheads had been piling steadily, eerie white on their pulpy summits, orange destruction in their curdling hearts. Louder and louder boomed distant artillery. Now came that interim when the world was weirdly quiet—a sinister quiet excepting that barrage. Then waiting trees thrashed suddenly in gale. That gale was ghostly cold. Gigantic spirals of dust careened; stray papers tore along sidewalks and gutters; awnings flapped wildly. The darkness came apace and lights were snapped on in Main Street stores and offices.

Finally it rained.

Marble sized pellets first settled the dust—with frantic clerks striving to get merchandise indoors, then a billion smaller drops turned the pelting to spray. The gale arose higher, sweeping the water-veil from highway to highway, from building to building, from treetop to treetop. Umbrellas were demolished. Cars left at curbings had curtains ripped loose and cushions quickly drenched.
Every store door and hallway held its quota of spectators as one side of Putney Square was screened from the other.

And high above town and valley the lightning zipped and the thunder clacked, bursting into heart throttling detonations that rumbled the ground like a spasm of earthquakes.

This epochal shower drew attention from the stranger. He reached the business section, found the hotel, was allotted a room. By half-past seven the downpour had lightened, the thunder growled off in the direction of Barre and the aforesaid Square was strewn with débris.

At a quarter to ten the stranger came down the steel treaded stairs, and passed through the lobby to a water-logged veranda. There he paused on the steps.

Few lights burned within range of his vision. The arc lamps were sparse and some of them were out. One sentinel bulb illumined a bank vault—the People's Bank vault on the Maple Street corner. The patent flash sign over Williams' clothing store besought a drenched community—

SEE OUR TWO-DOLLAR PANTS

Whether or not the stranger cared for a sight of Ben Williams' pants regardless of their price, Paris was a sensible workaday metropolis. The storm having passed, it disclosed no inclination to wait on the
eccentric behavior of one who because of the in­
clement evening, the civic lethargy, perhaps the 

The illuminated clock in the Court House tower 
tolled ten as he stood there. Then down East Main 
Street came the bobbing of head-lamps. A car had 
entered town from the bridge across the river. 
This machine slowed its speed as it neared Putney 
Square, then swerved toward the curbing and 
jerked to a halt. 

A passenger alighted. Three noisy attempts and 
its tin door was fastened. At a cheery "Good­
night!" its engine accelerated and down into Cross 
Street the contraption flapped loosely. 

The passenger thus deposited, turned and crossed 
the sidewalk. He went up two steps and unlocked 
an office. A half-moment later a window of 
plate glass showed sizable letters in sharp silhouette

THE PARIS DAILY TELEGRAPH

The one on the steps of the hotel seemed startled; 
the cigar came away from his ragged moustaches. 
Glancing nervously about, he pulled himself to­
gether. Then he started across . . .

The door was unlocked but the office was empty. 
Apparently the one left in front by the flivver had 
gone into the composing room. But scuffing foot­ 
steps were soon heard returning, and the composing
room door framed a quaint, rotund figure. The stranger stared at Potiphar Buss.

"Do you edit this paper?" he asked with a shiver. The veteran compositor, a little more sallow and weazoned and puckered, retorted with irony:

"Ain't you got more brains than t' take me for an editor?"

"No offense," said the stranger.

"Not a bit," replied the other. He came through the door and closed it behind him.

"Well, who might you be—if I'm not too inquisitive?"

"Seein' you're alone and apparently defenceless, I set up the ads that make this paper pay."

"Garland's my name. Peter Garland. Come up from the Junction on the six o'clock train."

"Have a chair, Mr. Garland. Have a couple o' chairs. But remember I told you, I just work here for wages."

"I see. You're one of the staff?"

"No, nothin' like a staff. Just a poor weak reed in th' Garden o' th' Lord."

"Well, maybe you'll do. I'm after information."

"What sort o' information? If Adam had been more careful 'bout givin' out such, we might all o' stayed in Eden."

"Smoke?" asked the caller, offering a cigar. The printer shook his head. "I'll pull at this cob if you don't mind th' smell. If I smoke that
black thing I’d bloom out like a cabbage—a moist sickly cabbage, too long in a cellar."

They seated themselves before the exchange table, after Garland had given his chair the unconscious pull to alter its position which every living person gives a chair before using it. He lifted one gourdlike knee across the other, pushed back his hat and hooked one big thumb in an arm-pit of his vest. Potiphar, in a suit of rumpled brown weirdly resembling gunny sacking on his person, leaned back in a swivel none too strong in the braces and ran a grave risk of a spilling on his neck. A full thirty seconds they inspected each other. Then the printer rolled tobacco and tamped it in the cob. He repeated as a match flame leaped above its bowl:

"Reckon no angel with a flamin’ sword will shoo us from this office. What sort o’ information was it you wanted?"

"It concerns a person—a man—I’m hunting. Party named Robling."

"George Robling?" The printer’s puffing halted.

"You know him, then?"

"Know him! Why, whilst he was here among us—"

"You mean he’s not here now?"

"He ain’t been in Paris for nigh twenty years."

Dull incredulity made Peter Garland stiffen. In the act of clipping the cigar, moistening its wrapper, he paused in small shock.
"You mean—come on a goose chase, have I?"
"Looks like you have."
"Could you—tell me where to find him?"
"What's your purpose, knowin'?"
Garland felt absently for matches in his vest. He lighted the cigar, blew out the match, held it in his fingers and stared straight before him. Finally he answered:
"It ain't no special secret. I want to give him money."
"Money! How much?"
"Pretty good sum. P'raps half a million dollars."
CLACK! Down on the floor went Potiphar's cob.
"You want t' give him—how much?"
"What difference does it make, if he's not here to get it?"
The stupefied printer pushed back his swivel. Under the table he groped for his pipe, crunching out sparks with the soles of his boots.
"Be you—some sort—o' relative?"
"No, not a relative."
"Lawyer then, mebbe?"
"No, not a lawyer." And Garland sneezed thrice, fingering for his handkerchief.
"What ails you, Mister? You're shakin' all over."
"Got soaked by the storm, comin' down from the depot." The stranger blew two nasal blasts, shivering again as he wiped his moustaches.
“Better take care o’ yourself. First you know, you’ll catch cold.”

“Huh, I got cold already. When I get to my room I’ll dose myself with Scotch. How ’bout this Robling? I learnt that he come here. Why didn’t he stay and where was it he went?”

But silence came first, till the printer got his balance.

The wall clock ticked the moments into weeks and months and years. More rain fell outside. It gurgled in a spout. Midnight had gone when he sighed in conclusion:

“I guess that’s ’bout all. Man in my business finds it touch and go with queer ones. Ships that Pass in th’ Night, as th’ poet feller tells us.”

“And you say his woman never showed up!”

“Well, you know how women are—some women. She wanted th’ money but she didn’t want Georgie. Got a perty hard jolt, bein’ a mother all alone.”

“And after all you did for him, paying up his theft, getting him back the sight of his eye, he fin’ly went off and forgot all about you!”

The printer’s big finger crunched the ash in his pipe.

“Earth’s a mighty big place, Mister. Life is rough and tempus fugits. You can’t hold boys responsible when they’re luggin’ ’round a sorrow.”

“But you did fix his eye?”
“Oh yes, I fixed his eye. Went to Boston, he did—and come home a changed feller. Smart he was. Right away with that fuzz off, he changed overnight.”

“Eyesight makes a diff’rence. I’ve known criminals to be cured, just by fitting ’em with glasses.”

“But he couldn’t get over the loss o’ his woman. Gripped hold o’ his gizzard. ’T’ have brains is one thing. It’s spirit makes us use ’em. He seemed t’ lose heart and I can’t say I blame him.”

“But didn’t he go to his wife and explain?”

“Oh yes, he tried. Come back up here and worked a little while—t’ be near me, he said, th’ only friend he had—but th’ blow was too much. He wanted his young un. They’s boy-fathers like that. Havin’ an infant is somethin’ perty fine. When they up and lose it, th’ gash don’t heal t’gether.”

“Did his woman divorce him?”

“Not that I heard tell on. They drifted apart and th’ boy drifted down. You know how it could be, when a feller’s hit hard. Didn’t care much what happened. So it natcherly did.”

“Yet I can’t overlook his conduct toward you. You say he made no effort to pay back your loans?”

“I didn’t say that. You musta got me wrong. Georgie paid back his loans. Little dribbles at a time—th’ payments hurt t’ take ’em. For three or four year, that’s how I kep’ track.”
“That’s what I’m after—where did they come from?”

“He commenced sendin’ money from a town t’ Pennsylvanny. Next thing I heard, he’d drifted t’ Chicago. Seems he worked there quite a spell. Guess he got in bad company.” The printer was silent a moment, musing. “Funny thing happened, whilst he stayed t’ Chicago. Ben Williams who runs a store t’ this place, met him one night on Michigan Boulevard. Ben had been t’ a clothin’ convention. By one chance in a million he run smack int’ Georgie, stewed t’ th’ gills in a cold, messy drizzle.”

“Drunk?”

“So soaked in hard licker he was plastered cock-eyed. Things happen like that, such meetin’s, in life. But he didn’t know Ben an’ reeled on out o’ sight. Williams wrote east t’ Sam Hod about it.”

“Where did you hear from him next?”

“He moved further west. Omaha. Denver. Once Californny. Then for almost a year come nary a word. From St. Louis fin’llly, or mebbe Kansis City, he writ me he’d got him a job in Montana. Whether he took it I never found out. Letter sounded blue and was writ a bit careless.”

“Just how long ago was that?”

“Before th’ big war opened t’ Europe.”

“What place in Montana was he taking that job?”
“Dunno’s I could say. But I got the letter home in my bag.”

“And you haven’t heard from him since the world war commenced?”

“Nope,” said old Potiphar. “I often wondered if he might o’ gone to it—he’d be just th’ right age t’get hisself shot.”

“Gad, I hope not,” said the other.

“It’s th’worst sort o’ tragedy there is,” cogitated Potiphar, “when a man’s first wife goes through so much, she decides in her mind that she’s married a failure. That sort o’ decision leaves scars that don’t heal. Th’ man might as well get out and let her think so. Even if they patch things up, all through their lives they’ll be nothin’ else.”

“As you’ve told me the story, the girl he married never loved him to commence with. What woman, really lovin’ a feller, would let him go off alone to take a new job as soon after marryin’?”

“All I know is, a woman’s love o’ man is founded on respeck. When a husband’s made her lose it, it rarely comes back. Don’t ask me how I know, but ‘tain’t from mere guessin’. Never mind how much money th’ duffer makes when he’s older and wiser, she’ll never be able t’ forget them lean years.”

“A certain type of female, Buss. Not all. I’ve known some in my time who acted just the opposite. The rottener the luck, the better they loved.”

Garland had been toying with his dead cigar.
butt. He tossed it in the coal hod, wiping fingers on his pants. One o'clock came. Two. His shivering turned to ague yet he made no move to go. Chief Hogan saw the office lights burning at three o'clock and tried the outer door to ascertain the reason.

"But if Robling didn't get killed to the war," the mysterious benefactor continually reflected, "where could he have gone that he never wrote you more?"

"Hard tellin'," sighed Potiphar. "Just a plain tramp printer prob'ly, earnin' his wages and blowin' 'em for bootleg, lyin' nights in th' dark and wonderin' about his kid. Will I ever forget him lyin' in th' Stevens house that night and wantin' t' know why life was so cruel, why some of us were born to find that no one gives a darn, why th' world was so hard when we're willin' t' play th' game. Them's th' words he used. I've heard 'em over and over."

"Maybe he's in jail!"

"Yes, I've thought o' that. Or mebbe he was killed without goin' t' th' war. Lots o' things could happen t' a bum without folks and how'd we ever know? And I can't help recallin' how he says his father started for th' Klondyke, t' bring back a fortune that'd give his son a chance. They's irony in that."

Garland offered no comment.

"Why couldn't his Pa have been spared t' come
back? It's a bad, bad thing for a sensitive kid t' face the world without father or mother t' steer him 'round th' pitfalls. Natcherly he would marry some designin' young Jezebel. Small wonder she wrecked him."

The caller brought his chair legs down to the floor. He scraped his feet around and started to arise.

"No," he corrected, "I wrecked young Robling!"

"You what?" exclaimed Potiphar, forgetting his weariness.

"Before I leave this town I may tell you. Then again, it's possible I won't. Sorry I've kept you up so, half the night, Mr. Buss."

"By cracky, you've kept me up th' whole night. How was it you wrecked Georgie?"

The stranger rubbed his eyes. When he lowered his big hand, the printer felt that cringe of nerves which comes to some persons at viewing a corpse.

"Man, you're sick!" he cried blankly.

"Got my duds wet, I tell you. Feel grippy all over."

"You better come down t' my house. Local hotel ain't no place t' be sick in."

"What I need is rest, if ever I get it this side the grave!"

"Well, I'd rather have th' grave than stay t' th' Whitney House."

"But your wife—"

"Shucks, I ain't got none! I boards for
nine years with a widder named Matthews. When she ups and dies, I gets me a house—I finds me a housekeeper and does as I pleases. Daisy'll look after you as you need t' be looked to. She's th' lookin' kind—I've learnt from experience."

They arose to find their leg muscles stiffened. Garland swayed badly as they moved toward the door.

"Man, I am sick," he admitted on the walk. Main Street and the Square were clammy with fog . . .

"Just what I thought. You come along o' me."

"But you don't know me. We're strangers."

"You're a feller-galoot who's sick amongst strangers. That's enough t' know about anybody t' take 'em t' my house."

"How far's the distance, wherever your house is?"

"Couple o' miles t' th' south o' th' village—over th' hill and down along th' river. But we'll root out a lift. They's allus a flivver 'round Farrell's Quick Lunch."
CHAPTER II

POTIPHAR'S home was a sociable, well ballasted, New England farmhouse to the right of the highway where South Maple Street became the river road that wound toward Bryant's Crossing.

The only other domicile in the vicinity, the James Twing residence over the way, was a more modern structure of arabesques and angles. Potiphar's dwelling was snug, complacent, friendly like its owner. Set lengthwise toward the road, its broad eaves came down to a spacious front door, its windows watched the highway like kindly human eyes, its doorstones were broad and its gate rarely latched.

The house was painted white and so was the barn. So too was the fence enclosing the yard—a chaste rail fence—that stood out sharply in midsummer dusk or when powerful motor lamps turned the tannery curve. The windows had green blinds; the lintels of the doors held little fan-shaped shutters. Between house and barn ran a short connecting ell, its twelve-foot arches piled with sawed stove wood. The ends of these billets made a yellow mosaic.

A plethora of lightning rods distinguished this
abiding place. Each gable had one; each chimney had two. Obviously Potiphar had no intention of getting struck by lightning without knowing it at once. A lordly Norway Pine grew off in a fence corner, which might have had its rod had the agent been a salesman.

The arrival of Hod's roadster in the printer's yard at half-past five the ensuing afternoon, brought Potiphar out on the ell veranda. He had spent the day in shirtsleeves and slippers.

"Something ail Daisy?" the editor greeted. "The kid who brought your message said someone was ill."

"I've took in a stranger who's perty dam' sick. Doc Johnson's been here three times since noon. I didn't go t' work 'cause Daisy was nervous."

"What's he sick with, Potiphar?"

"Sudden pneumonnie, I think Johnson called it. Daisy was 'fraid he might die on her hands. She's finicky, Daisy. She don't like t' have folks adyin' on her hands."

They tilted Windsor chairs on the kitchen veranda, two pairs of life-worn soles pushed against the railing. Sam lit a cigar.

"Hogan says someone was in the office with you till after three this morning. Same feller, Potiphar?"

"Yeah—name o' Garland," said the other. "Been in th' leather business down t' Pennsylvania but sold out lately for quite a chunk o' boodle. Come
up t' Paris t' hunt young Roblin'. You remember Georgie—who went t' th' dogs?"

"Why's he after that young scalawag?"

"Aims t' give him some cash. A sickenin' lot. Half a million dollars."

"The devil you say!"

Potiphar rehearsed the session of the night. "I've sent for th' daughter," he said in conclusion. "P'haps she'll explain it."

"Got a daughter, has he? Where does she live?"

"N'York, he told us. Though just at present she's down t' Virginnny. Can't get up here till sometime t'morrer."

"How about his wife?"

"I've took it he's widowed."

"How old's the daughter?"

"Woman-growed, I think. Must be, it seems like, t' travel 'round on business."

"So the one-eyed boy gets half a million dollars? What is it, a legacy?"

"He wouldn't gimme details. Just set and asked questions."

"Fine time for the one-eyed boy to come into money—about twenty years too late—when his life's gone to smash."

"Did you ever hear tell o' anyone inheritin' money just when they needed it? Anyhow, I'm hopin' th' daughter gets here 'fore her daddy passes out. He wants t' see her bad and she'll clear th' mystery up."
“Girl married or single?”

“Single, o’ course. We addressed th’ tellygram ‘Miss Louise Garland’.”

“Queer she’d be travelin’ down in Virginia on business when her father’s so rich he can give away millions.”

“Had your supper yet, Sam’el? Daisy’s got our’n ready. Come in and chew a snack.”

The printer stayed at home the ensuing day likewise. Jim Twing drove into town during mid-afternoon, bringing word to the paper the invalid was sinking. In fact Johnson said he might “go” before morning.

“Gad,” exclaimed Sam, “that’s being wiped out sudden! Any word from the daughter?”

“Yeah, Pott got a telegram just before noon. She passed through New York at eleven this morning. She’ll come over the mountain from Rutland tonight.”

“Queer, her knowing about making better time, cutting over from Rutland.”

Early evening came with Sam Hod still puzzled. He sought out Uncle Joseph Fodder, veteran owner of the livery and community genealogist. Old Uncle Joe could advance no solution. Sam cranked his roadster at a quarter to eight. He drove back down the river.

Miss Louise Garland came “over the mountain.”
A Rutland touring-car reached Putney Square at a quarter after nine, and halted in front of Will Seaver’s store. A man in the back seat with the young woman, alighted and asked for Potiphar’s residence; then the car resumed motion and turned the bank corner.

Few evenings that summer were as mystically beautiful. A great coral moon had just left the mountains, the night air was balmy and insects cheeped rhythmically. If tragedy had not clouded the end of her journey, the girl from the south would have found the town charming. Up Maple Street hill the car sped swiftly, under arc lamp after arc lamp, crossed Walnut at the top, went down the other side.

Death was hard to conceive, stalking on such an evening. Street traffic was lively; the sidewalks held strollers returning from movies. In the shadows of verandas, the giggling of girls followed youth’s callow vaporings. From windows behind—where screens kept the moths from mellow, lighted rooms—pianos or radios tuned the velvet dark with melody.

Once on the river road, the car hurried on through cleft seas of fireflies. Potiphar’s house was easily recognized; a roadster with physician’s license plate was parked along its fence. Diagonally across the highway the Twing home was lighted. The Twing girls were giving a party that evening.

The printer and editor saw the motor halt in
front. They arose from their chairs on the homely veranda.

“Is this Mr. Buss’s?’ asked the woman from the car.

“This is th’ place,” its owner responded.

She got down at once and came in through the gate. Her escort paid their tariff.

“Is my father still with you?”

“He’s just hangin’ on,” the printer informed her. “We told him you was comin’. Doc says he’s fightin’ t’ stay till he sees you.”

From the side piazza came Potiphar and Sam. The former led the way to the low-hung front door. He opened the screen. The young woman entered—with a nervous nod of thanks. Down the stairs came Daisy Crumpett.

A short, plump, panicky soul was Potiphar’s housekeeper. Her hair was unruly, her nose was a button, a pie might be set on top of her bust.

“You poor darlin’,” she cried, “we’re all of us so sorry you’re goin’ to lose your father!”

Daisy might have clasped the young woman in her arms—but three things prevented. This person peeling off elbow gloves beneath the red newel light was scarcely to be embraced on so brief an acquaintance; Daisy’s arms were too short; the girl was the taller by almost a head. She was likewise older than they had expected. About thirty-two years, Sam Hod guessed her age.

Clad in a dark-blue traveling frock of Canton
crepe she was, with trim jeweled turban and veilings to her shoulders. Her eyes were deep grey and etched with fine wrinkles. Her hair was like gold that is alloyed with copper. When she took off her hat before going upstairs, those Vermonters saw the father remolded in a woman. Her hair was waved back from the same brainy forehead; her features were strong without old Peter's crudeness.

"It's a crime to impose on you so," she declared.

"That's perfeckly all right," little Daisy contended. "'Tain't every day that you bury your father."

"No—that's a blessing. How is he? Conscious?"

"Lately he's been sleepin'. Though it tears out your heart when he strangles for breath."

The daughter's face whitened . . .

"Where is he, please?"

"In the south room upstairs—the one to the left."

"I'll see that you're amply repaid for this upset."

"Shucks, we don't want no pay. They's beds here aplenty—we could run a whole hospital. Potiphar takes turns, sleepin' where he likes. When he gets sick o' one he just dives in another. I've knowed him to get up in the middle o' the night and hunt a diff'rent bed to dive in." Daisy glanced
up the stairs. "I'd better go up and tell Doctor you've come."

A portly young flunkey now entered behind them. He set down two bags. The woman turned, nettled.

"Why on earth have you brought in those bags? Do you think we mean to live here?"

"But the man wouldn't take 'em back to the hotel. He's gone home a different route."

Miss Garland regarded her escort grimly. She studied him in fact—with a queer, twisted dimple in a corner of her lips. "—looking for signs of human intelligence," Sam chuckled later, though the editor perceived what Potiphar did not. She visited her companion with such ironic humor, not only because Nature had made him to be heckled, but because the young woman was terrified to panic. . . .

She tried to display a concern to be abovestairs, but she would rather have relinquished a pound of her flesh. At length she faced Potiphar.

"Mr. Finch," she said wryly, introducing the escort.

"Howja do," welcomed Potiphar.

"Charmed," said the fellow, removing his derby. But he didn't look charmed. He looked sick and half naked. The latter impression was conveyed by his head. As a head, it had points. But hair was not among them. An enormous pair of
tortoise-shell glasses distinguished his countenance; his manner was effeminate; he was made to fetch and carry. But he shook hands with Potiphar and the latter turned about.

"This here's Sam Hod. I work t' his newspaper."

"How do you do, Mr. Hod," said the woman. She offered him her hand.

"Delighted," echoed Finch, taking Sam's hand in turn.

"Mr. Finch," explained Louise, "is here at my request. He acts as a sort of Man Friday in my business. He accompanied me tonight in case I needed aid."

The Finch person paled and looked more distressed than ever. He had visions apparently, of being ordered abovestairs to stand over Peter and make certain that he died—assist him in fact, if the man found it difficult. He would doubtless have bolted at the slaughter of a chicken.

Weary eyed and rumpled, old Doctor Johnson emerged from the sick room. He came down the flight.

Introductions were repeated.

"I've done all I can," the physician said stoically. He was iron-gray and lean—and needed shaving.

"We brought out some tanks from the drugstore in town, and for a time it helped—the oxygen, I mean. But your father's not makin' much effort to live."
"Has he been—out of his head at all—since he was stricken?"

"Lord yes!—half the day."

"Has he said anything—anything peculiar—anything that—well, that—?"

"I don't pay no attention to folks in his condition." The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "I'll wait on the steps and get a brief smoke. If he starts lookin' queer, just call and I'll come."

The ordeal must be gone through with. The daughter climbed the stairs . . .

Daisy came down and went out toward the kitchen. The doctor and Hod stepped into the yard.

"Guess she don't want you," said Potiphar to Finch. "Come along with us, 'round on th' piazzzy."

The quartette found chairs in the side veranda's darkness and loaded their pipes in the hush of mute tragedy—all excepting Finch, who preferred cigarettes.

A hush on Potiphar's premises only, however. Across in the Twing house sounded revelry by night. The cut-ups of Paris were "going full blast." . . .

"You know th' Garlands perty well?" the printer asked Finch.

"I know Miss Louise," the stoutish one qualified. "You work for her, she said?"

"I'm at present accepting employment with Miss Garland. I act in her absence, if you know what I mean."
“Oh—you act in her absence? What kind o’ actin’ and what sort o’ absence?”

“I—er—handle her affairs when she—er—goes off on trips.”

“She’s in some sort o’ business?”

“My goodness, yes. She’s one of the biggest business women in New York. Everyone knows that.”

“Business woman, eh? What does she do?”

“She runs a chain of restaurants. The Wreath and Tea Cup Tea Rooms. Don’t tell me you’ve not heard of the Wreath and Tea Cup Tea Rooms!”

“Can’t say that I have. What th’ devil be they?”

“My goodness! Why—my goodness! Don’t tell me you’ve not heard of the Wreath and Tea Cup Tea Rooms!”

Potiphar paused in lighting his cob. He stared at the stout one with mouth sagging open . . .

“I think I’ve seen ’em advertised,” Sam Hod put in.

“Are they places to eat in?” the doctor asked dully.

“Eat in! Why—certainly. What else are tea rooms for?”

“I dunno. Sounds like they might be places to drink in. Tea and other lickers.”

“My goodness! Why—my goodness! Are you meaning to imply, sir, that my employer’s a bootlegger?”

“You never can tell these days,” chuckled Sam.
“I’ll have you know she’s not. These are perfectly respectable places. Our patrons are ladies—ladies and gentlemen.”

“How many does she run—these tea rooms?” questioned Sam.

“There are eighteen at present. There’ll be twenty by October. The Wreath and Tea Cup Tea Rooms! You know them by the trade-mark, a wreath around a tea cup. Clever idea, I’ll say. My goodness!”

“Clever idee! A wreath around a tea cup?”

“Yes. Certainly. A wreath means a garland. And Garland—that’s her name. She thought it up herself. It’s made a million dollars.”

“It’s made a which?” cried Potiphar, startled. For the second time within twenty-four hours, millions had been mentioned with a certain artless looseness.

“Our turn-over this coming year will pass two million dollars,” and Finch tapped cigarette-ash not quite ready for disposal.

“Where are these places?” Sam asked in interest.

“Where are they? My goodness!—don’t you get to New York?”

“Couple of times a year. But I don’t eat in tea rooms.”

“Why—they’re scattered all over—New York—Philadelphia—Washington—Baltimore. We’re opening two new ones in Richmond next week.”
That’s why we were down there—where your telegram reached us.”

“Tea rooms, tea rooms, everywhere!—but not a drop to drink!” This from Johnson crassly, needing comedy relief.

“Do you live t’ N’York?” the printer asked next.

“Naturally,” said Finch, “being Lou’s right-hand man.”

“Struck me,” said the editor, “your lady boss warn’t over-eager to go up and meet her pa. ‘Course he’s dyin’ from the signs. Still, she might o’ shown grief—”

“Between ourselves as men,” Finch explained knowingly, “there’s a long-due accounting coming to that father. Relations between them weren’t as cordial as they might be. It was Peter’s fault, mostly. He was always a rip.”

“A what?” exclaimed Potiphar.

“Oh, you mightn’t think it. All the same, he was. He liked his women wild.”

“Th’ two had a tiff—is that what you mean?”

“You can call it a tiff. I’d say it’s been a war. In eight or ten years the two have barely spoken.”

“Whereabouts is his wife?”

“Dead,” responded Finch. “Since Louise was a girl.”

“They didn’t live t’gether—th’ daughter and her pa?”

“My goodness, I’ll say not. Lou’s got her own
place, down in the city. Her father’s been living over toward Scranton."

"Ain’t he worth a lot o’ money?"

"Oh—he’s comfortably fixed. But Louise has got the most. Started in with another girl twelve years ago, she did. In a house up in Yonkers. Lou bought out her partner and went in for Art. Her places were freakish and yet they caught on."

The minutes ticked away. Somnolent smoke furls drifted out upon the dark. . . .

"How’d her pa make his money?" Potiphar asked next.

"Huh—her father’d gone bankrupt if the war hadn’t saved him. He’s been a horseman in his day and owned some famous trotters. He manufactured harness—till autos came in and ruined his business. But the world war meant saddles, all sorts of leather goods. He got rich in ten months."

"Profiteering?" growled Hod.

"No—just war orders," their informant replied.

"Does his girl get his boodle?" Potiphar felt giddy with this mighty ocean of dollars swirling round him.

"Providing she’ll take it. She’s his only living relative."

"They’s a chance she might refuse?"

"Well, don’t be surprised. Being a horseman, old Peter had his women. None of them stood for a
daughter in the offing. She’s gone on her own and no thanks to anyone, excepting—er—myself.”
“How long you been with her?”
“This will be my fifth year.”
Another spell of smoking . . .
“By th’ way,” exclaimed Potiphar, “did you ever hear o’ Roblin’s in th’ father’s affairs?”
“Roblings?”
“Did th’ daughter ever mention a chap named Georgie Roblin’?”
“Not that I recall. What makes you ask?”
CHAPTER III

At a quarter to twelve the stricken one rallied, that ultimate rally bespeaking the end. The man's spirit was battling—to stay till his daughter knew the burden on his soul. Shut in with him alone, the daughter kept her vigil.

Twice the doctor came up. Once Potiphar came with him. Disheveled Daisy Crumpett hovered in the hall. But little could be done; the ordeal must be suffered. The Vermonters withdrew and the fraught night went on.

They had seen a young woman looking stark-eyed at Extinction. So she appeared, and they left her to that mystery. . . .

At midnight the father still labored for speech. He would whisper short statements, then halt in a choke. The girl endured his aspect, the purpling of his eyelids, the puckering of his mouth. She sat in a chair near the bed's edge and stared. It was poignantly apparent she had never kept a death watch.

Across the highroad, the party continued. Coquetting flappers and muddy-shoed boys cavorted to jazz from a static-hoarse radio. A "Life of the
Party” kept bellowing above the tumult: “You Wanta See Mother When Dad Ain’t Around if You Wanta See Mother at All!” Once came a crash, as a tray of tea things spilled down a stair-flight. It was followed by shrieks. Supernal revelry, dropping tea things down a stair-flight. Blah! Blah! Blah! . . .

All of it drifted across on the nightwind; it entered through screens where sash curtains wafted. Would they never cease their racket, crank their flivvers and go home?

Daisy looked in at a quarter after midnight. The girl was turned sideways, face down in her hands. . . .

The high moon outside was no longer coral. A cool silver dollar, it rode overhead. At intervals autos honked down the river road, their raucous pummelings smothered by distance. Shortly after one o’clock the Twing stramash ended. With the last machine gone, the district knew quiet. Quiet! Someone clicked a fence-gate and a startled dog barked nervously. Then later no sounds but the zylophones of insects. An ordinary midsummer night in New England. Yet up in that chamber a soul was in torment.

The room was in shadow, for the bedlamp was veiled. The man in that shadow was sinking and shrinking. His hair matted down in long greasy strings. The pores of his skin were enlarged and distorted.
“—you’ve got to do it, Lou—” was the burden of his speech. He said it with his eyes closed, in rhythm with his breathing.

The girl was curved over, interlaced fingers clasped across her forehead. Her thumbs stuck up grotesquely, like a pair of little horns.

“—’tain’t our money, daughter. Belongs to this Robling. Maybe I used it to get me a start—maybe I doubled it—tripled it—no matter! Belongs to this one-eyed feller—had a baby—wife blistered him—wandered off somewhere and ended up a bum. You find him, Louise, no matter what it costs. Help him come back. Make him take Matthew’s poke. Give it to him. I gotta see Matt Robling in just a few minutes. Maybe it’ll help if I tell him you’ve promised.”

Then again Peter babbled. He spoke of certain blueprints, a deal for some land. Always he returned to his paramount obsession.

“—Matt Robling loved his boy. Told me so, often. Kid might o’ had his dad if it hadn’t been for—”

“Don’t talk about it, father. We don’t know who’s listening.”

“—you hunt him, Lou—no matter where it takes you. Do it for me—I’m askin’ you—dyin’. I’ve been a wicked man, Lou. God’s havin’ His turn.”

“Try to get some sleep.”

The man’s jaw went strengthless. His eyes
seemed glued together, that lethal excretion that glazes the sight. She thought he had gone. Yet he rallied from the coma.

"—helps—a lot—to know you’ll do it. Helps—a little—to know you forgive!"

Had she forgiven? . . .

"—you—promise me—Louise?"

Strange are the contracts made with the dying. The daughter seemed to nod, forehead still bent in those interlaced hands.

One o’clock. One thirty. The nightwind continued to waft the curtains inward. The Twing house over the way was darkened. Up in the freightyards a bell tolled faintly.

Two o’clock came. Two thirty. The milk train for Boston went roaring down the valley, the glare from its firebox tingeing its smoke. That juggernaut too was smothered in distance. Over in the Twing home, a retiring occupant adjusted a window. Trite peaceful sounds of Vermont summer night. . . .

Seventeen minutes after three in the morning. Peter Garland had lived sixty-one years, three months and eight days. He had loved much. Doubtless he had suffered much. His slumber was deep in the house behind the pine tree.

Miss Louise Garland descended the stairs. She paused near the bottom. Her features were blood-
Then she sank on the stairs, where the Finch person found her.

“He’s really gone, Miss Garland?”

“I need a cigarette.”

“I’m sorry, Miss Garland. I’ve smoked all mine up.”

“You would!” she retorted. “Go up and get my bag.”

“You mean—not in the room where—”

“Get my bag!”

Finch stumbled up past her. He went up sideways—as though watching his retreat, that it did not close behind him.

Two moths had come in when the screen was opened. They darted, quivered, wobbled, about the red newel lamp. One suddenly swerved and struck the seated woman. Thence it fell to her lap. Up her bare forearm it later crawled dazedly, taking off into space without permanent mishap.

The girl sat bowed over, hands clasped before her. Seated half the night she had been. Yet what place was there to go?

Finch came down with her handbag. Daisy had procured it for him, brought it from the chamber where the light was now garish.

“Miss Garland—Miss Crumpett says, we should stay here tonight—”

“Give me a match.”

“Of course, Miss Garland.”

Came the whine of the starter on Sam Hod’s
coupé. They knew from the accelerations of its engine when it backed from the yard and headed toward town—its weak bobbing lamps shot past the front door.

Upstairs in the hall the doctor rolled out tanks, tall blue cylinders with brass cocks atop them. He stood them by the wall and went down the rear stairs. Potiphar came through, to reach his front sitting-room.

"Mr. Buss!" called Louise.

The printer's eyes were heavy; he was tired to fatigue. Yet her presence startled him.

"I didn't know you'd come down," he began. "Will the doctor send an undertaker—or must Adolphus get one?"

"'Dolphus?" puzzled Potiphar.
"Mr. Finch," the girl explained. "Th' doctor'll 'tend t' th' undertaker, yes—soon's he makes out his certificate."

"May I speak with you—alone?"
"For th' land's sake, why not?"
"Dolly, get out. I don't care where you go. Find a bed and jump in it, or try the nearest river. Don't let me see you till sometime tomorrow."

"Certainly, Miss Garland. I'll ride back with the doctor, up to the hotel."

Adolphus departed. For a self-acclaimed co-director over two million dollars, he moved with queer alacrity. And the girl on the stairs surveyed the tired printer; from head to foot she
viewed him, her first opportunity to do it thoroughly. Yet the aspect of shock never left her strong countenance.

Despite his fatigue, the printer was gentle. Unmindful of her scrutiny, he swung the front door and closed it on the night, then he too sat down —on the seat of the halltree.

"Did your pa go easy, Miss Louise?" he asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Buss. He's the first person I've ever watched 'go'—as you call it. He might have gone easy. He might have gone hard." She tapped a cigarette and put it in her lips. Then her thumb pushed the end of a small box of matches.

"You mean—you never see anybody die before, daughter?"

Louise shook her head. She scraped a match on the side of the box. The smoke helped her poise.

"I've seen plenty in my time after they were cold. Dad's been the first that I've watched in the process. It was—what I call—uncanny. Oh I know that's banal! Death's nothing else but. What I mean to say is, one minute he was with me talking business affairs. The next I was looking at so much lifeless lard."

Lard! Old Potiphar was shocked. Was she calloused, this girl or was it a pose? Or was she using irony as a mantle for her grief?

"All th' same, that's how 'tis," he responded uneasily.
“This business of being a Conscious Entity one moment, capable of seeing, feeling, functioning—and absolutely Nothing the next—gets hold of me hard. Too hard. I agree with old Schopenhauer, that the greatest joke of life is nothing else than living.”

The smoke swathed her face. The troubled printer waited . . .

“For seventy years,” Louise cried raggedly, "we suffer and contrive, and struggle and aspire. Suddenly we get our feet wet, and take cold, and have congestion of the lungs. A muscle stops throbbing, something called a 'heart'. The attainments of a lifetime are swept into discard—smearled away in one night. The waste of it! The inane, useless nonsense!"

"Lookin' at it one way, yes, Miss Garland."

"Looking at it the hard-headed commonsense way—devoid of fancy and mystic drivel! The waste of it, I tell you!—spending fifty to ninety years creating an identity, a career, a character, and at the apex of development tossing the whole on a lethal scrapheap. Take my father for instance. God knows he wasn't much. Still, he was a man. He'd gotten through boyhood, come through adolescence, fought through young manhood—built a business—made some money. Finally he arrives at a few brief years of respite. Just when he's about to enjoy them, what happens? What is he this minute? Well, go upstairs and look.”
“You don’t think, Miss Louise, that death’s th’ end o’ everything!”

“Oh don’t feed me any pabulum about a Harp and Crown hereafter. I’m not in the mood, despite all your kindness. Death’s the end of everything as far as we can see.”

“You’re just scared, Miss Louise—’way down t’ your heels.”

“Disgusted would be better. Life is so futile. I don’t except myself. I’m no different than my father. I got somehow through childhood, I came through adolescence. I fought my way into a business of my own—built it to some size—expect to build it bigger. And tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, I may swallow a germ, or walk before a taxi, and I’ll be the same myself—just so much lifeless lard. The allusion isn’t pleasant. But neither is the prospect. What of my character, my business, my achievements? I tell you I’m sick. We’re all such fools to do it—keep on—living—battling—”

“You think death’s th’ end of everything?”

The printer seemed insistent of a Yes or No reply. She looked at him levelly.

“If you claim that it isn’t, where’s my father right this moment?”

The printer was distressed, but not by his weariness. At length he said huskily:

“Mebbe more alive than he ever was on earth.”
“Maybe is right! It’s nothing we can prove—just a spiritual assumption born of our despair.”

“I’ve proved it, Miss Louise, t’ my own satisfaction.”

“No one’s proven it to mine!”

“No one’s bound t’ do that. We’ve got t’ run down such things for ourselves. How much have you tried?”

“When the dead come back and talk to us without seance hocus-pocus, when they tell us where they’ve gone and how they like the climate, when they give us evidence of survival as reasonable as life—mortal life—”

“Then you’ll believe—is that what you mean?”

“Well, is that so irrational?”

“And how do you know they ain’t done it, Miss Louise?”

“They’ve not done it to me.”

“No, and if you kept doors locked t’ your house, and never answered th’ tellyphone, and never went out nowheres among folks, you might say they didn’t exist ’cause they never looked you up.”

She stared at him dismayed. “Don’t tell me you’re a Spiritualist!”

The printer shook his head. “No, Miss Louise. I’m—only a Christian.”

“I don’t know what you mean. All the Christians I’ve ever met were just as terrified about their status after death as the atheists. Some of them
more. In all human history there's never been a single person come back, of authentic record, to prove we survive when that heart-muscle stops."

"Th' Master come back. Lots o' folks saw Him. They even felt His hands and His body. They talked with Him. Forty days or thereabouts, He stayed—"

"That's a presumption of theology and I'm talking science. Besides, the One you mention wasn't human like us mortals. Why, you even lack proof He ever existed!"

"Do I?" whispered Potiphar.

"At least you've never seen Him!"

"Ain't I?" asked the other. "How do you know?"

For the first time Louise flushed. She finished her queer-scented Russian cigarette. And the printer said gently:

"You're like lots o' folks, daughter. Just 'cause things ain't happened t' you, you're ready t' claim they ain't happened t' anyone. And funny part is, folks never do get proofs when they're all het up t' fight 'em."

"I'm a business woman, Mr. Buss. I deal in facts—facts as I encounter them. All my life long I've been treating with Realities. If they've made me a Materialist, how can I help it?"

"You ain't very old, that's all, Miss Louise."

"I'll be thirty-four in March!"
"I didn't mean—"

"I know you're twice as old—perhaps older than my father. Just how old are you?"

"Somethin' like twenty thousand years, if you want th' real truth."

"What do you mean by that?"

"See, you don't understand," the printer said compassionately, "no more'n you 'get' death. You're a poor scairt baby, no more'n a cupple thousand years old, prob'ly. You've seed a man cast off a useless body, havin' done with it, and you don't know how t' take it."

"What do you mean, I'm probably not more than two thousands years old?" She looked at him nervously. Was he cracked, this old Samaritan? She saw him shrug his shoulders. He did not look crazy.

"'Tain't th' right time t' tell you t'nite. You're like a lot o' young folks—you won't b'lieve nothin' but commonplace things—things you know by your senses. You let life deaden you, sort of. It takes a miracle t' make you look around you. And even when you see one, you refuse t' admit it."

"I never saw a miracle! Or anything approaching one."

"What say? You never see a miracle? Then what's happened t'night—that's left you so upset? What's happenin' now—you and me sittin' here by
these stairs, talkin' t' each other? *Explain your senses!* Ain't each one a miracle?"

"Physics can explain the mechanics of speech. Natural laws aren't miracles."

"Yes they be, daughter! Miracles that folks has got so used to, they don't think of 'em no longer as such."

"Well, physics can't explain the mechanics of survival. If my father's alive right this moment, why doesn't he just talk and say so? I want that sort of proof. I'm hard-boiled, I tell you—"

"There's folks," said Potiphar sadly, "who think theirselves so almighty important that unless a thing's accomplished at their command they'll have nothin' more t' do with it. Don't tell me you're one. It's childish, Miss Louise."

The girl bit her lip. . . .

"I know I've lived thirty-four years and built up a business that employs a thousand people. In that time I've never witnessed a single happening that couldn't be explained by the tenets of physics!"

She seemed to expect Potiphar to contradict, argue, expound, exhort. He merely picked his palms.

"I'm sorry for you," he told her finally. "'Course, I don't know what your life's been. They's usually reasons for folks holdin' views. All I can say is, p'raps 'fore you leave I can help you see things diff'rent. When'll you hold th' funeral?"
"What funeral? Father’s? Who’d come to it?"

The daughter laughed queerly. "I'll have Dolly Finch take the body down to Shawsville and put it in the ground. You see," she defended, "you may think me cruel or lacking in respect. But I'm true to my convictions."

"No, I don't see," the printer protested.

"Father's perished. That's my present belief. Aside from his neglect since I was a child, holding paganistic ceremonies over his husk is superstitious bother. He may or may not be somewhere in spirit. I've never seen a spirit. Until I do, until someone comes along and proves to my overwhelming satisfaction there's such a thing as survival—and not by table tipping, either—this proposition that we go on existing when our bodies are lifeless, **that there's literal immortality in an actual place**, is a lot of mystic rubbish. Ten thousand times ten thousand may subscribe to it. There may be living people who have known it by experience. I hold to my premise. To me it's mystic rubbish."

The old printer's voice held a startling richness.

"But a sort o' Golden Rubbish all th' same, Miss Louise!"

"Perhaps so," she agreed. "Its quality's not the point."

"You'll—you'll have a prayer said for him, won't you?"

"A prayer? Well—maybe. That's not important, either."
A tiny tear welled in Potiphar's eye...

"I'm sorry if you don't like me," the girl went on hastily. "A lot of people don't. But then, there's an equally sizable number who don't like superstition either. I'm only the product of life as I've found it. I'm not an atheist. There may be a God—though I doubt if He's the thing the Salvation Army thinks. Call me an agnostic. An honest agnostic. But remember, I've not the temperament that tolerates phenomena. I've fought pretty much of a lone fight since I was twelve. I haven't had time for embroidery or—mysticism."

"You're a poor scart baby, I say—who's seed a man pass on and don't know how t' take it. Most folks like you are. Scart that's all. 'Cause they don't understand."

"Well, I'm not keeping you from bed because I'm after sympathy—although you're a dear and I'm treating you abominally. And neither right now does the After Life bother me; not so much as something else. Immortality—where my father's gone—whether he's alive or whether he's perished—can wait for the present. What I want to know is, who's this fellow George Robling?"

The printer glanced up suddenly.

"Land's sakes—don't you know?"

"Of course I don't know. I've only just heard such a person exists. He worked on your paper
twenty years ago, didn’t he—a derelict, dad said, who let a woman wreck him."

“But he loved her a lot,” the loyal printer argued. "Oh never mind that. Women don’t wreck men who are worth their powder and shot. What I want to know specifically—how old a man would this Robling be at present?”

Potiphar blinked stupidly, his weariness returning

"Le’see, I come t’ Paris in Nineteen-Hundred-Six. Georgie showed up a cupple years later. That’d make him thirty-nine. He was nineteen when I knowed him."

"A man nearly forty years old!” The woman’s voice held fright. "Seven years my senior!"

"What’s troublin’ you, daughter? ’Bout Georgie, I mean?"

"Thirty years ago, in Alaska, my father got into a nasty jam with this George Robling’s father. The two had been partners. When my father came out, he had Matthew Robling’s poke. That’s all I can say of what happened in the Klondyke."

"I’ve sort o’ suspected,” the printer said softly. "My father ‘stepped-up’ that poke to a fortune. When he arrived at those years when life lost its kick, he got thinking of the Roblings and specifically the son. His conscience got so bad it compelled restitution."

“And your dyin’ daddy asked you—?”
“—to hunt down this George and return him his patrimony.”

“Well, it’s natcheral you should.”

“Natural? Fiddlesticks! It’s none of my fracas. I’ve had nothing in common with my father but my name. Still, that’s not the point. Finding this Robling, giving him money—lawyers could do that. It’s the rest of the brevet that makes me see red.”

Again the woman laughed—that hurt, nervous laugh.

“Life’s funny, funny! After I’ve minded my own business, looked after myself, built my own life, arrived at the point where it meant a little fun—this sort of thing happens! I’m called to get behind a masculine failure and salvage what’s left of him to save the family honor!”

“What’s wrong ’bout that? I should think you’d be glad—”

“Glad! Glad of what, for heaven’s sake?”

“That you can help Georgie—that you can help anyone.”

“Why should I help anyone? Who the devil’s helped me? For twenty-one years I’ve fought my own fight. I’ve asked odds of no one. I’ve come out on top—”

“But don’t you see, all th’ more reason—”

“No, I don’t see! Excuse my bad temper but again I’m facing facts. Ever since girlhood, life’s
had a nasty trick of trying to dump things off on my shoulders. Because I’ve scratched back I’ve got where I am. This one-eyed Robling is nothing to me—no more than that man who’s lying dead upstairs. And so I resent this brash imposition. I haven’t time or temperament to be any man’s nurse—"

"Has your pa left a will?"

"Oh yes, there’s a will. I get half of his wealth. This Robling gets the other. Providing that he does!"

"You mean, you’d try t’ stop him?"

"That’s why I’m wrathy—at least one of the reasons. I can’t contest that will without its coming out—father’s mess in the Klondyke back in Eighteen-Ninety-Eight."

"I meant, I don’t see why you don’t want Georgie t’ get what’s his right. Don’t you want t’ be square?"

"Surely I do—square to myself! My father brought me into this spit-and-claw world and then blithely left me to shift for myself. All right, I took that challenge. And it’s taught me certain things. Chief among them is, to look out for myself because no one else will. Klondyke mess or no, you can bet I mean to do it. And any old time I let five hundred thousand dollars slip through my fingers to the lap of a gutter-snipe—"

"Did you let your pa die, athinkin’ you’d promised him?"
“And what if I did? I suppose it’s your contention his ghost will come to haunt me?”

“No, I was just tryin’ t’ figger out how a woman’d got t’ be your successful and—and warn’t no more careful ’bout keepin’ her word!”
CHAPTER IV

A FRONT PAGE story of old Peter's demise appeared in "The Telegraph" the following afternoon, but concerning his daughter it offered small comment. She was the founder and operator of a chain of successful restaurants; she was often "written up" in the achievement magazines and women's clubs besought her as a speaker on Feminism. So much was known before "The Telegraph" was published.

That she would remain in Vermont a few days however, "to conclude certain matters engaging Mr. Garland when stricken by his illness," was virgin information which the town seized eagerly. But what matters? Why had the townsfolk not heard of them before? Should people who paid fifty cents a month for a so-called evening paper, patiently tolerate such paucity of detail? If ever a community thrived on a pincushion in the week which ensued, minding someone else's business, that community was Paris and the someone else "Lou" Garland. The celebrity's sojourn caused more commotion than an epidemic of demises—a girl in her thirties who had made a million dollars, two millions, perhaps half a dozen? Why not?
Yet insult piled on journalistic injury. The town learned further, though not through the paper, that after the body had been duly “shipped south” the celebrity was visiting in the house down the river-road—Potiphar Buss’s home, “that ol’ coot on th’ Tellygraph” . . .

Why Potiphar Buss? Was the printer a relative? And what sort of daughter shipped her father’s body somewhere for burial while she stayed behind in callous indifference? Had the man a wife somewhere with whom the daughter was at odds or did the cryptic “business” mean postponement of his funeral?

Potiphar announced that his fair guest was “prostrated.” The townsfolk looked smug. To be prostrated you must “adhere to bed” with pains shooting through you, hot-water bags around you, nostrums on the table and window curtains lowered. Most emphatic of all, you must indicate a sufferance for neighborhood compassion. Miss Louise Garland was not confined to bed; she was not inclined to received the curious and assist them in fixing the number of her “millions”—quite the contrary. For three afternoons following Peter’s demise, the neighbors saw her reading in Potiphar’s lawn-swing; for three successive nights she was met by sundry motorists, strolling bareheaded under evening’s first stars; and she even sent out a curt “not at home” to Mrs. Brisco Busby, social marchioness and leader of The Fortnightly, when that
pompous matron drove up in her limousine and invited the notable to see the town with Quality. Behavior such as this was beyond the Impossible. Something should be done. The whole valley fretted.

Then the fourth afternoon of the guest’s baffling sojourn, Daisy Crumpett—who had developed an equally monstrous reticence in the fifty-first year of her orgiastic garrulity—sought her employer at his place of occupation.

“They’s goin’s on!” she confided worriedly.

“What kind?” exclaimed Potiphar, pausing in his work.

“Two men have come to see your Miss Garland. An’ she practick’lly commanded me to go to Calvary lawn-party an’ eat two dollars’ worth o’ ice cream. See, here’s the money—I think she wanted me out o’ the way.”

“I should say she did, permanent! What sort o’ men be they?”

“One’s a tall, swell-lookin’ feller, youngish sort of—the other’s a funny ol’ sawed-off with powder on his face.”

“Did she mention their names?”

“Yeah, but I’ve forgot ’em. An’ she told me a whopper—she says the funny ol’ sawed-off was a senator, a senator fr’m Washington!”

“A senator? Golly! What made you think he warn’t?”

“He wore a derby hat! Senators don’t wear
derby hats—it's against the law, ain't it? But that ain't all . . . just 'fore they showed up she tol' me in an off-hand way she was thinkin' to kidnap you."

"Kidnap me! For th' land's sakes, what for?"

"She's took a sick'nin' likin' to you, Pott Buss. You better go careful. Don't you forget she smokes cigarettes."

"Oh rats, Daisy! Chase yourself 'long t' th' sociable. But mind you keep your mouth shut an' don't you let folks pump you—no one works pumps without somethin' gettin' wet."

"You better go home, Pott Buss—she's down there alone with a whole two men."

Five-thirty came and the old man complied. In front of his domicile a luxurious car was parked—a long, black, glistening touring-car with negro-boy chauffeur.

Potiphar's sitting-room where Louise had received her callers opened off the hall along the housefront at the right. It had an elusive melody permeating its antiques like an old familiar tune played upon a 'cello. Black walnut rockers displayed knitted "tidies" and a worn horsehair sofa reared its scroll against a wall. A steep cottage organ with Gothic spires filled the space between front windows; in the center stood a table with turkey-red cloth. Steel engravings of Civil War battles, framed mottos worked in plush, art calendars and "catch-alls"
bedecked the faded walls and in front of the mantel was a pot-bellied stove. A woolen carpet covered the floor, its worn patches hidden by hand-braided rugs.

The keynote of the room was a ponderous Bible lying open beneath the hanging-lamp with the old printer’s spectacles reposing on the Psalms. At each end of the mantel were smaller twin lamps with a circlet of prisms around each china globe. Pots of geraniums filled the front windows and hussocks for the feet could be found beneath the chairs.

The owner of these premises entered his kitchen. A connecting dining-room, opening on the back, carried front-room voices through two unclosed doors.

“—all right,” a man was saying so that Potiphar heard, “have your own way—you probably will, anyhow. But remember what I’m telling you: if Cartwright goes to the Federal Attorney, someone in this outfit is going to have his hair cut—so he won’t need a comb.” And footfalls were audible, of a nervous man pacing.

“We may be investigated, yes,” said Louise. “But that doesn’t mean conviction.”

“Caesar’s Ghost, woman!—don’t you know what you’re flirting with?”

“I know what Bob Ackermann’s flirting with, and the prospect isn’t pleasant.”

“He had access to your money. He swung the whole deal with your name behind it.”
“And assuming he went to Washington tomorrow and fatally shot the President, I suppose I'd be hung because I sit with him on certain business boards?”

Another male voice intruded: “You’re sure, Louise, there’s nothing in writing between you and Bob?”

“Do you think I’m a fool? If I wanted to jeopardize myself, I’d use finer technique than bribing an underling. But I’m not quite so stupid. I can make enough money remaining on the level.”

“How about those vouchers drawn to ‘legal expenses’? We never got the money. That’ll look mighty queer.”

“Those vouchers are part of our corporate records. Besides, how could the government prove that some law firm, somewhere, didn’t get the money?”

“If we didn’t tell what law firm, we might be adjudged in contempt of court.”

“Yes,” agreed the older voice, “better to get the dam’ vouchers out of the records and tear them up ahead of time.”

“Wouldn’t that seem rather bad, if our books were subpoenaed? . . . to have vouchers missing yet the figures duly audited? No, let’s not call attention to the documents so. Better to wait and appear to act frankly.”

“But I can’t afford to wait! I’ve got a whole-
some fear of government prosecution, even if you haven't."

"I've got plenty of respect for our well-known Uncle Sam, but it's chagrin that overwhelms me—that such a thing has been 'put over,' so to speak, a criminal maneuver in one of my companies without my suspecting till it's too late to stop it."

"I'm afraid of that Ackermann. He isn't to be trusted. I said so from the start. Now I think it's proved."

"You've never liked Bob since you saw him as my escort at Mrs. Glair's dinner—why won't you be honest?"

"What do you mean? You're implying I'm jealous?"

"Aren't you?" laughed Louise. "I shrink from imagining what a Hollywood scenarist would do with the situation you precipitated after the dancing."

"I've apologized for that. I'd taken too much wine."

"Yes," the girl agreed, "and for all we know, Bob may have been under a similar influence when he got us in this mess. Van here is about the only man of my acquaintance who holds himself aloof from such indiscretions. I marvel how he does it."

"Be serious, Lou," the younger voice begged. "Senator Frye has good license to be worried."

"Serious? You think I'm not serious, in for
eighty thousand dollars and maybe a mess with the federal authorities? But I won't be stampeded, if that's what you'd like."

"Somewhere there's a fish-hook!" the older voice ranted. "That fool should be treading softly, making himself as inconspicuous as possible, not showing up before Cartwright's directors on the strength of owning ten shares of stock. He had no right there anyhow, aside from his job as your general manager."

"I agree with you, Fred, that it sounds indiscreet. But I want confirmation that he'd work with such crudeness."

"He got the bald idea across to Cartwright that if he wanted more success in government bidding, he'd better hook up closer with Garland Fruit Products. That could have but one significance, with me a heavy stockholder. I'd dump the dam' shares, if no one would notice."

"If a report of that session got around to the Senator, Lou, it's probably reached others,"—this from the younger man, not hiding his alarm.

Louise Garland's voice held a trenchant irony.

"Listen, both of you!" she ordered. "If our esteemed but loathed competitors are spreading the report that Garland Fruit Products is using coercion to absorb competition, our strategy is silence! Do the two of you get that? Nothing's happened yet—excepting an impression on the
Cartwrights that somehow or other we’ve a drag with the government. Take a grip on your nerves and act like two men!”

“At least you owe it to Senator Frye to hurry back down to the City and find out what Bob’s game is—”

“I’ll attend to Bob Ackermann, don’t either of you fret. But instead of the two of you going off like dry rockets, you’d better use your time piling brush for a backfire. *And doing it in silence!* Instead of rushing off up here—”

“Think of my prestige!” the older voice cried shrilly. “The minute it’s known how Ackermann reached—”

“I wouldn’t speak names if I were you, Fred. The only crime *you’ve* committed is owning a thousand shares of Garland Fruit Products which, miracle or no, you came by quite honestly.”

“The country won’t believe it!”

“No? After a few turns at your job you’re suspected of everything from the League of Nations failure to the cause for fallen arches. Well, the country’s losing no sleep yet over scandal not yet happened. You’re whelping before you’re stepped on and that behavior’s fatal. Stiffen your vertebrae. Give this thing the laugh—”

“The best defence is an offensive, Louise!” This from the younger man in nervous appeal.

“The best defence against any charge is *silence!* I heard one of the ablest attorneys in America say
once that three-quarters of the fools languishing in jails and penitentiaries got in their dilemmas through the wagging of their tongues. Well, in this case the group of us have lock-jaw. The law holds us innocent till someone proves us guilty."

"There are plenty of persons ready to do the last!"

"I challenge that, Van. I demand to be shown."

"But with fifty thousand of mother's money involved—to say nothing of bribery—"

"Hush! . . . what's that? . . . I'm sure I heard a noise."

A moment of silence. Then a man's stealthy voice—

"There's someone in your kitchen!"

"It's me," announced Potiphar—through the two opened doors. A floorboard out back had creaked beneath his tread. . .

"Come in, Mr. Buss," Louise called, rising. She was calm and cool eyed, disclosing no upset at what he must have heard.

"I was just seein' t' my supper," the printer apologized. Through the dining-room he scuffed, lowering his spectacles and peering above them.

"This is Mr. Buss, gentlemen. Mr. Buss . . . this is Senator Frye from Washington . . . and Basil Van Dyke, an attorney from New York."

Potiphar shook hands and said two pleezter-meechers.
"We were—ha-ha—motoring up through Vermont," declared Senator Frye. "We called in—ha-ha—to see Miss Garland—"
"— and console her at losing her father," said Van Dyke.
"Ha-ha! Just so, just so!" said the Senator. He flicked his neat whiskers, then rocked on toes and heels with hands behind his coat-tails.

He was a short, square little person with undersized hands and oversized feet. They anchored him to the ground, those feet, making him vaguely of the earth, earthy. He had quick, squirrel-like eyes and a mouth whose contour was screened by a trim beard. In peculiar mannerism he flicked this trim beard as though keeping it clear from a snarl in his cravat. His iron-grey hair held a permanent wave, as the lapel of his cut-away held a carnation. He had a freshly-powdered, bandbox aspect, responsible for Daisy's allusion to cosmetics. "Old Coat-Tails" they called him on Capitol Hill, though the printer learned this later.

The other man was tall, supple, about thirty-five years old. His forehead was high with the hair combed straight backward. Thin hair, jet black, it was—like his eyebrows and moustaches. The printer glanced twice at these upper-lip adornments. They were straight as black wire and curled to needle sharpness. A gray, double-breasted, basketweave suit, the latest cut in collars, socks
with white clocks and gun-metal oxfords, he wore with the ease of the business aristocrat.

“Unique country home you have here,” he said, addressing Potiphar who came only to his shoulder. “I envy Miss Garland her brief vacation in it, after the sorrow of losing her father.”

“Yes, he—he perished on these premises,” was all that the printer could call up at the moment.

“We ought to be going,” the Senator galvanized. “You don’t have t’ hurry ’way on account o’ me. If you wanta see Miss Garland you can stay here all evenin’.”

“We’ll have ourselves driven to the hotel up in town. I hope you have a good one.”

“We might have a better. Th’ Whitney House, they calls it. Pat Whitney runs it. He’s a tight one, Pat Whitney. He wets all his stove-wood—t’ make it burn slower.”

“Then it’s fortunate we’ve come up here in the summertime—when a fire’s not of consequence.”

“They tell a fair yarn ’bout Pat,” the printer offered, seizing on anecdote to leaven his diffidence. “Drummer spilt cream on his pants once, eatin’ his breakfast t’ Whitney’s hotel. Ruined his suit, or that’s what he claimed. Took it t’ court when he and Pat squabbled. Pat won his case, though. Got off scot free—when he proved t’ th’ jury ’twas skimmed milk he served and not cream at all!”

The laughter of his auditors disclosed their re-
lief—that whatever of their converse the man had overheard, it had made no impression that showed in his manner.

"Suppose," said Basil, turning to Louise, "we finish our discussion tomorrow as you said."

"It's the better way," she answered. Her expression held significance . . . and they moved toward the hall.

"We got beds here aplenty," Potiphar assured them. "You could stay here if you wanted. I ain't never slept no senators on these premises but I once took in a congressman who was shot in the head."

"Is that a local practice?" Senator Frye exclaimed.

"Congressman Blake 'twas, who'd been huntin' on th' mountain. He was never th' same man afterwards. But he went back t' Washington."

Louise remained twenty minutes with her visitors continuing the discussion at the door of their machine. At length she reentered.

"What are you trying to do?" she demanded.

"Get me my supper," the printer responded.

"Go in and sit down. I'll get your supper."

"You'll get me my supper! You know how t' cook?"

"You forget it's assumed that I've made money in the restaurant business. Go in and read your paper."
“I never read my paper. Land’s sakes, I work on it!”

But Louise had her way. She pinned one of Daisy’s aprons about her printed-chiffon frock. Later she sank down across the table-corner and watched the man’s jaws in amused fascination; they munched like a rabbit’s atop his fringed napkin.

“I never et such vittles!” the little printer gasped.

“Ham an’ eggs, ain’t they? Jus’ ol’ fashioned ham an’ eggs!—but what’s all this white stuff?”

“A new way of fixing the egg,” Louise answered.

“Land’s sakes!—t’ think you could cook a man’s supper! You don’t seem like a woman, not a cookin’ woman, bein’ all mixed up in businesses like you are.”

“No?”

“—yet you don’t seem like a man, either. You’re betwixt an’ between, sort of—if you get what I mean.”

“A feminine paradox because I’m domestic?”

“Well—you got too many brains t’ be a woman. On th’ other hand, when it comes t’ usin’ them brains t’ see things higher’n cookin’ an’ dollars—”

“I’m an aggravating numbskull?”

“No, you’re a myst’ry!” And Potiphar finished the viands on his plate. “Say, how many businesses you got?” he cried suddenly. “Seems t’ me them fellers acted worried, didn’t they? . . . ’bout somethin’ ’sides restaurants?”
The woman lost her smile. She seemed slightly vexed. . . .

"I'm having a complication, Mr. Buss, in a fruit-preserving corporation in which I got involved. My manager bid on government contracts. Other firms are vindictive because he got the business."

"You got some sort o' factory in addition t' your lunch-rooms?"

"Three plants are owned by the company, and a bottling works in Yonkers."

"How'd you get 'involved' as you call it?" A paternal interest prompted the catechism.

"I made an investment in a canning industry and found it was mismanaged. To protect my holdings I had to take control. It's a separate enterprise. I'm only its president."

"Only!" echoed Potiphar.

"The directors' chairmanship is a more vital office. Not to mention its General Management."

"It must be swell, bein' presidents and such. I was doorman t' a lodge once,—that's th' highest office I ever held. It got too blamed hard. Had t' give it up."

"Yes?"

"Yeah, every time a fight started I had t' be bouncer. I lost my front teeth and broke two left ribs. 'Course you don't run no chance o' havin' your face pushed in, when you're officer t' a business."
"But you often get walked on. That I can assure you."

"Yeah, I daresay. Seems funny though, you bein' a woman and up t' your neck in corporations and such. Ain't many go in for it."

"I mightn't have gone in for it either, if Life hadn't forced it. Then again . . . I suppose . . . there's a lot of father in me."

"Natcherly," said Potiphar. Then a moment later: "That senator feller, he's in your business too?"

"He owns some securities," the woman answered dryly.

"How'd you ever land him?"

"When I took over the canning concern I found it in trouble . . . with the government, I mean. We needed a . . . legitimate private lobby, if you know what that is . . . a friend at court, you might call it, to help us clean things up."

"So you got yourself a senator! Don't senators come high?"

Louise stood up, both hands holding plates. Her cool-eyed smile returned. "There are times, Mr. Buss, when being a woman has . . . certain compensations!"

She turned and went kitchenward. And Potiphar grinned. He thought she had winked . . .

In his favorite spring rocker, with collar off, vest unfastened, shoeless toe-joints creaking comfort-
ably, he sloughed down later in evening quiet. His pipe was drawing smoothly, his arms were folded, his little abdomen was in pleasing prominence. Breezes of another summer’s night, incense freighted, wafted through the house; moths tapped at the screens; across the low ceiling crawled drab groggy flies. One of Daisy’s many cats mewed for a time at the side kitchen-door but later went elsewhere at receiving no attention. And in another rocker across the corner of the table holding that opened Bible, the city woman sat with a frown in her eyes. She had brought cigarettes and now lighted one absently.

“Great stuff, tobaccy smoke,” the printer said pensively. “Lots o’ troubles go up in it.”

“Yes,” Louise nodded.

The hanging-lamp’s mellowness lighted her in profile and the frock of blue chiffon made sharp contrast with her flesh. A strong, shapely leg was thrust forward and a lean French-heel made contact with a hassock. It rocked her gently while she smoked, as men smoke, without haste, letting the fumes bathe her copper-gold head.

“I can’t stay here longer, Mr. Buss,” she went on. “I’m motoring back to New York in the morning with Senator Frye and Basil Van Dyke.”

“Well—it’s been mighty fine t’ have you visit me. Ain’t many come here t’ see Potiphar Buss.”

“Don’t your relatives visit you?”

“Not in flesh,” the printer whispered. . . .
"I've been thinking about—things like that—things you mentioned just after dad's death. You hit me rather hard, about keeping my word. You hit me hard too, in some of your views about his survival. First I should say, I told dad what I did—gave him the promise—more to ease his distress than because it spelled sense. We don't argue with the dying, Mr. Buss, not because they're dying but because there's the chance that it hastens the end. We're—afraid of committing a sort of murder, so to speak."

The printer rocked gently in the patent spring rocker. He gave the impression of massaging his shoulder-blades.

"Mr. Buss, I haven't the time to go chasing off on the trail of any derelict. My affairs are too important."

"I can see how you might think so."

"But they really are. Thousands of dollars are involved, each day I stay away from my business."

"Some folks do have th' knack o' thinkin' o' th' money end. I never could see it. But then, if I could, I might be rich too."

"Detectives, Mr. Buss, can run down this Robling. If my father'd employed them, he'd been alive today. Still, that's not the point."

"He prob'ly felt 'twas a personal obligation. Doin' it himself give him certain satisfaction."

"You've said it exactly. A personal obligation. Personal with my father! This idea that the sins
of the fathers can be visited on the children went to limbo with witches and infant damnation. I'm no more held to finding this man and working his rehabilitation than I'm held for being born of my father in the first place. We've got to think clearly on these matters, Mr. Buss. Four-fifths of all the upset in life is caused by people thinking they're responsible for others."

"You don't think they are?"

"Certainly they're not. Each one of us in life is responsible for exactly one soul—that's lodged within ourselves. And the average person has quite enough distress, accounting for that and suffering for its errors."

"You admit we got souls then? T'other night you tried t' argue—"

"I don't admit we've got souls as you conceive them: I spoke symbolically. What I'm telling you is, this mess was my father's. And again thinking clearly, when my father perished as a living mortal, his messes perished with him."

"Hardly th' results o' them messes, Miss Lou. Th' money you say he took from Georgie's father, that ain't perished, has it?"

"I'm coming to it presently. First I'm disposing of certain moral aspects of a situation not of my selection. I resent and refute that anything committed by my father as a youth can have its denouement in the fortunes of his daughter. I'm
held to nothing as a common-law principle. On the other hand, my father, having thrust me into life—"

"Done what? Real sure you didn’t come o’ your own accord Miss Lou?"

"Of my own accord! What bizarre idea are you playing with now?"

The printer shrugged his shoulders. "Go on," he said gently.

"Do you think, if Ed had any choice about my rôle in life, I’d let myself be born of an Alaskan dance-hall woman—?"

"Was you?" cried Potiphar.

"—the unwanted brat of a might-have-been Sourdough and a girl in a honky-tonk—brought back to the States as a Cosmic Encumbrance—left to grow up as Kismet took caprice? Do you dare to maintain, if Ed had the slightest election, I’d have handed myself such a weird deal as that?"

The printer stared, thinking.

"Sure," he said finally. "Matter o’ fact, that’s exactly what you did!"

Louise stopped her rocking. Terror seemed to slip across her eyes for an instant. As quickly it was gone and her nervous laugh sounded.

"That’s novel, Mr. Buss. But I didn’t, I assure you. Granted it were possible, I hope I’d show more brains."

"Choose yourself a nice, comfortable, uphol-
tered berth I s’pose—in some Lap o’ Luxury where you wouldn’t learn nothin’? You’d select such soft snap as evidence o’ brains?”

“God knows where you’ve come by some of your strange notions! . . . yet commonsense dictates that permitted such a choice I’d hardly have specified the hardships of my girlhood. They were too, too cruel. They did too much damage.”

“Made you strong, didn’t they?—so you’re runnin’ big companies at thirty-three years old?”

The girl became silent, thinking uneasily.

“But how about happiness?” she went on finally. “How about mental tranquillity? You think I rejoice in this never-ending strain?”

“Pshaw, you’re just tired for a time, that’s all. An’ you argue from that, you’d like t’ be a Nobody—a nameless flabby Nobody.”

“Well, I’m not allowing sentimentality to undermine the structure I’ve been rearing, whether I chose my rôle or not. I’m not at all flabby in regard to this legacy!”

“Call it sentimentality, do you, standin’ by a promise you made your pa, dyin’?”

Louise colored dully. The iron dimple grew in the corner of her mouth.

“You’re the first real person I’ve met in recent years—but our outlook’s different: we were born to separate creeds.”

“Naw—I’m jus’ older. An’ I’ve knocked ’round
a piece an' had some adventures with humans an' with God."

"Well, it's made you a philosopher at least while I'm only a—a fighting misanthropy, if that doesn't sound inane. Maybe I've got a lot to learn about myself, but sentiment comes hard—"

"I knowed a feller once who made them sort o' statements. Went up an' down through life arguin' how hard-boiled he was, an' how mighty little use he really had f'r sentiment. Fin'lly he was shipwrecked somewheres off Hatteras. Drifted f'r days he did, with his water gone bad an' nothin' f'r company but a little terrier dog."

"Well?" asked, Louise, at an overlong pause. Potiphar chuckled. "Revenue cutter rescued him—found him near dead with tongue hangin' out, swollen black an' blue. First thing they did was lower him some water, an' th' selfsame galoot who'd been spendin' half his life arguin' t' folks his heart was made o' brass, give th' little dog water 'fore he'd drink some himself. Ain't like my friend, be you, Miss Lou?"

"I may be," came the answer.

It discomfited the printer, her whimsical candor. He went on lamely: "Th' Chinese has a pro­verb, daughter—'When th' grief o' th' soul's too heavy f'r utt'rance, it may a little be eased by speech.' I was young when I learnt it. It helps lots o' heartache."

"Who said anything about heartache? Besides,
I've learned to keep my own counsel. I'm—I'm too busy to have heartache!"

"Yes, that's th' sad part—it shows 'round your mouth."

"Does it?"

"I don't mean that sassy. I want you should know."

"There's a lot of difference between heartache and—lack of mental calm."

"You're all wrong with folks, daughter. I've seed it from th' first. I don't know whether your girlhood started it—I sort o' wished you'd tell me—but you lack understandin', bringin' peace t' th' soul."

"Mr. Buss, I despise people!—average people—because they're so average!"

"Despise 'em!" echoed Potiphar.

"That's a wicked thing to say. It reeks of conceit. But the stupidity of the ordinary person fills me with contempt. I want you to get me straight—why I feel as I do—"

"Marvel t' me is, feelin' that way, you've done all you have!"

"From the time I was a little girl, forced to find ways to get things accomplished, doing work beyond my strength, straightening out problems for far older people—I've had capricious contempt for the average human dunderhead, blundering through existence. For that's what he is. And that's what he's doing!"
“I wish,” said Potiphar, “you’d tell me ’bout your girlhood. I’d like t’ know ’bout you; mebbe I could help. How old was you, daughter, when you up an’ lost your ma? I—I got reasons for askin’,” the old printer coaxed.

The girl’s face darkened. “I never knew my mother,” she answered with reluctance.

“Never knew your ma?”

“Among my earliest recollections was being held in a woman’s lap one summer afternoon out in western Indiana and seeing a cortége climb a country hill. And another woman, a morbid woman, told me my mother was in the glass wagon.”

“What was it she died of?”

“Pursuing her vocation with too much enthusiasm. You see, father had left her at arriving in the States. I was nearly fourteen the first time I saw him—to know him for my father. The people who’d raised me got a line on him somehow: they made him come back and relieve them of their ‘burden’.”

The distress of throwing off her reserve, ranting biographically, was obvious to the printer. And yet she must do it; somehow he must make her. He ventured persuasively—

“Relatives, was they?—th’ folks you was left with?”

“No, people named Beers: I don’t know why they took me, but they kept me twelve years. Then father came back, and saw me, and cried: ‘The hell
this is my brat!’ I was scrawney and awkward. My nickname was Stilts.”

“Tell me all 'bout it. We got plenty time. This Beers fambly now—how was it they treated you?”

“If you want the drab story, I'll give you the high lights. There were Pa and Ma Beers and three older girls. They were hideously poor and Ma Beers did washing: far into the night I had to turn the wringer till I sank to the floor from the pain in my legs. All the same, it was Ma Beers' dementia that beclouded my childhood. She had hideous expedients for relieving her repressions. Once I had six chicks given me in payment for a service done a neighbor. A family by the same name in the district had cheated Ma Beers fifty cents on a wash-bill. She 'got justice' by seizing my piping baby chicks in their box of cotton wool and severing their heads with a razor-sharp knife. Again, she exterminated a litter of newly born kittens by dropping the fumbling mewling things on the back-veranda flooring, then squashing each one with her great heavy boot-heels. I had to watch it. She was crazy, of course. But—I had to watch it!”

An old clock ticked thoughtfully in dining-room darkness. Someone passed in the road, the scuff of their footfalls sounding plainly in the silence.

“Father came and got me,” the woman recounted, “and parked me in a train seat for that
tedious eastern trip. He rode in the smoker, coming back meal-times to toss me a sandwich. Yet the novelty of the ride took the sting from my loneliness and we got to Philadelphia and he put me in a school. A ‘private school’ it was—in name—run by a woman shaped like a tub. She was so horribly fat that a circus should have had her. In fact, a circus did have her—though she little suspected—right there in her home, which made me speak sarcastically about the privacy I met with.”

“Jus’ whatta you mean?”

“A score of girls were boarded with her, all in my dilemma, and she taught them what she knew. But all those girls learned didn’t come from Madam Bliss. They crawled in and out of the windows like flies as soon as the lights were extinguished at night—to meet boys, of course—neighborhood boys—any sort of loafers providing they were male. One girl, Inez I’ll call her, became enamoured of a plumber—”

“You met ’em like th’ others?”

“Do you think I had any reasons for playing Little Angel in that mob of she-hoodlums? But the turmoil that resulted when matters went wrong, with Inez I mean, her confinement and funeral, branded me with a dread for romantic love till well into womanhood.”

“Well, that was all right, warn’t it—seein’ you needed some sort o’ protection?”
"I left the place finally," Louise went on wearily, "because dad's business was slipping and no money came for board. I decided I'd go out to Shawsville and have a talk with him, really try to get acquainted... so a girl advanced some money and I packed up my clothes. I reached Shawsville in the evening and went to dad's factory. I didn't know his address—the address of his house—but I hoped to find a watchman or someone who would give it. A sullen young loafer did that all right, when the watchman I found acted strangely evasive. Across the town this fellow led me, to indicate finally a house behind some trees. At first it looked unoccupied but I made out a sign on reaching its steps. Madam Somebody-or-Other was a palmist on the premises."

"Mistake, warn't it?" The printer stopped rocking and was listening wide-eyed. "Your pa lived with a fortune-teller?"

Again Louise spoke with sardonic hurt.

"Wait! ... I rang the bell, and rang it, and rang it—till the door was opened stealthily. A woman was behind it in tawdry dishabille. I looked at her surprised. And she too was surprised—believe me she was! Bluntly I asked if my father could be found there: I spoke his name loudly in adolescent nervousness. It brought giggles from the stairs at the back of the hall. I looked beyond the woman and saw half a dozen girls clad in sleazy slips... I got back to the street with the same qualm grip-
ping me that I'd felt over Inez . . . I never waited to encounter my father—"

"Was he there, d'you think—or had th' boy spoofed you?"

"No, the boy hadn't spoofed me . . . I stumbled around that strange town looking in toward the comfortably lighted houses till whole avenues were darkened. Along toward morning I was ill all alone, down in a fence corner. But I managed to recover and buy myself a breakfast. Then I faced life—and planned what to do."

"I know," whispered Potiphar. "Mebbe I'm man but I've faced such facks m'self."

"I got into Scranton—walking the distance—and found myself a job. In a restaurant it was, owned by a Dutchman, a young Dutchman, with an old ugly wife. When she wasn't about, he had a weakness for the waitresses. She walked in one night and caught him pawing me. I had a few dollars by then, however. The next place I found was a job in a laundry."

"I sure admire your grit—"

"Grit? Oh fiddlesticks,—it was self-preservation. A man named Penny ran the laundry—a one-armed old codger who'd lately lost his wife. He put me in the office. That's where I learned my proficiency with money—that I had certain gifts to make dollars do tricks. Penny got giddy when he suddenly saw his profits. One day he
grabbed me and insisted I marry him. It was ludicrously awkward; he was older than father."

"I s'pose you've had lots o' offers t' marry. I wonder you ain't done it."

"I've come too near it, too many times. To continue, however . . . when I laughed at old Penny he broke down and sobbed. Sobbed! I'd never seen a man sob and it frightened me to death. That night he hung himself—in his bedroom—in a closet."

"What!"

"I could go on telling you about job after job—a whole magazine of true confession stories, most of them dramatic because my life's been little else. What would be the use? I could tell you about an experience in a Pittsburgh burlesque where I earned easy money by showing men my legs—"

"You been on th' stage?"

"—I could tell you about working in a pawnshop, working in a bank. I met a young lawyer and expected to marry him. Drama again! Another woman shot him, a week before the wedding. I got bruised in a train-wreck and was paid a thousand dollars. I put it in a tea-room and became my own mistress. Eleven years ago, that was—and since then I've prospered. But I'm not Lou Garland of the *Wreath and Tea Cup* chain by wearing my heart between my shoulder and my elbow!" She declared this last defiantly, as though arguing with herself.
“How ’bout your daddy, when you started t’ prosper?”

“Yes, what about him? When I went up into your south bedroom last Tuesday night, it was the first time I’d seen him since Nineteen-Twenty-Three. I was badly cramped for funds—acquiring that cannery—and I thought I’d try him out. I met him by appointment, in New York it was, and asked him for a loan... I knew he had plenty and could easily spare it. He parried me however, describing a breach of promise suit with which he was threatened: some racy jezebel had mittened onto him and he wanted me to see her ambulance-chasing lawyer. I laughed in his face and went off to see Basil.”

“Basil?”

“Basil Van Dyke, who was here this afternoon—he’s the son of Joel Van Dyke, the chemist, and his mother’s a Carberry and scandalously wealthy. He promised to get me a loan—he did get me a loan—on a half-understanding I’d later be his wife. That was five years ago, and stalling him along has scarcely been a picnic.”

“You don’t want t’ marry him?”

“Oh, call it I’m indifferent. Anyhow, you see why dad’s death didn’t crush me—why I wouldn’t be hypocritical enough to give him a funeral, weep over him, act mawkishly compassionate and hope he’d survived. As for letting his money go to
A pucker appeared in Potiphar’s forehead. Subsequently needing more tobacco, he crossed to the hall for a packet in his coat. Returning, he stood thoughtfully a moment by the organ, breaking the stamp and uncreasing the tin-foil. Louise crunched the end of her cigarette in a saucer at her elbow and fitted a fresh one into a slender black holder.

“What I can’t get,” the printer said finally, “is why, havin’ went through so much, you can’t split with a feller who’s had his knocks too? Plenty hard-poundin’ should leave people soft.”

“Because he’s a stranger and none of my business!—to start sharing with all similar unfortunates in America, I’d liquidate my holdings and go in for philanthropy. You see, Mr. Buss, it’s a law of economics—business is one thing, charity’s another; the moment you mix them you’re courting calamity.”

“But you promised,” cried the printer. “You can’t get around that fact. You promised!”

“My reply to that is: it takes two to make a bargain. When one party dies, the bargain is dissolved. You can’t have a contract with a memory in the abstract, not a legal covenant.”

“But your pa ain’t a memory!”

“That’s metaphysics, mysticism again, over which I can’t enthuse. If you’re right, if father’s still
alive, if he knows obligations contracted in flesh, let him finish his errand and find Robling for himself.

"'Tain't impossible he will, if you don't keep your word."

"Mr. Buss, you're so—droll."

"S'pose you knewed for a fack that your daddy ain't perished, how'd you feel then 'bout short-suitin' Georgie?"

"What the legal status of a legacy may be under cosmic survival is something I can't answer, but after the blatant recital I've just made you I should think you'd understand that salvaging a derelict is a farce to begin with. I mean for Lou Garland. Let alone the question of money—which was only one-half of the covenant that troubles us—who am I, pray, to regenerate a failure?"

"Seems t' me, from your 'blatant recital' as you call it, that you've learnt a few ropes."

"I haven't the time. I haven't the inclination. I haven't the patience. I haven't the incentive. The whole thing's preposterous and I simply can't be bothered."

"But gosh-almighty, honey, ain't you got no love in your heart for nobody?"

"If I did have the belated impulse to clean the choked fountains of inhibited altruism, I'm telling you that no man who'd let a woman wreck him would be the motivation. If you think I'm hard-ribbed, charge it to my father."
“No,” said the printer, resitting in the rocker. “Your father ain’t t’ blame. You got things all wrong.”

“You think so?” asked Louise. Her mouth was twitching queerly.

“Every boy and girl has a grievance ’gainst their folks. It’s th’ way o’ all flesh. No man and woman ever raised a mutual youngster that sooner or later didn’t get a peeve, that things might o’ been diff’rent or might o’ been happier. I’ve felt th’ same m’self. Long time ago, in Seventy-Five, years ’fore you was thought of, I got sore at my folks and run off from home. My father’d sold a cow I thought was half mine. Later I learnt th’ reason why he did it—t’ get me from a scrape—yet ’cause of a heifer I hated him for years. Lookin’ back now, I see he done his best—all things considered—’cordin’ t’ his light and th’ standards o’ th’ times. Most parents do, though we’re old afore we see it—or know what life’s about.”

“My father didn’t do his best! Why, he didn’t do anything!”

The printer’s voice grew husky. . . .

“Trouble is, Miss Louise, we don’t know th’ ins and outs o’ folk’s lives, that’s made ’em what we find ’em. And that goes for parents, ’cause after all, they’re human. Not a single person was ever born who did a wicked deed, that he didn’t hold he had good, sufficient reasons. Sixty-seven years I been findin’ my way ’round this present Vale o’
Tears and I ain’t met no bad folks—just them as got a rotten deal somewheres and took out their heartbreak strikin’ back wrongly. Your pa prob’ly got his rotten breaks, too—which put in his system th’ carelessness you speak of.”

“Carelessness! Carelessness!”

“Chief trouble with this old world, honey, is its lack o’ understandin’. Every male and female, good, bad or indiff’rent, is simply th’ result o’ all th’ things they been through. Not in one life only—in many lives, I’m thinkin’. I don’t care if you have made a million dollars runnin’ lunch-rooms, if you ain’t got that straight you’re still a young girl.”

“The ‘millions’ I’ve made are grotesquely exaggerated. I’ve not made one million dollars yet—clear!—or anything like it.”

“Folks knows in their hearts th’ loads they’ve had t’ carry, th’ plans that’s gone wrong, th’ injustices they’ve suffered. They can’t allus tell it so’s th’ world makes allowance. But they don’t want blame, or jail, or headlines in th’ papers: they just want a square deal, that’s all—and sympathy—and love. A lot o’ love, daughter. You think folks is stupid. I just call ’em tired. Come right down t’ it, what’s men and women but a lot o’ growed children, crazy with life’s fixes, doin’ th’ best they know how with th’ handicaps they’re under, sobbin’ for th’ arms that once rocked ’em t’ sleep?”

Louise bit her lip. She turned her face aside. . . .
"I ain’t got no blame for any soul on earth," Potiphar Buss wheezed earnestly, "no matter what it does. Seems sometimes I’d like t’ stretch out my arms and gather th’ whole human race right into my boozum. ’Tain’t much as boozums go. Still, that’s how I feel. I know how Jesus must o’ felt when He wanted t’ be a hen."

"What!"

"—when He looked down on Jerusalem, I mean, and says He wisht He could gather th’ place up, and all th’ folks in it, and hide ’em like chicks under th’ shelter o’ His wings. I’m a mushy ol’ fool. I sometimes takes notions. But I’ve went through a lot and I know folks’ insides."

"I’m a business woman. And as a business wo-

"—I’m thinkin’ that’s why He’s had all sorts o’ persons willin’ t’ die for Him these last two thousand years. He jus’ sympathized! And so I bet a cookie if we really knewed th’ truth ’bout your pa—could o’ followed him ’round through his life from th’ first—we’d o’ seen th’ reasons why you didn’t figger so much in his affairs."

"I’m not so good a person—as you are—Mr. Buss—"

"You ain’t so old as I be, that’s all. But some-
day you will be and your soul ’ll be soft."

"Yet thousands of elderly people don’t—"

"I admit th’ world’s funny. Takes all sorts o’ suckers t’ make up th’ tax-list." The printer lit
his pipe. "You can't give a feller kindness by givin' him age. All th' same, real love for th' human race is a mighty pleasant feelin' when it gets to your gizzard. Queer part o' it is, if it once moves in on you lots o' things happen. You suddenly find you realize, for one thing, that dead folks ain't perished. And when you get that good, life takes a new meanin'."

The city woman stared. "How do you mean—you realize—the dead haven't—perished?"

"No one knows what love is. As a word it's worn out, we use it for so much. A mother thinks she feels it when she'll fight for her young. A feller calls it love when he hankers for a girl. Th' Good Book tells us that God felt it towards a world gone skewed, and let His Son come here—t' show us th' way t' conquer our cussedness. Mebbe in a way it's all th' same stuff. But when you get over thinkin' 'bout yourself, and let it really warm th' cockles o' your heart, it opens strange senses and gives you queer powers."

"What powers, Mr. Buss?"—The girl's face looked frightened.

"Dunno's I could tell you. If you was born blind—and most of us are—I couldn't describe you th' color o' red. But things happen. You see traits in folks you never see before. Perty soon you realize they's other things you're seein'—not only seein' but feelin' as well. Presences, you might say. People too fine t' be looked at with eyes. "Twas
love fetched th' Carpenter back, warn't it—t' th' twelve that was grievin' in th' closed Upper Room? That ain't no parable, Him returnin' like He did, . . . and 'twas love bridged th' gap, though we don't know just how. What I'm tellin' you is, when you got a genuine feelin' t' put your arms 'round everybody and let 'em cry on your shoulder, they's puzzles explained that scares selfish folks stiff."

"I see. You contend—we acquire—supersenses?"

"No, not acquire. No one acquires what they already got!"
CHAPTER V

LOUISE left Vermont the following morning. A volcanic sun was erupting gold recklessly over Haystack Mountain’s summit, streams of bright lava were pouring down valleys and a faint tinge of fall hazed the country horizons, when the regal car halted at Potiphar’s gate and the woman came out in the hat with the veils. A sad little printer followed with her luggage.

“Sorry you’re not going with us, Mr. Buss,” Van Dyke greeted him politely. He was clad like the Senator in motoring coat.

“Oh, they’re all alike, places. I been ‘Here, I been ‘There. Now I’ve took root an’ places comes t’ me!”

“Good-bye, Mr. Buss,” said his guest from the tonneau, extending her hand after tying her veils.

“Goo’bye, Miss Louise . . . you’re gonna have a wonderful day for auttymobile ridin’. Remember what I told you ’bout comin’ back up. When you get full o’ snarls—”

“Yes, yes, I know! It’s been a strange contact — perhaps not without significance.”

“Nothin’ happens in this world without that,
daughter. You remember I’ve told you. When you’ve got old as me, you’ll take it for granted.”

“Mr. Buss—Potiphar!—I’m sorry I’m going.” And Louise pressed his hand. “That’s not a mere politeness—”

“I know, sure! But if it’s on th’ Books for us t’ come t’gether agin, we’ll come, don’t you worry.”

Robes were adjusted, gears clacked, the heavy machine turned into the road. From her place between Basil and the Senator, Louise turned about and waved her white handkerchief.

The printer waved back—a nondescript bandana—

A long time he stood waving. He did not seem to realize that the car had turned the curve. At a quarter to eight he arrived at his work.

“How much did she give you, Pott?” the editor demanded.

“How much did who give what?”

“Lou Garland—compensation for the upset she caused to your house—you know darned well what!”

“Between fifteen an’ twenty thousan’. I ain’t counted it yet—mebbe fifty—seventy-five—you never can tell, when you do things for heiresses.”

“That’s a lotta limburger!” cried Joe Hicks, the pressboy. “It’s his way o’ tellin’ us he never got a cent.”

“You oughta sue her!” the office-staff agreed.
“Naw—I don’t go in for lawyers. I cotton t’ folks who needs some encouragement.”

“But think o’ the chance you had to sting her, Pott!” argued Kenyon, the foreman. “You could have asked practi’clly any price for lettin’ her old man croak on your premises. And you go and muff it! I s’pose you’ll have over that drule about Love—”

“I’d ask plenty for lettin’ you croak on my premises, but quality folks gets special bargain prices.”

The day wore on. The week wore on. The office forgot its kindly indignation and Potiphar Buss resumed his drab labors. Ben Williams’ clothing ad, the daily gist of publicity for the Modern Bargain Store, the Red Front Grocery, the Bon Ton Emporium, and “them Jews down West Main Street”—he set morning on morning in the same quaint typography, varied only by items and prices. And in mellow summer sunset he trudged up South Maple Street, crossed Walnut at the top, went down the other side toward those wide river-meadows and the home behind the pine tree.

On the second Saturday in September, however, he had been at home an hour when a boy on a bicycle halted at his gate: young “Slim” Seavers who worked at the postoffice. Slim had a letter with lengthy blue stamp. Special Delivery for Potiphar Buss! He was cleaning a stovepipe when Daisy announced it. The postoffice boy heard a
bump and a shriek, the bump being Potiphar tipping from his ladder and the shriek being Daisy's—when he picked himself up and reached for the tablecloth . . . to wipe his black paws.

He got the missive open, and at once a slip fell out of the sheets—a long greyish slip with two crinkled edges. Daisy recovered it.

"It's a check, Pott Buss!—a real check for money! Look what she's sent you!"

"Pshaw!" cried the printer. "She's went and spoiled everything." Into the sitting-room he scuffed and procured the spectacles laying on the Psalms.

An instant later he appeared as one demented.

His entrance into "The Telegraph" office that Saturday evening was a classic in dynamics. He wore his coat but his hat was on backward. Soot from the stovepipe daubed his splayed nose and the trip into town had been made in his slipper-feet.

"I'm goin' t' Chicawgo!" he cackled to Sam Hod. "Th' Garland girl's found Georgie and wants that I should help her."

The printer thrust two heavily embossed, closely typed pages into the puzzled editor's hands and pushed him toward the cubby that he called his private office. Four equally startled cronies, talking state politics with Hod, were left to conjecture and a crassly closed door. Seated before the cluttered
exchange table, alternately reading and cogitating, once feeling for a match and lighting his half-smoked cigar without taking his eyes from the lines the newspaper owner apprized himself as follows:

NEW YORK CITY,
September 12th.

DEAR POTIPHAR BUSS:

It may gratify you to know that a line of inquiry which I launched on returning to this city, regarding the present location and status of Mr. George Robling, has resulted in information which seems to be pertinent. Advices received from Chicago state that a person of such name is employed in the offices of a construction corporation in that city, obviously in a menial capacity, but that further identification waits on the presence of those more vitally interested.

Robling is, of course, a not uncommon name. If the national census could be searched I have no doubt that scores and even hundreds of "George Roblings" could be met with. I am led to believe that this may be the specific George Robling with whom you were once acquainted, for two reasons.

First: Recalling the packet of old letters which you showed me during my recent visit as having been written twenty years ago to Mr. Robling by his abandoned girl-wife, I had one of my associates trace the latter through her divorce data. Thus Mr. Robling's former stepmother-in-law was located and interviewed. She not only confirmed the details with which you supplied my father, but disclosed that divorce papers were served on Mr. Robling in Detroit.
Second: Having sent a Mr. Perry to Detroit to investigate certain addresses furnished by the ex-wife's stepmother, I am certain he would not be wiring me to meet him in Chicago unless he were reasonably assured he had found the right person.

As explained to you in your home, I have no interest in Mr. Robling, his present location, or his status, excepting that he is a beneficiary under a legal instrument which I propose to have set aside and the first point to be determined under such action is the fact of his existence and legal residence.

As you appeared greatly exercised over his fortunes, however, displaying sincere feeling over the unsatisfactory termination of his contact with you, and as I am your debtor for kindnesses shown my father and myself for which you stubbornly refused payment, I am moved to make you a business proposal.

If you will come to New York at your early convenience, I will arrange my affairs so that we may make a brief business trip to Chicago together and interview the person Mr. Perry has traced. If the proof is irrefutable that he is the George Robling my father desired to benefit, I will desist from any action and "rehabilitate" the unfortunate on the following basis:

If he will agree not to contest my father's will, or insist on his bequest to my detriment when I contest it, I bind myself to amicably settle on him a sum of money representing the original amount which came into my father's possession from his father in Alaska, in 1898, but without interim interest or increment.

Such offer on my part, however, is emphatically
premised on an additional qualification to which you must subscribe, namely, that if there appears to be necessity for any further "rehabilitation" over and above the restitution of this patrimony, that you personally undertake to supply such service, completely releasing me from any such obligation and further guaranteeing not to inform Mr. Robling of my father's requests of such nature and intent.

You, and not I, seem to be the one temperamentally fitted to perform such function, and in view of all the factors, past, present and future, I assume your cooperation without further correspondence. I am enclosing you a check for $500 for expenses, made payable to your order. You need feel no compunction against accepting it, as I can assure you the amount will eventually be charged against the administrative expenses of my father's estate.

May I add that I very much anticipate the journey to Chicago in your company as offering an opportunity to perfect the friendship begun under recent distressing circumstances in Vermont. Also I'm confessing that I want to hear more of your views about the cosmos.

Please wire me when I may expect you.

Most respectfully yours,

LOUISE GARLAND.

"H'm. . . she writes a fair letter," said Sam Hod smugly. He folded the pages and handed them back.

"I could catch th' train t'morrer night, couldn't I, Sam'el?"
The editor impaled the printer with his glance. "And I you told me when I gave you this job that you’d take root and stick no matter what happened?"

The little man’s joyousness froze on his countenance.

"But Sam’el—I stuck twenty years. And I ain’t givin’ up—it’s like a vacation. I wanna see Georgie!"

Potiphar’s loyalty was nothing to jest with. The proprietor sobered . . .

"I was only spoofing, Pott. I’m tickled plumb stiff she’s made the trip possible though I can’t say I’m pleased at making you the patsy."

"She ain’t makin’ me no patsy, Sam’el."

"She’s making it a condition that you pull her chestnuts from the fire. Boiled right down, she’s the daughter of a thief graciously agreeing to give back the loot if no one will squawk and if someone like you smooches everything over."

"She’s a business woman, Sam’el. She looks at things diff’rent."

"I’ll say she’s a business woman. And too cold-souled for comfort. But all the same, she’s pretty. And that makes me think: you can’t bust around the country with handsome young ladies, looking like something that come from a rummage-sale."

"You mean—my clothes?"

"I’ll cash that check for you. The first thing you do is visit Ben Williams. And don’t buy any
more of those sidewalk dusting ulsters. Tog yourself out snappy—so Robling doesn’t think he’s meeting Father Time.”

“Then I can’t go till Monday night. Ben Williams’ store ain’t open on Sunday.”

“Send her a wire you’ll be with her Tuesday noon. Take the trip on her money. Enjoy a vacation. But you listen to me when it comes to George Robling. Don’t be a fool. That woman’s rich, according as I see it, getting other people to discharge her obligations. She dodges trouble naturally and calls the dodging Business.”

“Such obligations—helpin’ her—helpin’ Georgie—is only privileges, Sam’el. Why th’ devil am I livin’?”

“Privileges my foot! You’re getting to be a soft-headed old buzzard who’d give away his skin if anyone could use it.”

“Well, I’ve done that too in m’ time, Sam Hod. Not all o’ it, o’ course, or I’d look summat diff’rent. Patches, you might say—”

“All right, all right. We won’t argue that now. But chase yourself over to Ben Williams’ store the first thing Monday and get what’s left of it covered with spry garments. For the honor of ‘The Telegraph’ you’ve got to look shipshape.”

“They’s a whole day in between. How’ll I ever get through Sunday?”

He managed it, however.

When Benjamin Williams came down to open his
clothing store on Monday, Potiphar Buss was seated in its entrance. But Williams being subsequently summoned to the bank, he left his quaint customer to his youthful clerk, Spinney. And by some weird atavism maintaining from Father Adam—or taking his employer’s advice too literally—on digging down through the stock with this Spinney, Potiphar came on one suit that no floods of dissuasion could keep him from acquiring and draping on his person. By its custom designer it was known as a “Pinch-Back” . . . and the printer wanted that suit specifically. If Spinney wouldn’t sell it he would lose a cash patron.

Potiphar Buss arrayed in a Pinch-Back! A collegiate Pinch-Back! It had to be let out generously in seams with which only a male is acquainted and taken up frightfully where seams are unusual. These changes complete, he worried a lot—that somehow he failed to appear as those sleek young vacuums in Ben Williams’ fashion-plates. Still the raiment was bought and the world must be tolerant. An overcoat too, was determined on finally—a raglan overcoat—and concerning a hat young Spinney was consistent; he sold Potiphar a soft green Fedora with a bow at the back and a sparrow’s wing feather thrust in one side. Clad in such ensemble, the printer sallied forth. . . .

He made his first bid for approval at the office. Jane Winbolt, bookkeeper, caught sight of him
coming. She stiffened and stayed so, an apple-blossom waxworks. Joe Hicks, the pressboy, was next to perceive him. Joe's neck seemed to stretch as he swallowed his tobacco. George Kenyon, foreman, came hurrying in—to drop his damp proofs and grope for something steadying, which chanced to be the stove and luckily fireless. Two or three callers turned and saw Potiphar. One of them asked brassily: "What th' divil be you advertisin'?"

Sam felt a silence falling on his business. He thrust out his head from his nearby private office, spilling paste on his pants without knowing that he did so.

"How do you like 'em?" the printer asked nervously. He came in to Sam and stalked for inspection.

Sam lit his pipe before daring to answer. "Depends on what you aim to do in 'em, Pott. If you expected to turn community horse-frightener—"

"I'm goin' to wear 'em t' Noo-York. You can't mean they ain't a fit."

"Oh, they're a fit all right—but not the kind that has to do with clothing."

"You m-m-mean you don't like 'em? I thought you said t' get somethin' classy."

"Yes, but—"

"Spinney wanted t' sell me tan shoes but I drawed th' line at that. They warn't quite dig-
nissied in a man o' my years. Clothes ain't what they once was, Sam’el. Take my ol’ green ulster. *There was a garmint!*"

“I’d rather that you—er—knocked ’round town a bit today, Potiphar. Come in later and I’ll help you with advice.”

At half after one he was back in the plant.

“Sam’el, be frank!” he implored his employer. “What’s wrong with me, anyhow? People stops sudden-like when they sees me on the sidewalk—and—and—three dogs all barked at me t’ once up beyond th’ Baptist Church.”

“Dogs barked at you, eh? I suppose they’re not educated to what the Well Dressed Man Should Wear. Tell me, what are you squirming about?”

“I dunno. But if these pants looks as funny as they feels, I ain’t so sure I’m a respecktable citizen.”

“Potiphar, you can’t go traveling in an outfit like that. Supposing the train ran off the track!”

“But I gotta wear it somehow, Sam’el. My sleeper’s bought and there ain’t no time for alterations to another.”

The editor was thoughtful when the printer had departed. “Oh well,” he told Kenyon, “maybe Providence had a hand in selecting that suit. When Lou Garland sees it, she’ll show him what she is!”

Louise beheld Potiphar at nine the next morning. For reasons known only to herself, she had come to the Terminal to greet the man personally.
Through the train-gate he trudged, confused by the crowds, toting the telescope bag with the straps—and though she discerned him, recognition was tardy. Not until he jabbed her playfully with the faded fat umbrella did she grasp what caprice had inflicted upon them.

"Mr. Buss!" she cried blankly. "What have they done to you?" Then she noted the ache in the tin-colored eyes. "Have you—bought some new clothes?"

"Thirty-nine dollars, everything cost me. I just had t' do it. Th' others looked shabby."

The oncoming crowd shoved them out of its current.

"But—the trouble is—they're not the kind of clothes—suited to your—temperament."

"Spinney claimed they looked swell. And I—I waited all Sunday t' buy 'em, too!"

People were staring. Some of them were grinning. It was characteristic of the smartly tailored woman that none of them existed. . . .

"You dear old soul!" she cried impulsively. "You come along with me and the two of us will shop." She got him to a cab.

"Ain't you busy, Miss Louise? It's mighty kind o' you t' meet me t' th' depot with all you have t' do."

"I've decided I'd rather make you happy, Mr. Buss, than transact all the business there is in Manhattan."
"What!"
"You've got to have clothes that make you feel more comfortable."
"You—you heard any more 'bout Georgie, Miss Louise?"
"Oh—him!" Instantly the altruism, faint, almost imperceptible, vanished from her countenance. "Not that I care to discuss," she responded.

Up from the Terminal tunnel their cab shot, and into Forty-third Street. Louise gave the driver the address of an exclusive men's furnishing store in upper Madison Avenue. They rode in silence for the first few minutes. Not even in the traffic halts did Potiphar show interest in the city scenes about him. Suddenly he chuckled.

"I was thinkin' 'bout Paris," he explained, in answer to her query. "Specially George Kenyon. He and Sam Hod see me off last night. And I won me five dollars."

"You won five dollars how?"
"Oh—I ain't got it yet. I'll get it when I tell 'em. George Kenyon bet me five that when you see my clothes you'd 'low you didn't know me."
"Why should I do that?"
"They got you all wrong up home t' Paris. There's folks there who claim 'that if anybody stuck a knife into you, you'd bleed lemon-juice'—but I held out diff'rent. And I've won me five dollars. Wait till I tell 'em what you said—that
you’d rather fix me up than do all th’ business they is t’ Noo-York!”

In a poignant type of glee, the man drew forth his corncob. Ten minutes later the patrons and clerks of a de luxe establishment were startled by the entrance of an egg-shaped little man, with skull entirely nude, proceeding toward the Suit Department in the raiment of a saxophonist. And a trenchant cobpipe laid a smoke-screen behind him. . . .
CHAPTER VI

"So I'd bleed lemon juice, would I—if somebody thrust a knife in my body?"

Their cab, another cab, turned out of Madison Avenue fifty minutes later, went eastward on Fifty-Seventh Street and northward on Park Avenue. And Potiphar Buss was exceedingly troubled.

"Because I put up my own fight," Louise said harshly, "refuse to let life whip me, take the world as I find it and try to outsmart it, because I hunt ways to succeed where others have failed and go my own way regardless of convention—"

"Kenyon didn't know you very well, Miss Louise. He couldn't in four days."

"—most of all, because I seek no man's shoulder to weep on, in the little-girl manner so appealing to your sex, I'm a bloodless monstrosity that should somehow be destroyed."

"No, no, Miss Louise. 'Tain't that way at all!"

The woman laughed suddenly.

"On the contrary, I'm telling you, Potiphar Buss. Having all the ingredients for a first-class meglomaniac in my system, why not give them exercise? Surely you'd not deny me that poor compensation?"
The printer desisted from craning at buildings. He glanced at his companion in ill-concealed anxiety.

"Besides," Louise persisted, "if you won't indulge me, soon you'll be telling me I lack a sense of humor. That would be the crowning touch—the coup de grace of your solicitude—telling me, Potiphar, that I lack a sense of humor."

"I ain't never said you lack a sense o' humor."

"But we should be very careful on that point, Potiphar, and have it distinctly understood between us: Do I, or do I not, lack a sense of humor? Up in Vermont you gathered that I did—now tell me truthfully."

Her manner was hectic. Never had the printer seen that iron dimple deeper. She held her chin high and gazed with a queer mirthless preoccupation at the city's madding jangle.

"Well, you—you took things perty serious, though I grant you 'twas natcheral, with your pa's death an' all. Er—by th' way, Miss Lou—you fixed that mess up yet, th' mess them two fellers come t' see you 'bout t' my place?"

The woman started slightly.

"You overheard—and remembered?" she exclaimed.

"Most o' it, Miss Lou. I didn't mean t' do it."

"Forget it at once. It had no significance."

"'Twas perty serious—seemed like t' them."

"You're a baffling person, Potiphar Buss. You
appear so—naïve—and yet there's little gets by you, is there?"

"Well, how'd they come out, th' Senator's troubles?"

"Sometimes I believe you receive things telepathically. If you must have the truth—I'm not figuring over-much at my office this week because of persons I don't wish to encounter."

"Perlice ain't after you, be they, Miss Louise?"

The printer's face whitened.

"No," laughed the woman. "I might handle the police."

"Where's your office at?"

"In lower Broadway. Near City Hall. You've been in New York before, I believe?"

"Pshaw—I worked here twenty years 'fore th' Spanish War. Where we goin' now?"

"I'm taking you home—till your clothes are delivered."

"When we startin' t' Chicawgo?"

"On the eight o'clock train."

"Tonight?"

She nodded. "This is where I live. We'll stay here for lunch."

"I was hopin' I could eat in one o' your lunch-rooms."

"Please not today. None of my managers must know I'm in Manhattan."

The cab had halted before a narrow slice of
residence—a quaint little dwelling three stories in height with a front of pink sandstone wedged between granite. The printer alighted and Louise paid the fare.

“You got a whole house all t’ yourself, Miss Louise?”

“Let’s not loiter on this walk!”

Louise produced her keys, waiting for no servant. She appeared relieved when the street doors were closed and the house like a sanctuary reared its walls about them. The hall they had entered was level with the sidewalk. On its left were broad stairs that mounted to a living-room. A cloistered place it was, dark-toned and secluded, light coming in through stained glass at the west.

“My, this is swell!” the printer gasped artlessly. “But it seems sort o’ lonesome—like livin’ in a church.”

He saw paneled wainscoting surmounted by oil paintings. At the north was a fireplace, its ponderous mantel on a level with his head. Heavy chairs and divans, quaint screens and taborets, a black grand piano with scroll cover lifted—all contrasted sharply with a mammoth polar rug. Louise pulled on lamps that deepened the effect.

“My stars! This is an awful big place for just one woman,” gasped the printer.

Louise smiled absently. She took off her hat. A negress appeared from the door at the back.

“Mr. Buss, this is Margaret . . . Margaret’s my
housekeeper, cook, and all-around bodyguard—when I'm at home."

Potiphar gaped, and so did the black girl.

As a bodyguard—for whatever reason she might have been necessary—Margaret possessed due physical equipment. Six-feet-two in height she stood, "cyprus black as e'er was crow," a stalwart Amazon of amazing comeliness, under whose arm the Vermonter might walk and not upset the hat with the feather. Nevertheless, he did not experiment. Margaret the Magnificent might not have understood.

"Howja do," said the guest. He pulled off the hat and was quaintly appalled.

The ebony Juno was likewise astounded: Potiphar's cranium might have been a soothsayer's gazing crystal, such was her bewitchment at its refractive nudity. The jazz artist's clothes caused stupefaction also. Louise said to Margaret—

"Mr. Buss is the gentleman I spoke of, . . . in whose home I visited, up in Vermont."

"Yes'sam, Mis' Louise," and Margaret came from her trance with an effort. "Ah'm glad yo' got here all right, sah," was her form of acknowledging the unusual introduction. Her smile became as friendly as her voice was melodious.

"Yeah, I—I fin'lly made it."

The printer's tone implied that for weeks, months, years, he had wrestled with demons of cir-
cumstance bent on holding him a prisoner in New England. Yet he kept a weather eye on Margaret as though hesitant at lingering in her statuesque vicinity. Thus did he occasion a somewhat awkward incident. The negress approaching to take his hat and bag—and perchance to disarm him of the corpulent umbrella—the man misinterpreted. He almost sat down in the cavernous fireplace.

They rescued him with laughter, from which Margaret sobered quickly. She addressed her mistress.

"Dolly Finch been tryin' get yo' all ovah N'York," she declared. "He call up fo' times since yo' leff hyar dis mawnin'. He tell me Ah fib when Ah say yo' ain't home."

"Did he mention what he wanted?"

"Yes'sam. Ol' Mis' Van Dyke come see yo' frum Phillydelphy. She down to yo' office, layin' square duck eggs. That what Dolly Finch say. She gotta misery 'cos she spat wif Misto' Basil."

Louise bit her lip. "All right, Margaret. How long ago did Mr. Finch call?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes. He say ol' Mis' Van Dyke come back affer lunch. If she doan fin' yo' dar, she gwine smash things up!"

The mistress tossed her gloves on a table with annoyance. "Call him back, Margaret. Say I'll be down between two and three o'clock."

"Yes'sam, Mis' Louise."
Now come abovestairs, Potiphar, and I'll show you where to change when your clothes are delivered.

Up another short flight the three of them went, Margaret in the rear carrying the bag. She might have carried Potiphar as easily, which apparently accounted for his clutch on the umbrella. They entered a chamber that looked down on the Avenue: a room done in old rose and ivory with mahogany twin beds which startled the printer.

"You don't hanker t' meet th' lady t' your office?" he asked, when the maid had descended to call Adolphus Finch.

"If she's here from Philadelphia I'll not dodge her deliberately. But I'd hoped to get away without meeting her this week."

"She related t' that feller that come t' my house?"

"Yes, she's his mother. This is the bathroom, Potiphar—see, here's the light-switch. You'll have time for a bath between now and luncheon."

"But I had my bath 'fore leavin' Vermont—Daisy made me take one. That woman t' your office, she's makin' you trouble?"

Louise tried to smile. "She's the sharpest old Battle-Axe, Potiphar, that ever took literally that epigram of Roosevelt's: 'Hard hitting's the best parry.' They call her 'Rule-or-Ruin Charlotte'!"

"But she won't keep us fr'm goin' t' Chicawgo? What is it she's after?"
“Something, I daresay, to do with her son.”
“Can’t that young feller run his own business?”
“You don’t know his mother. I didn’t, either, till Basil got that loan.”
“She won’t try t’ hold you here in N’York?”
“She’ll try anything once, that pleases her whim.”
“I wisht I could go ’long with you. I’d like t’ see your office.”
“That old despot has been trying for weeks to corner me alone. But she hasn’t done it yet without a witness or a foil. Why do you think I set the appointment between two and three o’clock?”
“Tony sort, is she?”
“She likes to think she’s tony. But between the two of us, it’s from his father’s side that Basil gets his quality. He comes from Van Dykes that were settlers of New Amsterdam.”
“H’m!”
“‘Rule-or-Ruin Charlotte’ can be small-towny as . . . I mean, every once in a while Mrs. Van Dyke forgets that her forebears never settled anything of more consequence than a mining-camp fracas, and reverts to type in a manner most provoking. You’ll see what I mean when you meet the lady personally.”

Basil’s mother, the printer was to learn, had been a Carberry—a Golden-West dynasty whose wealth came from lead. Joel, his father, had schooled him-
self in medicine. Repaying funds borrowed for his education by working as doctor in a Pittsburgh industry, Miss Charlotte Carberry had met and approved of him. Ostensibly they loved. Decidedly they married. Joel had been twelve years her senior at the time of those nuptials and according to the mathematical principle evolved from that circumstance, had remained twelve years her senior throughout every year since. At precisely what stage he had relinquished medicine for chemistry, twice being decorated by the American Institute, had remained as indeterminate as to how this strange pair should have merged in one flesh. Pittsburgh as well as Idaho was fecund with anecdote concerning Charlotte's young womanhood. Born of prospecting parents in the era of bonanzas, she had scarcely worn shoes till her father made his strike and she came east to school. There she had rescued Joel from brawlers who had stopped him in a slum, leaping from her carriage and wielding a horsewhip. Whereupon, fearing to repulse so drastic an Amazon, the hapless physician had submitted to her amours. Thus went the story. Basil had been born of a nouveau riche mother and an elderly father who kept to his crucibles.

In her sixtieth year "Rule-or-Ruin Charlotte" was still known for her queerness, being a painfully gaunt czarina given to freakish styles and manners and the nettling implication that without the Car-
berr
ty anthology, the American Saga would be	rash. As for Joel’s genealogy, the less said the
ter— in doughty Charlotte’s presence. After all,
what was it that one’s forebears had merely come
from somewhere and settled in Manhattan? Didn’t
everybody’s forebears immigrate on principle?
What comparisons could be drawn with an an-
cesty that had conquered deserts, fought Indians,
appalled bad men, and created a fortune that lent
money to Europe?

Louise and Potiphar, confronting this gorgon at
precisely two-thirty, beheld an elderly woman as
erect as an arrow — and barbed accordingly—
pompous in black silk and a queerly beaded hat,
with a fatuous Pekinese in the curve of one arm
and a sharpness to her glance that gave *boi polloi*
the fidgets.

“H’m!” she said combatively. She was vexed at
seeing Potiphar and her bother toned the confer-
ice.

“You wished to consult me, Mrs. Van Dyke?”

Louise was calmly courteous, her voice convey-
ing that no matter what candor the visitor indulged
in, she meant to keep her temper.

“Consult you? H’m! I merely came over to
find out if the report was true . . . that subway
motormen did their work in soiled gloves.”

Charlotte’s voice held a whimsical insolence—as
her dished - in face wore an ugly smile.
“Your interest in public hygiene does you credit,” laughed Louise. “Won’t you sit down?”
“Thank you, young woman. I scarcely expected to meet with such civility.”
“You compliment me, madam.”
“Well, it’s not intentional.”

The caller selected a chair, set her dog on the floor, gave a sharp projective pat to its furry little rump and straightened very straight. She inspected the appointments.

The executive offices of The Garland Corporation occupied the entire third floor of a déclassé building that looked eastward toward Park Row. Purchasing, auditing and employment departments were grouped in big rooms along a high corridor. The owner’s private office in the rear southwest corner offered more cloistered atmosphere: its motif was Spanish, its flooring was tiled, the windows were draped in salmon velour. More oil paintings, indistinguishable in half-light, set off the pastel walls and iron candelabra illumined fumed walnut. The desk in the center was exquisite with carvings. A strange composition it was, to discover in an antiquated business structure. No noises intruded back here, no hurrying of employes, no tapping of typewriters. Even the roar from Broadway was hushed. Mrs. Van Dyke at length inspected Potiphar.

By a private side-door he had entered with Louise, directly from the corridor, while “Rule-or-
Ruin Charlotte” waited in the ante-room. Clad in a wholly different costume the printer was now—a sober suit of black appropriate to his years and a soft-collared shirt with polka-dot tie. The hat in his hands was not mawkish with a feather; the shoes upon his feet were not astragals for columns.

“I beg your pardon,” Louise said suddenly. “Mrs. Van Dyke, permit me to introduce Mr. Potiphar Buss. He’s visiting me from Vermont this week. My father died in his home up in Paris.”

“Glad t’ know you, ma’am,” said Potiphar.

“Are you? Just why?”

Old Charlotte, it seemed, was spoiling for a brawl. But though Potiphar blinked, she failed to abash him.

“I was thinkin’,” he grinned, “that I knowed a woman once who might o’ been your sister. Abbie Cramp her name was. She come fr’m Foxboro Center. Earnt a good livin’, Abbie did, cleanin’ bugs fr’rn folks’s houses.”

“What!”

“You never had a cockroach chaser for a sister, did you?”

“No,” returned Charlotte, not batting an eyelash, “but I once had a gardener who might have been your brother. The resemblance is uncanny.”

“So?”

“He was such a dam’ thief we had to discharge
him. The last we heard of him, he was hung in Oklahoma—I think for stealing horses."

"Well, if he looked like me he prob’ly knowed his ropes. He must hev, t’ get hung."

"But apparently, sir, they hung the wrong brother." She turned and faced Louise. "I’ll talk to you alone," she said, like a threat.

"Potiphar Buss is quite harmless, I assure you."

"Yes—so are idiots. That’s no reason, however, they belong in business conferences."

Louise had seated herself in the chair behind her desk.

"But you wouldn’t ask me to turn a country guest out into Broadway with the five o’clock traffic to confuse and endanger him?"

"On the contrary: I’d highly recommend that excellent expedient—tending, let’s say, toward his permanent extinction."

"I don’t like crowds," Potiphar contributed. "They rile me somehow, like ol’ women an’ fireworks."

"Put it, Mrs. Van Dyke, that Mr. Buss’s presence is inoffensive strategy: he’ll keep us from taking ourselves too seriously."

Dull color crept up the visitor’s throat. And the ugly amusement remained in her eyes . . .

"Well, young lady, during the past fortnight I’ve sent you three letters, two wires, and a message through Basil, requesting you to see me at my home"
in Philadelphia. Why haven’t you responded?”

“I answered your letters, Mrs. Van Dyke.”

“Oh—you answered my letters? You informed me in so many words that despite my loan you didn’t consider me of sufficient consequence—”

“Not exactly that. It breaks up a day to go to Philadelphia. You’ll concede, I’m sure, that with all the interests demanding my time—not to mention the upset of burying my father—it mightn’t be convenient to answer such a summons.”

“You’ve been in Philadelphia three times since I wrote my first letter—don’t ask me how I know. As for burying your father, all the upset that cost you was a four-day vacation, lolling in Vermont. Adolphus Finch did your dirty work for you, ... I’m not using slang.”

“It seems to give you pleasure, doesn’t it, Mrs. Van Dyke, to make our relations as strained as possible whether contacts occur by arrangement or otherwise?”

Louise’s desk was barren of appointments excepting a great russet blotter, a scarlet quill pen in a marble standard, a French style telephone and a tray holding clips. She had selected one of these clips. Her expressive fingers refashioned the wire.

“You deliberately ignored me,” Charlotte insisted.

“And I repeat, that for five or six years I’ve recognized that we can’t come together without our temperaments clashing.”
“Perhaps. What of it? They’re going to clash some more.”

“That’s most regrettable,” Louise said softly. The printer was surprised that her voice could hold such tact.

“You heard me say, you deliberately ignored me. Well, that’s your business; I’m not here in pique. It’s a much graver matter that’s brought me to New York and unless you’re positive this man can keep his mouth shut, you’d better pack him out.”

“Mr. Buss is in my confidence—very much in my confidence.”

“The choice is yours, so . . . first I’ll recapitulate. I have your permission, or shall I do it anyhow?”

“You have my permission certainly, madam.”

“Um-m, . . . very good!”

Charlotte hitched in her chair, sitting forward on its edge; at times she tapped her toe on the red-and-black tiling. All too seldom did she encounter persons who would thus cross rapiers with her. She was secretly eager to try her mental steel.

The visiting printer sucked an empty corncob. Fascinated though he was by this tussle of wills, the sniffing Pekinese came in for his petting. He reached down presently—and the little animal settled in his lap, blinking damply but contentedly as the old man stroked its ears. Charlotte cleared her throat.
“Five years ago last May, young woman, and three days before I sailed for Spain, my son took me to look at a stretch of Jersey-shore property which he said could be bought for fifty thousand dollars. An automobile tire company was negotiating for it; by trading at once I might clear a smart profit. I gave Basil authority to liquidate certain industrials I was holding at the time and use the money to put the deal through. Then I sailed for abroad. I expected, of course, that the matter was settled.”

“We’ve discussed this before, Mrs. Van Dyke. I’m familiar with the details.”

“It won’t hurt you at all to hear them again! So . . . returning home I made a discovery. Basil had sold my stocks as directed. Instead of buying that land, however, he had brazenly committed a callow indiscretion. He had loaned the whole fifty thousand dollars to a Garland Fruit Products company, and the money had gone to keep someone from jail. That’s where my fifty thousand went: to pay up incorrect or defaulted taxes. To mitigate a felony!”

“The company was in a hapless dilemma, I’ll admit. But I doubt if fifty thousand dollars, coming at a psychological time, ever bought more.”

“It didn’t buy anything. It went to pay up taxes.”

“Still, paying them up and using an additional
thirty thousand of my own money, won control of the stock. Your son approved. You should have been delighted.”

“‘Delighted’ is too mild a term to describe my feelings, young woman. I was . . . overwhelmed. Quite overwhelmed. But it happened as explanations followed, that my son disclosed the extent of his romantic interest in a female person heading that coup—a person with little to recommend her but her courage, ingenuity and astounding audacity—”

“Thank you, Mrs. Van Dyke. Thank you very much!”

“Not at all, young woman, . . . now I am not, and have never been, one of those mothers who try to thwart the stupidities of their offspring in affairs of the heart. My son was of age; he had been given opportunities to meet all female types and form his opinion of their marital endowments. So I made no rumpus over the theft—”

“Theft!”

“Exactly—thief! I made no rumpus over the theft, carrying it as a loan to my son till the boy’s infatuation should have run its silly course. Between five and six years ago, that was. Since which time I have waited with composure.”

“Waited for what? I simply won’t credit that Van sent you to see me in the role of . . . maternal John Alden.”

“Indeed he did not!”
"Your interest has been paid punctually, madam. There was no explicit covenant that I show your son partiality for his aid in my financing. Why are you disturbed?"

"Wait! My son, as a fledgling attorney eager to bring business into his firm without family assistance, felt reasonable pride at being retained as counsel for your companies. On that score his parents have offered no criticism. But they have been concerned, mightily, at meeting the audacious female person, to discover that she was not favoring the boy for his professional abilities or romantic inclinations."

"No?"

"No, she was using him as cold-bloodedly as any siren of fiction for his social connections, his political affiliations, his access to wealth. In other words, not to put too fine a point upon it, she was pulling his leg."

Louise waited quietly, offering no comment.

"Now Nature has happily endowed me with a certain sagacity in such matters, young woman. I have the knack of being a business person myself at times. Nothing could be more instructive for my son than letting him follow the course he had charted—learning from experience that sex as an asset is not always forecloseable. I wasn’t aware, however, that his education was going to depart so far from the conventional curriculum as to compromise his family."
“Do what?” cried Louise.

“Ah, you show interest! That is sagacity on your part, young woman—acumen I respect. You realize, I hope, that a man of my son’s background would be more or less close-mouthed about his affairs. Certainly as attorney he would keep his clients’ secrets. I want you to know that in all the time since, Basil has not recounted a single word to his father or mother concerning the progress of his so-called romance, nor has he made references to your commercial activities.”

“That would be quite consistent with his character, Mrs. Van Dyke. Your son is a thoroughbred—we’ll not disagree there.”

“We have been passive spectators, his father and I, marveling none the less at the lad’s freakish patience. A week ago Thursday, however, I received a phone call from one of our attorneys, at our home in Philadelphia. He solicited an interview, asking to bring along a man whose errand would be disclosed as our conference proceeded. I gave the permission and the pair of them came out.”

Charlotte hitched her chair closer to the desk and stretched a forearm on it. One finger thumped the desktop.

“I was questioned,” she emphasized, “about Basil’s connection with Freddie Frye’s law firm. I was questioned about my holdings, if any, in the Garland enterprises—a lot of other matters. But
especially I was questioned as to whether or not a man named Pettersleigh had ever met Basil for business at our home. Ah, . . . you acquire a pallor, young woman. You should take more outdoor exercise. Your habits are too sedentary for one of your vitality.”

“Please continue, madam. I find this most enlightening.”

“Excellent, young woman. I rather thought you would. Now . . . I mightn’t have given a second thought to the conference, my attorney implying that the stranger was checking on certain tax returns, had I not chanced to be in Washington later, having luncheon at the Willard with Freddie Frye’s daughter. You know her, I think.”

“Mrs. Glair, madam, is one of my stockholders. A very heavy stockholder.”

“What?” exclaimed Charlotte. It seemed to disturb her.

“Yes, Mrs. Glair would be financially affected by anything happening to my . . . enterprises,” Louise said intuitively.

“Well, while we were eating, this Jones person entered—at least that’s what I called him—the man, you understand, that my attorney brought to see me.”

“And you made mention of him,” Louise finished whimsically, “and discovered to your consternation that you’d been interviewed by someone connected with the federal attorney’s office!”
Again the Gorgon stared.

"Correct—er—in substance," she faltered. "But the interesting part comes presently. Curious to know if Basil could have gotten himself involved in any legal mess, I summoned him home and questioned him sharply. Something was wrong: I saw it at once. I finally wormed out of him that he was throwing all his social, political and financial resources into a battle—a silent battle—to save you and your associates from a criminal indictment!"

Charlotte paused for effect. Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"Someone was paid money," the caller went on, "for the figures on certain food bids to be disclosed to the manager of your canning company. Before contracts were awarded! . . . that you might bid lower and undersell competitors."

"I've been very much chagrined—"

"Well, Joel and I had conferences with counsel. In view of all the circumstances, especially the dilemma into which our son's romantic absurdities have plunged him, we . . . reached a decision."

The Gorgon hitched closer. "We agreed that it would be an excellent idea for you to surrender your positions in your two corporations for the present and permit them to be officered by more competent persons." Whereat Charlotte leaned backward, awaiting reaction.

Nothing followed but silence. Louise shaped
the paper-clip, studying it with interest. She viewed it from one angle, then from another.

"I see," she said finally.

"I'm glad you do," said Charlotte.

The Gorgon glanced across, noted her little dog's comfort in Potiphar's lap, and arose from her chair. She procured the beast by yanking, slapped it sharply twice as she dangled it before her, and collapsed it in her own lap without audible comment. Louise cleared her throat.

"And all sorts of horrid things happen, I suppose, if I don't see my way toward accepting your . . . proposal?"

"You'll see it, never fear," and the woman's lips were grim. "Shocked by such disclosures," she resumed, "Joel and I hired certain—er—investigatory agencies to delve deeper into details. They were very efficient. Within three days we knew that the Cartwright Soup Company had become suspicious concerning the loss of government contracts and submitted those suspicions to the federal district attorney. The man who came to see me was employed in checking evidence."

"What a miserable trick your attorney played on you!"

"— and along with such checking, two suggestive things happened: first, the Pettersleigh person, who had been in the strategic position to cause such a leak, slipped out of Washington by airplane
and has not been heard of since; second, a few days after your return from Vermont, one Robert Ackermann was relieved from his duties as your manager and departed for Europe. He is now in England, where he may be . . . detained."

"Did your 'investigatory agencies' learn who charted the airplane for Pettersleigh?"

"No, but they found out that Ackermann hadn't received his passport without official influence for speed in his behalf. And the price of that speed was the surrender of some mighty interesting vouchers from the files of the Garland canning company!"

"So that's where those vouchers went? Bob Ackermann stole them!"

"They showed," continued Charlotte, "that just before the date of the successful Garland bid, a mysterious sum of money had been drawn against 'legal expenses' without such sums being received by your attorneys. The mosaic of evidence fits together perfectly."

"You know the location of those documents at present?"

"Ah, now we get along! Joel and I thought it discreet, in case our son was being compromised—not to mention the jeopardy of my hundred thousand dollars—"

"I owe you fifty thousand dollars, Mrs. Van Dyke, not a penny more!"
“You forget, young woman, I include the sum paid Senator Frye for his cannery company holdings. Forty-two thousand, I gave him!”

“You’ve—taken over—the Senator’s stock?”

“With a scandal in prospect, Fred had to get clear.”

“Yet why should you have invested so heavily?”

“How else might those vouchers have become my property?”

“So you’ve got them? But how did Little Coat-Tails get them before you?”

“Your manager, you’ll recall had to have his passport quickly.”

“I . . . see,” said Louise. A flush replaced her pallor.

“Joel and I decided, as I started to tell you, that as you were involving our only son Basil, we were the appropriate avenues for those documents to pass through, into the hands of the proper authorities. All the same, because of our son’s—er—sentimentality—where you were concerned, it seemed only right before taking any action that we give you the chance to save yourself harmless.”

The younger woman’s eyes were riveted on her work. She bent and rebent the wire, pulling it, pressing it. Finally she spoke.

“And Basil’s aware of this ultimatum?”

“We’ll leave Basil out of this. It’ll do you no good, employing him further.”
"But you're not answering my question, Mrs. Van Dyke. Basil is my counsel, ... in a manner of speaking."

"You'll discover, I think, that he'll ask to withdraw."

"Then the pressure on him will be worse than on me."

"That's none of your business!"

Silence came again. The printer wheezed audibly.

"And how long," the girl asked thoughtfully, "may I consider this, madam?" Her iron dimple was never more notable.

"I wish to go home on the five o'clock train."

"This afternoon? You expect me to abandon two firms I've been several years building, by exerting such duress between luncheon and dinner?"

"Merely a readjustment, young woman—a temporary readjustment for the good of all parties."

"Whom do you think capable of taking my place?"

"That would be decided by two boards of directors."

"But I have controlling stock interest in those two companies. Both boards of directors will do as I direct!"

"Which brings up a second little matter that eventually must be discussed. November first is another due-date on your note. It goes without
saying that more renewals are impossible. So to save you the distress of liquidating your assets, I'm willing to make you an easy alternative."

"You mean . . . magnanimity of some sort?"

"H'm! Not so much as I might have shown had you come to Philadelphia to have this business over. Still, the term's fair. My proposal is this: I bought Frye's stock at eighty-eight—a holdup figure, but I had to have those vouchers. I'll accept a thousand shares out of your holdings in each company, at fifty, and return you your note with Paid written on it."

"All of which you insist upon," the younger woman smiled, "or you'll visit the United States District Attorney?"

"Visit him? No. The United States District Attorney is more considerate of elderly people than you are, young woman. He kindly supplied me with an escort for this visit."

"Escort?"

"If you'll ask your Vermont horsethief to open the door, you'll see an interesting gentleman sitting outside who'll be only too glad to take back to his superior certain papers I may give him."

"The vouchers you specified?"

"Evidence that will indict you, I think, for violation of Section Thirty-nine of the Federal Criminal Code. As yet he knows nothing of why he was asked here. I told him I might help him, perhaps, in his sleuthing."
“Potiphar Buss, would you kindly favor us?”
“Do . . . what?”
“Open the door. It’s the thrill of a lifetime. I’ve never confronted a federal detective.”

The printer complied. A ponderous, elderly man was reading a paper on the ante-room bench. He had a vest-chain on his glasses and shoes with thick soles. He crunched the paper, glanced up, and started to remove the glasses when the door closed as quickly.

“I see,” said Louise.
“I’m glad you do,” said Charlotte.

Potiphar’s face held a ghastly pallor: his skin showed red lines like the silk threads in banknotes. Madam Van Dyke flicked imaginary dust-specks from her forearms and reslapped her dog when it turned in her lap.

“You figure, I suppose,” Louise thought aloud, “that rather than suffer the unpleasant notoriety of arrest and trial, I’ll present you with control in two profitable businesses—confirming rumors I’ve heard of similar acquisition by you of several other companies?”

Charlotte tilted her chin, an over-sharp chin on an undershot jaw.

“You’re not the only specimen of your sex with a flare for business, young woman. You see, I’m not forgetting your strategy in acquiring control of those canneries to begin with.”
“But,” smiled Louise, “you overlook, madam, that Business like Politics is the science of the possible. I got away with my coup, as the slang phrase has it.”

Charlotte stirred angrily. Again she cuffed her dog.

“And that’s an insinuation I won’t get away with mine?”

“I don’t see how you can.”

“Miss Lou,” gasped the printer, “what you need’s a good lawyer. Now up t’ Paris there’s Len Brickhart—”

“I know plenty of good lawyers, Potiphar. In fact, it’s been a lawyer of gratifying abilities who’s made it possible for me to listen to Madam Van Dyke with a certain whimsy now.”

“Whimsy!” snapped Charlotte. “It doesn’t dawn on you that in this game of—of—”

“Clubs?” suggested Louise.

“Excellent. I thought you might have the audacity to say Hearts. It doesn’t dawn on you that in this game of Clubs I may hold the face cards?”

“Are you sure, my dear madam, that you hold all the aces?”

“If you hold aces, play them!”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing.”

Louise tossed the altered paper-clip in the tray near her pen. She leaned backward thoughtfully, pulled open a drawer and took out cigarettes. She
lighted one of these, to Charlotte’s discomfiture, picked a shred of tobacco from her under lip and regarded her caller in humorous appraisal.

“You believe you have me jockeyed into a disastrous position—am I right in that, madam?”

“I’ve known for some time you were out of your depth. In a business way, I mean. More competent hands should control your companies. When you have to stoop to criminal practices—”

“Well, supposing we determine just how unfit I am.” She reached for her telephone. “Get me Basil Van Dyke,” she ordered her operator. “Try the offices of Frye, Cogswell, Perry & Van Dyke. If you don’t find him there, send out a riot call.”

Charlotte tapped her toe.

“Come, come, young woman. We’re only wasting time.”

“On the contrary, madam, we’re expending it quite cleverly.”

“We’re wasting it, I say, because your phone call is useless. My son is absent from the city today. Of course I saw to that.”

“Did you?”

“You don’t think I failed to perceive what a disturbing factor he might be in this transaction?”

“And when, may I ask, did you see your son last?”

“I made quite certain, by a ’phone call from Philadelphia last night, that Basil was leaving for Boston this morning.”
"But what you don’t know is: that Basil called me afterward, because your query worried him."

"What!"

"I suggested he linger in town for the present. You might be coming over to—capitalize his absence."

Charlotte's stare was glassy.

"Someone should congratulate you," was the comment she contrived.

"Thanks," said Louise. "Many people do. You have to think far, to head a modern business."

The caller's voice altered. "I'm warning you, young woman, you're snarling this thing worse!"

"On the contrary, madam, I'm cleaning it up."

"Explain yourself, please!"

"Well... for instance, it would look rather disastrous for the one you're affecting to protect, if the federal attorney learned the identity of the person who chartered the airplane for Pettersleigh. Must I speak that person's name?"

The women locked glances.

Charlotte's voice came hoarsely. "So—that's—it, is it?". Then raucously: "Your strategy at cards is inherited, they tell em!"

"Yes, my father met my mother across a game of poker."

"I see," said old Charlotte.

"Fine!" said Louise.

It was difficult to determine which startled Basil
most: the sight of his mother, or Potiphar’s expression. After a fifteen-minute trip downtown in the subway, the young attorney laid hat, stick and gloves on a small side-table and whetted his lips as he took his mother’s hand. The dog pranced before him, yipping to be noticed. He gave it a pat—worried eyes on Louise.

“You remember Mr. Buss, don’t you?” the younger woman asked. She had arisen at her desk. “Yes, . . . certainly! . . . how do you do?” Basil greeted.

“I’m sort o’ sick,” the printer said truthfully. “What’s wrong, mother? I hardly expected to see you here today.”

Louise’s tone was suave. “Your mother was bringing a lot of concealed weapons, Van. If one of them exploded, her son might get shot.”

“I . . . don’t understand.”

“No, but you will. Sit down and we’ll tell you.” Basil was gracious, virile, gallant sans affectation, as he bent to the hand Louise had extended. It was Potiphar’s chance to study him in close-up: the visit in Vermont had been too brief and vague. Never had the young man’s head appeared more sleekly barbered or his needle moustaches waxed to sharper points. His dark eyes were shadowed; his jaws were blue shaven. A double-breasted blue suit tailored his physique, with a touch of swank added by grayish-white gaiters. He had a poised
boyish wholesomeness that made the printer like him . . .

“We’re in a devil of a jam, Van,” said Louise, sitting down. “Your mother’s all hot and bothered.”

“Yes?”

“She thinks something’s wrong with our slow-coach romance.” The girl’s careless banter confounded both men.

Old Charlotte kept silent. Back in her chair she relaxed, elbows on its arms, lower lip pressed between vertical forefingers. She studied Louise through hard, narrowed lids.

“But nothing’s wrong with that unless it’s gone so, suddenly!”

“Make your mother believe it. She’s come here today with a lot of ugly threats. If she can’t take over enough stock to give her control in my companies, she’ll have me locked away in some vile place with bars.”

Basil smiled nervously. He pulled a chair up, his mother at his right hand, the printer at his left.

“What do you know about Fred Frye selling your mother his cannery stock?” Louise demanded next.

“He did it—yes.”

“How long have you known it?”

“For nearly a week.”

“Why haven’t you told me?”
"I rather thought you’d know it. You’d have to, of course, to sign new certificates."

"They haven’t come in for transfer as yet. And what do you know about Little Coat-Tails getting those missing vouchers from Bob?"

"I learned of it, naturally. But—I thought you had enough to distress you at present. Besides, I could handle him."

"Oh? Is that so? And you did it so efficiently that your mother up and bought them!" The girl was facetious: her voice held no rancor.

"Why yes—certainly. It was part of the plan, mother cooperating—"

"Basil," ordered Charlotte, "shut your callow mouth!"

"But mother," he protested, "under these circumstances—"

"I thought you were going to Boston today?"

"It wasn’t essential. And now that you’ve come over—"

"What’s that to do with you?"

"Well, Louise thought—"

"Louise thinks too much! And you’re not an attorney. You’re a chestnut-raking dunderhead—a lickspittle errand boy—who lets a woman dupe him and calls it Romance."

"Mother!"

"What can the government do to us, Van," Louise interposed, "assuming your mother surrenders her documents?"
Basil asked his mother’s permission to light a cigarette, was refused it—that Charlotte might show her maternal authority—put his case in his pocket and managed a smile.

“Well, nothing can stop him—the federal district attorney I mean—from asking for warrants if he thinks he’s got a case.”

“You mean we’ll be arrested? What comes after that?”

“The federal grand jury will be asked to indict us.”

“Assuming we’re indicted can we get release on bond?”

“Yes,” Basil nodded.

“How big a bond?”

“Five thousand each, . . . somewhere around that figure.”

“No more than that? Will the case be tried in Washington?”

“No, here in New York—the southern federal district.”

“And supposing we’re convicted, how big a fine might a federal judge assess?”

“Three times the amount of the malfeasance, Lou—so the statute reads—and three years in Atlanta.”

“And three years? We go to jail anyhow?”

“Yes, if we’re convicted. As principals, however. If we’re only accessories to the fact, we’re given half the penalties. I’ve told you this before.”
"True, but I wanted your mother to hear it."
"Mother gave me to understand," the son said courteously, though his tone was rueful, "that no action would be taken—she would trade for those vouchers merely to return them."
"Then you ought to know details of her latest ultimatum."
Louise rehearsed those details and Basil's eyes darkened.
"Mother," he declared "this seems rather beastly—"
"Do I understand, sir, you're criticizing me?"
And old Charlotte galvanized.
"But I thought we'd agreed—?"
"I've suddenly learned things. This woman's coming into money—sizable money—from her father's estate."
"Assuredly. What of it?"
"And you call yourself a lawyer. Don't you grasp, you poor dolt, how vulnerable that leaves you?"
"Vulnerable, mother?"
"She can pay off our loan and tell us to hoof it!"
"But Louise is too honorable. That, too, must be thought of."
"Honorable, faugh! For five or six years she's made you a cat's-paw. She's gotten you snarled in her affairs for no reason but strategy—believing we'll protect her. Well, she'll mighty soon find out!"
"I can't accept that, mother," Basil said quietly.

"No, you're like your father: think the whole world's lily-white because you're white yourself. But I know a thing or two . . . I wasn't born yesterday, . . . I can see through this jezebel as though she were glass. She'll come to my terms or suffer her punishment. When I tell her to wait on me in Philadelphia she'll wait on me, or I'll know the reason why."

"But, mother, just because you resent—"

"Never mind what I resent. She can't bully me as she's bullyragged my son. I'm boss of this family. My money's behind it." Charlotte turned toward Louise. "You can't pay off my loan and brag around afterward how neatly you duped us!"

"Yet you can't lay yourself open to a conspiracy suit, mother," the attorney protested.

"I'm not afraid of suits: I've fought them all my life. I suppose it's conspiracy to work your opponent into a neat business corner and . . . then put on the screws?"

"It can be, decidedly, under certain conditions."

"You listen to me! Five years ago I came home from Spain to find that fifty thousand dollars had been maliciously stolen for this insolent woman's company—"

"Must we go into all that again, mother?" The young man's voice was patient. "The tire com-
pany's deal had completely fallen through. Your funds were lying idle. It was perfectly legitimate to put them to work."

"Fifty thousand dollars," Charlotte ranted on, "sunk in a business where I didn't have control! But that isn't all. For every day since I've had to stand by and smart beneath her insolence. I send her word to come and see me. Well, does she do it? I tell her I wish to talk with her in privacy. Do we have it? Look at what listens!" She pointed at Potiphar and the little man jumped.

"But, mother, you can't—"

"I can do anything, young man, until somebody stops me. And now—when I finally get her into a place where some swift, sharp trading can be forced—when the tables are turned—when I'm on the point of fixing things so we can take over her companies and alter their records so you can't be incriminated—you have to stay in town and come to her support!"

"So that's how the land lays?" Louise exclaimed softly. "You'd falsify our records further—"

"What I do when in control is none of your affair. But cleverer persons than you have tried to outsmart me—the government included. Go learn how they fared."

Basil's face grew strong. "But mother," he said quietly, "it doesn't seem to occur to you that I mayn't care to be cleared by any such practices."

"What?"
"Two wrongs don't make a right. Gaining control of those vouchers to return them is quite a different thing from deliberately wresting control of a corporation in order to change its books."

Charlotte regarded her son a long moment.

"I declare," she said caustically, "I don't understand you. Your father's plenty queer on what constitutes 'culture.' Now it seems we're the parents of a sanctimonious ninny!"

"You really don't believe that, mother."

"If it wasn't the truth I wouldn't express it!"

"Very well, mother," and Basil bowed slightly, with a finely tempered flush.

"If my son had the brains the Almighty gave geese," the Gorgon ranted on, "he'd long ago have seen through the woman who's wrecking him—"

"Wrecking?"

"Who was it got that aeroplane for Pettersleigh? She says it was you. Were you that big a fool?"

"I had to take somewhat drastic measures, mother, to avert a situation that might have been disastrous."

"She's right then. By your own admission! And you come here prating to me about the ethics of destroying corporate records!"

Basil made no answer.

"If my son had the brains the Almighty gave geese," Charlotte continued, "he'd long ago have recognized that this insolent female is a sort of business Lorelei. She doesn't give a rap for my son
as a man. She cares even less for my son as a lawyer. But because he's a Carberry, with all the social and financial advantages—"

"Granting for purposes of argument that what you say is true, mother, where you seem to err, is in thinking that it matters."

"What?"

"Somehow . . . forcing Pettersleigh to surrender his position and get out of the country before I made it hot for him, offering him an avenue that swallowed him permanently, shapes up to me as a sort of leniency—something quite different than altering and fabricating records that—"

"All the same, you'll admit as a lawyer thatspiriting witnesses away in a criminal case is a crime in itself?"

"Ethically, yes!" The son's eyes were troubled.

"Very good. H'm! And now what's this drivel about my garbling its significance—erring, as you put it, in thinking that it matters?"

"The point you've been unable to get from the first is . . . assuming I'm playing this rôle for profit."

"Profit?" echoed Charlotte. "And why not profit?"

"I mean . . . you seem to think, mother, that because I love Louise—and I ask her pardon for mentioning it so publically—she should immediately relinquish all her business and social interests, give up her career, cease being a constructive
individualist, and devote herself solely to Basil Van Dyke."

"She could do many worse things, from the way she’s been acting!"

"Romance, you lead me to believe, mother, shapes up to you as the insistence on a man’s part that a woman renounce her personal integrality and enter on the rôle of complementing menial. And that, on any man’s part, is insufferable bigotry."

"Oh, is it?"

"I’m sure, were I a woman, I could never care for a man who asked me to surrender my natural individualism because of his egotism, . . . his conceited caprice."

"Well, I may be old-fashioned, but women in my day were quite content to do it—women in love! It was proof of their affection."

"But don’t you see, mother, I haven’t the audacity to assume that Louise is in love with me. I’ve never asked her expression on the point and she’s never volunteered it."

"You bet she’s never volunteered it. But didn’t you understand if you got her that loan she’d marry you sometime?"

"I could hardly expect it, could I, till my exploits in law surpassed hers in business?"

"You’re evading my question."

"My regard for Louise, mother, is founded upon a wholesome respect for what we might term her
character-integrity—what she’s overcome, what she’s made of herself, what she’s further capable of attaining—providing no under-executive, befuddled by wine, intrudes on a board of competitors and makes proposals without her knowledge that threaten catastrophe.”

Charlotte tried to get it. She merely sat blinking.

“But Lord o’ love, boy! . . . where’s your compensation? Men don’t love women without expecting something from them. What’s this girl giving you?”

Basil cogitated. “A concrete statement would be awkward,” he declared.

“You can’t be cohabitating with her,” was Charlotte’s crass reflection, “because she’s not the type. Throw her into one of Charlie Schwab’s blast furnaces and her temperature’s so cold that she’d put out the fire. I’ve watched her six years. She’s the kind that thinks youngsters are brought by a stork—for all she cares physically. She’s not giving you companionship. Where’s your compensation?”

Louise at her desk had turned granite white. Basil shifted uneasily. He turned toward the printer. Good-naturedly he asked—

“Tell me, Mr. Buss, have you ever been in love?”

“In?” exclaimed Potiphar. “I ain’t never been out!”

“Will you confirm my contention that . . . a man may be amply compensated in his relations
with a lady by the quiet gratification that he's giving her something he senses she needs?"

"But that's just what makes love!" the little man cried. "It's findin' someone, so t' speak, we can spend ourselves on."

"You qualify as an expert on love?" was the Gorgon's sour demand.

"I'm perfeck'ly willin' t' act as your instructor, ma'am, if that's what you're after."

"What I'm after," snapped Charlotte, "is an answer to my question: what's your compensation, being this girl's cat's-paw?" She glowered at her son.

"Mr. Buss has said it. I find a strange satisfaction in backing Louise, helping her to express herself, to work out her destiny. Incidentally, her ultimate destiny, as I sense it, isn't running restaurants or directing corporations. I think she's embarked on a career far greater than we dream. All this business stramash," he added, "is merely educational. She'll leave it behind her when she's grown further, . . . spiritually."

"Grown further what?"

"—and so long as I derive an elusive satisfaction out of aiding her to do it, why need anyone be exercised?"

Basil spoke with bluntness. His tone to his mother was respectful enough but his voice gripped like iron—a hand of iron gloved with rich velvet. And Charlotte was checkmate. His mettle per-
turbed her. She did not know this son who referred to spiritual values: it showed in her expression. Lamely she cried—

"But there's something you don't know!"

"There's a lot I don't know," and Basil laughed lightly, relaxing his tension.

"She's going to Chicago to meet another man! . . . a man she's got to marry or her legacy is void."

Louise straightened angrily. "Madam, that's absurd!"

"Oh, no, it's not absurd. I've paid out good money to learn what's afoot."

"Then for once in your life you've been taken in."

"No Carberry is ever taken in, young woman,—not permanently taken in. You dare to deny you're meeting a man named Robling in Chicago, to comply with the terms of your late father's will?"

"I'm meeting several men in Chicago, probably—but marrying any one of them is farthest from my thoughts. Besides, Basil knows of my errand in Chicago. If you don't believe it, ask him."

"Well?" demanded Charlotte.

"Louise is quite right," the son assured his mother.

"And you're sitting like a dolt and making no remonstrance?"

"Remonstrance! Why remonstrance? Even
were your assumption correct, mother, I hope you don’t think I’d try to dissuade her—against marrying, I mean, if she found herself in love?”

Again the room held silence. And the old lady grunted.

“I don’t get it,” she cried finally. “No, I don’t get it. You say that you love her, yet you wouldn’t bat an eyelash if she married someone else!”

“Without trying to be gummy, mother, put it that my regard for Louise is such,—and the spiritual problem she presents is such,—that I’d get more satisfaction out of seeing her happy than from arrogantly clutching her life for myself.”

“I think you’re a fool! The woman’s got you mesmerized. Men don’t love women unless they respond. You might as well go up to the Metropolitan Museum and love some marble statue.”

Again Basil smiled. “As a matter of fact, mother, I do love several of them,” he rejoined.

“Well, if I was this female I’d be rather ashamed of it—being classed, so to speak, with dummies chipped from stone.”

“I didn’t say, mother, that I loved her in the same way.”

“That’s what you’ve implied.”

“Esthetics may enter it, yes, I grant you. But—well, perhaps I perceive what even Lou does not: that the day’s going to come when she’ll tire rather tragically of all this stress and burden. She’s going
to reach some hour when Business—Money—Power—will all seem rather shoddy. I’m thinking the moment will arrive when she’ll want an old friend, a tried and proven friend, on whom to rely. I’m living in anticipation that when it arrives I’ll be somewhere about—that she’ll think of me kindly and . . . let me offer help.”

“Even,” snapped Charlotte, “if she’s married to another?”

“Whom she marries doesn’t matter: it will only be an incident.”

Potiphar studied the lawyer in profile. He knew that no stripling in his thirties was answering Charlotte. He glanced at the mother, centuries younger than her son. He glanced at Louise and saw that her face was hectic. The girl looked up once from the wire she still patterned; her eyes held the same fleeting terror they had showed for an instant on Potiphar’s stairflight . . .

“You ought to be a minister,” Charlotte Van Dyke ridiculed, “and wear one of those silly pancake hats—”

“Louise,” went on the son, “has shown too much capability in the few years she’s been living to allow us to accept that heading a business is all she’s to do. What she’s to do I’ve no right to suggest. But it should be something big. Yes, bigger than being the mere wife of any man. She’s like a lot of persons in life, however, who must climb the ladder of
materialism, so to speak, to reach the heights of true earthly perception—yes, even more . . . *expression!* I’ve been watching her five years. I feel that I’m correct. Whether she marries me, or Robling, or any man, or doesn’t marry at all, when she’s put all this shoddy commercial accomplishment behind her then will come her real flowering into power. I’m interested and gratified to contribute to that happening. You mightn’t call it Love, but it’s better than passion.”

“You’re out of my depth,” the mother said brassily. “For all I know, too, you’re out of your own. All the love between man and woman that I take seriously is an experiment in curiosity for which beds were invented.”

“Mother! *Please!*”

Charlotte got to her feet. “All the same, if your monstrous neophyte has been smart enough to involve you in this mess—so you chartered an airplane and abetted her malfeasance—I’m keen enough to grasp that I’m stopped for the present. *For the present,* I say. I came here for a purpose and I mean to see it through. The time’ll come soon when the tables will be turned.”

The two men arose as she tucked away her dog.

“I’m going back home,” added Charlotte at the door, “to talk with my husband and discuss things with my lawyers. If there’s any known method to smash this grotesque *amour*—if there’s any way on
earth I can discipline this hoyden without damaging my son—I promise you faithfully both shall be found."

"Mother, you can't mean—"

"I mean just what you're hearing! She may typify all the 'spiritual climbers' to be found on the planet, but it ceases to be an issue between this woman and my son: it becomes an issue now between her and his mother. This is only an armistice," Charlotte cried darkly.

"I understand," Louise said coolly, "—to bury our dead!"

"No, to get some new playing-cards without dog-eared corners. You needn't see me to the station," Charlotte told her son, who had flushed at her allusion. "I can find my way 'round. You go back to your office and tell Frye I want to see him."

Chin high, she went out.

Basil smiled at Louise in chagrin and apology. He picked up hat and stick. Hastily he said—

"I'm hoping to see you again before you leave. Now I'd better follow mother. That federal sleuth may need some cajoling."

Louise was left with Potiphar.

"Well?" she laughed grimly, still seated at her desk.

Potiphar relaxed. His bandana came out and he mopped his moist forehead.
"Seems, Miss Lou, that you’ve had a tight squeak—or somethin’ mighty like it."

"No tighter than usual. Living in the midst of alarms—or under a volcano—it’s the Bed of Procrustes that an executive must lie in."

"I begin t’ b’lieve it!"

The girl was silent, cogitating. She turned and dropped clips in a nearby wastebasket: clips she had ruined. Resting elbows on her blotter, she interlaced her fingers across her high forehead. Her two thumbs stuck up, again resembling horns.

"Potiphar," she cried, "what’s it all about?"

"What’s what about, Miss Lou?"

"The things that Basil’s just said in this room. The things you said to me up in Vermont. Why am I suddenly running up against traits in those about me that . . . confound and confuse me?"

Potiphar frowned. From corner to corner he studied his bandana . . .

"His mother was right," Louise confirmed angrily. "Men don’t love women without expecting something from them. What’s Basil’s game? What is it he’s after?"

"But he told you, Miss Lou! ’Tain’t necessary to—"

"Oh fiddlesticks Potiphar! Love between men and women is founded squarely on what Charlotte said. Or are you so old you’ve forgotten the sensation?"

"No, I ain’t forgot," the printer smiled lamely.
"We don't need to have any inhibitions between us, Potiphar. At least I haven't any, as old Charlotte said."

"I'm 'fraid, Miss Louise, t'aint nothin' you'll get by havin' it preached at you. You got t' go an' live it."

"With your Georgie, I suppose? How delightfully romantic!"

The printer made no comment.

"If you want the blunt truth about that sort of thing, Potiphar, let me tell you frankly... I wouldn't be unjust enough—to Robling—to Basil—to any man—to myself—to experiment, as Charlotte put it, in marital intimacies. You see I can't trust myself. I don't know what might happen."

"I dunno's I ever met a girl," Potiphar said absentely, "so scairt o' life as you be."

"Well, I'm rather hard-ribbed—"

"No, no, you ain't, daughter. You've said that afore when I've hankered t' correct you. You ain't hard-ribbed at all. If you really was hard, you'd never think t' mention it. You're like Ben Williams, up home t' Paris, allus fixin' a new sign up somewheres in his store: No Checks Cashed. He does it 'cause he knows he would cash folks' checks if any o' them arst him."

Louise dropped one hand and fingered her quillpen.

"Well, if you're right," she said after a moment, "then it behooves me to be doubly cautious. If I'm
really a sentimentalist but refusing to admit it, I suppose the glorious career Basil mentioned will end on a chicken-farm, over on Long Island. All independent women nourish that complex, though why on Long Island is something I can’t fathom.”

“"You ain’t really loved a feller—I can see that plain enough. No matter how near you come t’ marriage like you told me up home, you ain’t never loved a feller. And I’m thinkin’ when you do—"”

“"Oh tommyrot, Potiphar! Let’s go to Chicago!”"
CHAPTER VII

BUT Potiphar was troubled.
When they went home for dinner, he forgot to be awed by the ebony Juno. He gave nervous fits and starts as he ate with Louise in the elegant rear dining-room. When the telephone rang, his fork clattered floorward.

"It's Misto' Van Dyke," the negress reported. "He say he jus' put he ma on de train fo' Philly-delphy. He want to talk wiff yo'.”

"Did you tell him I was here?"

"No m'am."

"Well, to save him coming up here, tell him I left word with you I'd see him near train-time in the Pennsylvania station—the eight o'clock train-gate."

"But Miss Lou," protested Potiphar, "we're goin' t' Chicawgo by th' N'York Central, ain't we?"

"Surely—that's why I'm sending Basil to some other Terminal."

The printer dropped his glance. He munched at his food . . .

"You've got to get used to that sort of thing. It's all in my day."
The guest made no comment. And Louise colored slightly.

"Don't be so troubled, my funny old friend. You're only having a look at the machinery that makes the business clock tick."

"I ain't troubled for m'self."

"Don't be exercised for me. All fortunes are made by this sort of subterfuge—the same kinds of strategy—much the same duelling as you've seen this afternoon."

"Um-m," said the printer.

"I know the Rotary Club of Paris, Vermont, asks visiting executives to give talks on business ethics. Beautiful pæans break out in the nation's magazines on the brotherly love that's behind modern commerce. Now and then a Rockefeller makes a fine gesture, kicking out an underling too big for his shoes. But business, as I've said, is the science of the Possible. What you get away with, is all that really counts."

"Mebbe, . . . if you think so."

"Suppose I hadn't been clever enough two weeks ago to snarl Basil up in Ackermann's blunder—where would I find myself, this large September evening? Madam Van Dyke would have me out of my companies so quick I'd be dizzy. She'd cut my throat as joyously as Ma Beers cut the throats of those chicks, in my girlhood."

"Possibly, possibly!" And Potiphar munched.

"To hold your place today, you've got to out-
smart everyone! You've got to plan further, think faster, act with more skill than all those around you, or the pack that runs with you will tear you to shreds."

"What int'rests me, then, is why you don't like it, . . . why you're discontented, sort o', . . . why they's a scairt look at times accrost your eyes."

"If I have my moods of discontent, Potiphar, they come from what economists would call the Law of Parsimony. The human system is essentially lazy; Nature resents expending any more force for a result than is absolutely necessary. You're given to the same sort of law, being content to live up in Vermont, aiming no higher than working on a paper. To hold our places and out-smart others means killing vigilance. And that takes energy. And Nature's niggardly. It's the strain we resent: the necessity for struggling."

"All o' which is th' silliest flapdoodle I've ever heard in speech!"

"Flapdoodle, is it?"

"Daughter, you're so ign'rant it tears at my heart!"

Only his sincerity kept them from a quarrel. Louise went abovestairs and came down dressed for traveling.

They departed for Chicago.

With red caps paid, valises stored away, hats and coats removed and tickets accounted for, they
watched the hastening passengers with eyes that failed to see them. When the long python of coaches commenced to roll forward, without jarring, out of the tunnels, past 125th Street, a sudden queer fury assailed Louise Garland. She had no zest to go on this journey. The city was suddenly dear to her as the crash of the Harlem River bridge sounded beneath the coach-trucks.

Yet the train clipped up past Yonkers and Tarrytown. They saw the lights of the lawn-mower sign across the Hudson at Newburgh. The train made more noise with a steam locomotive; on into York State night it hurtled, searchlights on the Albany boats occasionally combing the river's shores about them. Till the train slowed for Poughkeepsie, old Potiphar was silent.

"What's the matter?" Louise asked finally.

"I was thinkin', that's all. 'Tain't really important."

"Thinking of what?"

"Well, . . . th' hurt in that young feller's heart when th' train left that other station an' he realized he'd missed you."

"You're moist-eyed over that?"

"I been in them places. I know what it's like."

"Well, the thing to do—when a man finds a woman isn't responding—is to drop her from his life and hunt out someone else."

"'Tain't allus possible. I know that, in addition."
She stared at him curiously. "I marvel you've got through life, Potiphar Buss, with such a continual tax on your sympathies."

"Well, sympathy's funny. You get it by spendin' it, if you know what I mean."

"You're talking like Basil again," she laughed nervously.

"Well, he sees life perty straight."

This silenced Louise for the halt at Poughkeepsie. Passengers about them were going to bed. They had taken a section on account of Potiphar and had to move twice before the porter had it ready.

"He's uncanny at times," the girl remarked, preoccupied.

"Who is?" asked Potiphar, wishing he could smoke.

"Basil. He seems so very old."

"He is old, Miss Lou. Old in his soul. I could tell by his actions—his willin'ness t' give."

"His willingness to what?"

"It's th' sign o' an old, old soul, Miss Lou—bein' willin' t' give—bein' eager t' serve. It's th' young souls that's selfish: like small greedy children. Old souls know that givin's receivin'. It's its own compensation—a spiritual compensation. It's what th' Master meant when He says: He who loses his life shall find it."

"The Man of Galilee is very close to you, isn't He, Potiphar Buss?"
The little printer nodded. "Only . . . I don’t think o’ Him as th’ Man o’ Galilee. He’s too alive for that!"

"Alive?" The girl’s voice was hoarse.

"It sort o’—antiquates Him—if you know what I mean—callin’ Him th’ Man o’ Galilee—makes Him out as a musty person who lived ’way back at th’ dawn o’ hist’ry."

"You said something, Potiphar, about—knowing Him—from personal contact. Did you mean a literal contact?"

The printer dropped his gaze. When he looked up, he was smiling. Smiling beautifully.

"Well, He’s mighty alive, Miss Lou—just you take my word for that. An’ some day folks that run big businesses like you, is goin’ t’ know that He’s a greater teacher o’ th’ future than He is o’ th’ past or th’ present."

Silence for a time. Then—

"Wouldn’t it be a ghastly joke on some of us, Potiphar Buss, if you were actually correct!"

"A ghastly joke, how?"

"Think what would be coming to some of us in the Day of Judgment—the way we have to ignore His precepts to hold our own in day to day business."

"I see. You hold He’s a sort o’ perliceman, . . . what?"

"That’s what the Bible implies in its essence."
“Speakin’ real plainly, how much have you read it?”

“Far more than you’ll credit, my funny philosopher!”

“What?”

“Don’t think I’m so vile. Don’t think I’m so stupid. Oh, Potiphar Buss, I’ve had my heart agonies too—searching for the cue as to what life’s about.” She turned away her face and stared out at the dark . . .

“And yet you’re agnostic—” The printer stopped suddenly.

Both of them listened. Someone was calling Louise Garland’s name.

“Yes?” she responded. “What is it—a telegram?”

“Taken on at Poughkeepsie, ma’am,” reported the trainman. He gave her the envelope and continued through the coaches.

“My Lord!” cried Louise, unfolding the enclosure.

“What’s th’ matter, Miss Lou? No one ain’t . . . dead?”

“No such good luck. Great heavens, what a fix!”

“Read it,” begged Potiphar, “I ain’t got my specks.”

“It’s from Basil—oh, damn!—‘Found wire from Perry at office after starting mother homeward. Robling left for Los Angeles at noon today and
Perry now en route back to New York on Century. Tried to halt you before you left city but Margaret made error naming your terminal. If you decide to go on to Chicago ask details about Robling at one three seven South State Street, third floor. Do not worry over mother. Have talked grudge out of her at least for present. Deepest love and apology for upset this must cause you. Basil.’”

Louise crushed the message in her lap with both hands.

“Georgie’s gone t’ Californie!” Potiphar gasped weakly. “He . . . he must o’ lost his job agin.”

“Or maybe he’s gotten an inkling of my trip through Perry and deliberately sidestepped me.”

“Who’s this Perry?”

“One of the partners in Basil’s law firm. He was going to Detroit on other business and agreed to hunt Robling from the clues I gave him.”

The train hurtled on and on through the night. It seemed like a juggernaut that had somehow entrapped them and was ruthlessly making away with them now.

“I feel,” said Potiphar forlornly, “like th’ Jewish feller in th’ story.”

“What story?” asked Louise. She was staring ahead of her, dynamically thinking.

“Ain’t you heard that yarn? Emigrant feller, he looked like. Long beard an’ everything—bundles all about him. Folks in th’ same car with him
heard him groanin' an' groanin', all day long, till everybody pitied him. Thought he must be travelin’ t’ bury someone somewheres. Night come an’ he went t’ sleep. Next day he was up agin’ an’ groanin’ still more. Next noontime a travelin’ man couldn’t stand it no longer. ‘What’s th’ matter?’ says he. ‘Why all th’ sorrow?’ An’ th’ Jewish feller rocked hisself and moaned: ‘Yoi, yoi! . . . three days already an’ I’m on th’ wrong train!’”

Louise laughed despite herself. It broke her angry tension.

“Potiphar Buss, shall we turn back at Albany?”

“But if Georgie’s gone west, we’d have t’ cross this whole country t’ see him.”

“It looks that way, doesn’t it?”

“I’d—jus’ as soon—make a trip t’ Californie!” Yet even as he spoke it, the printer seemed awed.

“You would?”

“Ain’t nothin’ t’ stop me. I allus did hanker t’ see th’ west coast.”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” Louise proposed finally, “we’ll keep on to Chicago and learn Robling’s status. Then you go on after him and I’ll go back to business. Perhaps after all, this is happen­ing for the best.”

“I’ll do it,” said Potiphar several minutes later, “if what you learn ’bout Georgie t’ Chicawgo don’t hold ’nough int’rest t’ make you go with me.”
“Agreed,” returned Louise. Then as though relieved—“Now suppose we go to bed?”

Potiphar slept fitfully. He awakened next morning to the city roar of Buffalo. It was raining, they discovered—one of those gray, murky days that presage early autumn, with foliage drooping groggily and all the world depressed. Across Indiana by one o’clock they headed, due in Chicago at four that afternoon. Across endless miles of farm lands the great Pullmans roared, through resonant bridges, past vaporous woodlands, leaving behind them hamlet after hamlet.

Queer tawdry little hamlets most of them were, unfenced, unpainted, dropped in America’s fecund immensity. Spur tracks came first, and long aisles of freight-cars, then shacks became houses that lined into streets. Crossings flipped by with zebra-gates lowered, automobile traffic halted, the whining ding-dong of signal bells functioning—Main Street after Main Street—hundreds of Main Streets—stores, restaurants, garages, cigarette lithographs on billboards, white globuled lights that reached into distance. Then more batteries of houses: big angular houses that elbowed for space, small furtive houses that hid behind trees, fat humorous houses, houses with ricketts. Six out of ten had stripped motor-cars abandoned in corners of chip-cluttered yards, a few waterlogged hens, the débris of a gar-
den. Then out sped the train to vast open country, and wide fields of grain with the stubble still fresh.

Sometimes their train would halt in a town and Louise would watch the shoddy platform loungers, taxicabs drawn up for passengers that came not, nondescript dogs that wagged tails at strangers. She looked into rooms of nearby track domiciles and wondered after the people calling them Home—what their problems, worries, feuds might be—which houses held happiness, which roofs covered sorrow. As if she were not acquainted with existence in such structures! . . .

Again and again she found herself speculating on the man George Robling who had spent his life wandering over spacious America. She considered him rubbing shoulders with persons he knew not, adjusting himself to new jobs and lodgings, recalling the East as she thought of Manhattan—always going on—somehow existing. It finally broke through to her that no matter what he might turn out to be, she too had known a similar Odyssey. It startled her at first: this heritage in common.

In approaching Chicago they ran from the rain belt. The smoke of crude industry hung above the vista, but a mellow sun shone wondrously as they clicked along Lake Michigan. It beautified the sand-dunes, tingeing foundry stacks and water-tanks with aureoles of gold. At ten minutes to four Louise addressed Potiphar.

“Well,” she said, “we’re here!”
“Yeah, Miss Louise—an’ arrivin’ in sunshine. Like th’ Journey o’ Life,” the printer responded. “You’d philosophize at your own funeral, wouldn’t you? Most people hold that the Journey you mention ends in just the opposite.”

“No,” he cried huskily, “sunshine! . . . bright, glorious sunshine; . . . I’ve seed it lots o’ times.”

“Forget philosophy, Potiphar. Keep your mind on your wallet.” She meant it as a pleasanty. As soon as it was spoken she knew it was crass.

Their train drew under the long shed and stopped. Congestion prevailed about vestibule luggage. Then the din and grime of America’s crudest and most typical city throbbed and sifted about them. Chicago!

Potiphar hadn’t been there since the Fair in ’93, but Louise recalled its atmosphere from many business visits: a smoky maelstrom of stockyards and gangsters, of black belching founderies and interminable bridges, of shrill traffic whistles echoing upward through the Loop. As their cab went bumping over greasy cobbles toward their specified hotel, Louise sensed how gruff, vigorous, dynamic, was this City of Winds.

They arrived at their hotel.

“It’s only four-thirty,” Louise declared later, rejoining her companion in a corner of the lobby. “I find that it’s possible to get accommodations on the Limited for eight o’clock tonight. Instead of
taking rooms here, therefore, supposing I hurry over to State Street. A ten-minute interview with the right persons will determine, I think, what my course is to be.”

“I’ll sit here an’ smoke,” Potophar assented. “I’ll read all th’ advertisin’ folders ’bout Californie.” He seemed eager to get at them.

Louise left the printer and went into the street. A trim, well-turned-out, energetic aspect she presented as she wove her way toward the specified address. She had chosen a tailored suit of greenish tweed for this adventure, with olive-colored hat and black fox neckpiece. She got into State Street and looked for her number.

A slender skyscraper of freshly quarried marble was the building she sought, its fine Gothic pinnacles still catching the sunlight. Windows were lighting on its serried floors, however, for early autumn twilight was shortening the days. Louise pushed her way through the out-pouring occupants.

“The offices of what firm are on the third floor, please?” she asked the elevator starter.

“The Trans-West Construction Corporation, madam.”

“A construction corporation!”

“Owners of the building. Car Seven, madam. Let the lady out on Number Three, Tom. Going up?”
The car lifted its load with the lightness of air. Louise stepped immediately into a spacious room of sturdy white pillars and quartered oak appointments. An area of reception space was fenced off by railings, stuffed divans set about, the walls were hung with etchings—buildings apparently that the firm had constructed. A regiment of typists was clearing the desks; clerks bearing books were heading for the vaults. Down the carpet at the right was a desk marked Information. A youth lolled behind it, a silk-shirted youth with patent-leather hair.

"I'm wondering if you'd assist me, please?" said Louise, coming up. "I'm looking for a person who is, or was, employed here. Mr. George Robling is his name," she added, "and I'm seeking particulars about him to aid in the settlement of an eastern estate."

"What's your name?" asked the other. He drew a pad toward him and pulled out a pencil.

"Louise Garland. I've just gotten in from New York City. I'll talk to anyone who can furnish me with details as I'd like to start back to Manhattan tonight."

"Have a chair, please. I guess Miss Duncan could fix you up, if she hasn't gone home. Wait and I'll see."

The youth came back presently with a small, comely woman about forty years old. She was clad
in a businesslike shirtwaist built snugly at her throat, a skirt of blue serge and pumps with square heels. A white "transformation" gave her head a silvery aspect and her short tilted nose was weighted by glasses—heavy bar glasses from which dangled a ribbon.

"You wanted to see Mr. Robling?" she suggested. "I'm sorry he's not here. He's left for California."

"Yes, so I understand. But if you could give me some details about him—"

"Aren't you Peter Garland's daughter?"

"Yes," gasped Louise, "how did you—"

"Oh, Mr. Robling thought that sooner or later you'd come looking him up," and Miss Duncan smiled amusedly, taking off her glasses.

"Then despite my instructions, Mr. Perry must have told him. About myself, I mean."

"Mr. Perry had several talks with Mr. Robling, the last one no later than night before last."

Louise bit her lip. "Then Mr. Robling suspected I might be coming west, and went farther west in order to . . . avoid me?"

"Not at all, Miss Garland. He had his business to attend to. Your comings and goings were not of his concern."

Miss Duncan waited. She had a chin like old Charlotte's and tilted it slightly. Her eyes were hazel-green, set too close together, and she carried herself erectly—almost combatively—with the airs
of a grand dame. She was a grand dame, in mini­
ture, tailored for business, forced to work in an office.

"Can you tell me," asked Louise, "whether or not Mr. Perry definitely established that Mr. Rob­ling was the person who once worked on a newspaper in Paris, Vermont?"

"I can establish that for you—on the ‘Paris Daily Telegraph’ it was, owned by a man named Samuel Hod. Perhaps it were better if you talked with Mr. World."

"Who’s Mr. World?"

"The company’s president. I think he had in­
structions what to tell you if you came here."

"This is a . . . construction company?"

"We project, construct and finance skyscrapers all over the west. Here’s Mr. World now. I’ll let you talk to him."

A tall, big bodied, elderly man in expansive tan vest had come up behind the railing. His bald head was blotched; his watery eyes were pleasant but shrewd. He carried his glasses hooked on one ear.

"Sybil!" he summoned, taking a straight­stemmed briar from his teeth.

Miss Duncan turned. "This is Peter Garland’s daughter," she said in explanation. Her voice held annoyance . . .

The head of the concern advanced through the gate. His sleeves were up-rolled on huge hairy forearms. He looked down on Louise as though
his glasses were in place and he must peer above them; he was taller than Louise by nearly a head, even as Louise was taller than Miss Duncan.

"How do you do, Miss Garland?" he nodded. "I'm Mr. World. We . . . rather expected you."

"So I gather," said Louise, eyeing World coolly. Yet she offered him her hand.

World "had a way with the ladies," she suspected—or at least he implied it.

"Mr. Robling has gone to the Coast," he lamented.

"That's very unfortunate, in a manner of speaking. But perhaps you could give me the details I'm after."

"Certainly, certainly. Mr. Robling asked me—"

"He's still employed here then?"

"Oh, yes, he's . . . employed here. Won't you step in my office?"

"I won't be detaining you?"

World took out a watch that was crusted with diamonds. "It isn't five o'clock and I don't leave till six."

He stepped toward the railing and held the gate open . . .

It was a quarter after seven when Louise reappeared—in the Boulevard hotel where Potiphar still waited.

"You made out all right?" the little printer cried. "What we goin' t' do?"
“We’re going to the Coast on the eight o’clock Limited.”

“We’re goin’ t’ th’ Coast? You’re goin’, too?”

“Decidedly, I’m going.” And Louise swallowed dryly.

“What you so white for? What you found out?”

“Plenty, my funny philosopher, plenty! We’ll send our bags to the station by a porter. We’ll follow afoot. Through State Street. I want to show you something.”

“Ain’t we got t’ see t’ tickets?”

“I’ve already seen to tickets. And we’ll snatch a bite of dinner at the station or on the train.”

The luggage was despatched and Potiphar went out in Louise Garland’s wake. Ten minutes of walking—silent walking on the girl’s part—got them to State Street. This time she crossed over along its west side. Finally she halted.

“What’s it all about?” the printer begged, befuddled. “Where is it you’re fetchin’ me?”

“Potiphar Buss, look over the way!”

Traffic barked around them and taxicabs darted. Policemen’s whistles screamed; newsboys bellowed papers. Above all the bedlam the exquisite pile towered which Louise had lately visited. Like a vertical symphony of frozen music it was floodlighted now, far up to its pinnacles. Over its entrance were artful bronze letters: the printer required no spectacles to read—
“Why, that’s . . . Georgie’s name!” Potiphar gasped weakly.

Louise let him have it then. “Yes,” she agreed, “and your protégé not only financed and built it, but he’s Chairman of the Board and chief stockholder in a company that owns half a dozen like it!”

“That—buildin’s—Georgie’s?”

“So I’ve discovered. Do you wonder, my philosopher, that I’m going to Los Angeles?”

“But why ain’t you known that—that—?”

“Mr. Perry, I suppose, conspired to surprise me.”

Mist filmed over their eyes at its beauty. Thirty-five stories of immutable marble prodded the smoke, the clouds, and the stars. Finer in that moment than Louise had thought it could be, it thrust up from the city, a Victory Song in stone.

“Miss Lou . . . somehow . . . I’ve got t’ sit down!”

Louise did not heed when he utilized the curbing. She was thinking . . . thinking . . .

“Miss Lou, Miss Lou! How could it o’ happened?”

“I don’t grasp it myself. But I mean to find out.”

She was thinking of the man whose acumen had constructed it, lying half-blind in a cold country house, as the printer had recounted it, demanding
why Life was so cruel to those with high ambitions. How many similar skyscrapers, she wondered, making the cloud-line of a hundred Yankee cities, owed their existence to young men who at some time or other had floundered in a morass, tottered on the brink of earthly oblivion—to stagger back, face about, go on somehow in snarling defiance at inhuman heartbreak, building similar monuments on débris of illusions? Such achievement was celestial. It must be celestial.

Celestial! Why should that analogy sing in her brain?

She turned and looked down at the little man seated—the puckered-mouthed printer whose doughty legs had failed him.

His savings it had been, given in love, that provided that youth with escape from his morass—given him two good eyes to find his way about this Land of Opportunity and erect this great shaft to Indomitable Courage. Little rotund Potiphar Buss, rumpled and shabby and bald as an egg, was equally responsible for this towering anthem of iridescent stone, housing its hundreds of workers by day, lifting its turrets by night toward the Almighty. A pure white column to humble altruism it was—a mute memorial to unsung compassion, a heart worth more than coronets, a simple faith that did naught but sympathize!
PART THREE

THE AWAKENING
CHAPTER I

THERE is something equally heroic, something inexpressibly poignant, about a great train leaving Chicago by night—when it has for its route the farflung Southwest: the prairies, the mountains, the mesas, the deserts. The midland metropolis typifies virile, ingenious, exhaustless America, the handiwork of man, the epitome of brawn—modern society in the crucible of commerce. But the Southwest typifies rudimentary Nature, cradled in Force and matured in Change—the handiwork of God, the epitome of Genesis.

From the man-made canyons of brick and cement that train emerges dauntlessly—to canyons of scoria, granite and basalt—from deserts of billboards to deserts of mesquite—from the slag-heaps of foundries to those of volcanoes—away through the night with a continent sleeping. There is something audacious about it, yet something sublime—the insolence of mortals who sleep on a Juggernaut—the glory of achievement a railroad proclaims.

The girl and the printer remained on the observation platform till the city ran out and Illinois
opened. How could they sleep after what they had discovered?

“What I can’t make out,” the man kept repeating, “is why Georgie never writ me ’bout such change in his fortunes—why Vermont’s never heard o’ what ’tis he’s done?”

“Aren’t there chapters in life too painful to open? I have them in mine; you have them in yours.” The girl’s voice was tender despite the noisy wheels. “Mr. World said he rarely referred to his early days in Paris. He forgot them deliberately when he started life over.”

“But why should he start? That’s th’ puzzlin’ thing.”

“I’m hoping we’ll learn when we get to the Coast.”

“Miss Lou, what’s come over you? I swear, you ain’t th’ same person you was this afternoon.”

“Don’t try to talk, Potiphar. It takes too much effort.”

“You ain’t told me everything said t’ you, then!”

“Wait til tomorrow . . . the next day . . . till I have time to think. Call it for the present that . . . the Robling Building . . . the sight of it . . . has had a queer effect. Something . . . swept over me, Potiphar, as you sat down on the curbing, . . . something I’ve never had happen . . . in my life.”

He tried to draw her out, but she would not be drawn.

Southward in darkness their Section gathered
speed. One had gone ahead; another came behind. So they would travel for three days and nights: twelve minutes apart never meeting tragically.

As they turned the first curve the station lights vanished. They made their way out of a city of shadows—crude, tawdry, work-scarred shadows—over resonant culverts that rumbled with their tonnage. Signal lights whipped by and grew small in the rear; the lanterns of yard-men glistened on rails; the track fires of tramps became pin-points in distance and the backwash of air held cinders and coal soot.

Onward and outward they took on more speed. Vast skeletons of bridges loomed ghostly in boat-flares. Chemical odors, sewer gas, the fetid smells from warehouses, the bilge reek from rivers that might have held corpses, at length grew less nauseous. A furnace-red nimbus soon hung on the north—the glow of a holocaust across dark open country. Over multiple switches the train picked its way, growing ever more self-confident, clicking an errorless track into starlight.

"It's wonderful, ain't it?" Potiphar whispered. He leaned close to his companion. "I swear . . . a railroad all us grips hold o' me. So much cooperation! . . . thousands o' persons all bent t' one object, . . . seein' that folks who's travelin' are safely took care of, every minute o' th' journey, though they don't know each other and 'll never find out."
“Yes,” Louise nodded.

“Animals don’t do team-work like that. Animals don’t care what becomes o’ one another. I guess it must be th’ God in humankind, seekin’ expression in mutual service.”

“But drawing good wages for it!” Louise argued practically.

“Sure!” agreed the printer. “But just another example o’ receivin’ by givin’.”

Far up ahead their great locomotive leaned on the curves like an arrogant minotaur. Its lungs burst with power. Fires played on its smoke. And behind flowed the coaches, docile, obedient. Ahead in its cab, too, a wizened little man—a man with kindly eyes and grizzled moustaches—held a thousand lives in his keeping till dawn, seeing only semaphores, hearing only small sinister noises, sleepless himself that others might slumber.

Smaller cities sped past—Lamont, Lockport, Joliet—and houses with occupants going to bed. Long aisles of street lights glinted sharply on asphalt. Lone motors sped along those streets, carrying persons who must be forever nameless, darting through underpasses as though casting themselves beneath the Juggernaut. Potiphar yawned. Finally he nodded . . .

“We’d better go in,” Louise said maternally.

He had a bad time keeping his feet until they reached their Pullman. When Louise returned in
dressing-gown with hair down, she found him sitting on the edge of his berth. Coat and vest were removed and he clutched his belt, puzzled.

“What’s the matter?” she asked softly.

“How’s a man gonna take off his pants when he’s sittin’ on ’em?”

“How did you manage last night?” she laughed.

“By heck, I kept ’em on! S’pose they was a wreck? . . . how’d I know m’self, undressed?” . . .

They awakened next morning in Kansas City. Then came the wheat-belt.

The printer spent most of that day on the platform. The bigness and flatness of the prairie country awed him. It was a state where intoxicated aviators could not even hurt themselves. They covered distances of such immensity that the hours of the day all looked alike—a sear, leafless country, brown as a cigar.

“I read a piece once,” the printer cried wryly, “’bout ‘What’s th’ Matter with Kansas?’ I’d say it’s got so much quantity they ain’t no room for quality. It’s th’ sort o’ country you travel ’cross when you ain’t th’ least notion o’ ever comin’ back.”

Their ears grew accustomed to monotonous noises: the droning click of wheels on rails, the hollow roar of bridges, the long-drawn wails of the laboring locomotive. Sometimes, afar on the prairie, the train would halt unexplainably and
quiet would ensue—quiet broken only by idle conversation, gentle whirring of electric fans, the fluff of porter's whisk on carpets.

Smells maintaining nowhere but in a Pullman were part of that novel journey for the printer: soft coal, hot oil, musty blankets and carpets, the pungent reek of orange peel. As each midday approached the scent of cooked fowl drifted back from the diner.

"We went across the corner of Colorado in the night," the printer later wrote back to Sam Hod. "I was thankful we skipped that distance by sleeping. The first fellow who flew across America must have broke a lot of speed laws, even for the sky."

The second day found them afar in New Mexico—with excited passengers exclaiming at rock shapes.

"It's too crazy t' keep track of," the printer declared. "Even th' Creator's forgot what He chucked here. He's used it for a dump—for all He had left over when He finished with th' universe."

A country of dried mud opened to them—Indian trading posts, water-tanks like mammoth red ashcans on stilts, pueblos with fences made of reed saplings. Trees showed along water-courses, their branches swirled upward as though twisted and held by a vortex of wind.

"Indians!" cried Potiphar—and half the coach
smiled. The train, it appeared, was in sudden risk of scalpings.

Late afternoon brought a void of aridity: of lava and mesquite, of yucca and thorn. Eastern Arizona defied the geologist. Unburied roots lay scattered about like the whitened bones of plant-life that had perished in agony.

Sunset that night was the stuff dreams are made of . . .

The far mountains mellowed; pink, burnt orange and old rose brushed them—their valleys a swirling mantle of mauve. They altered as one watched. Then all too soon the color show was over: the stars appeared—great ochre blobs of liquid incandescence. A cold wind swept the greasewood. The Milky Way came into its own. God was up there. How beautiful, vast, terrific, was the world which He had made!

But the Great Divide was behind them at last and the Golden State was far-flung around them. At Barstow, Potiphar saw his first palm tree.

"You yell to me right off, first time you see oranges," he made Louise promise. And he contented himself with the assumption that immediately those fruits appeared the girl would leap electrically, shouting, "Oranges! Oranges!"

"An’ t’ think all this country’s been out here all th’ time I been alive back east," he lamented. "No wonder Californie does so much braggin’. She’s so far fr’m all th’ rest o’ Americky it’s like callin’
folks names when you know they can’t chase you.”

Down from Summit and Victoryville they rolled through Cajon Pass—to a flood of golden sunlight that enfolded them like love. San Bernardino at last—Pomona—San Dimas—Azusa. And Potiphar saw orange trees . . .

“You got th’ address where Georgie’s stoppin’, ain’t you?” he asked Louise.

“I have his ’phone number. I’m going out to the Ambassador Hotel and call him from there.”

“What you goin’ t’ say t’ him? How’ll you explain us?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” the girl admitted.

They approached Pasadena as one-thirty arrived—Lamanda Park—the westerly curve along Orange Grove Avenue. Across Colorado Street they rolled, to a tired halt at the Pasadena station. The train which had been a glory sight pulling from Chicago, had fulfilled its mission and accomplished its task. A ten-minute pause at Pasadena, friends greeting friends, negroes scrambling for luggage—then the six further miles down into Los Angeles.

Potiphar Buss had crossed a continent.

“Miss Lou!” he cried excitedly, “—look at them rows o’ auttymobiles—an’ more in th’ streets—thousan’s—millions! They have flivvers ’way out here, too. It’s jus’ like Paris, Vermont!”

Los Angeles!
They took a cab out Wilshire Boulevard. Leaving the skyscrapers of the downtown district, they wove through a city of yellow brick buildings, clean asphalt, ringing traffic bells, corner drug stores and open-air markets. The principal merchandise in those markets seemed oranges. It was a metropolis of myriad filling stations, mid-west farmers, real estate emblazonments, militant steamshovels all gouging ochre dirt. The printer had confused impressions of scarlet-diamond boulevard signs all ordering "Stop"—of unhurried energy under sun-flooded sky—of motor cars that glistened—of ten thousand bungalows smothered in flowers. A clean-washed city of stucco and palmfronds! Milwaukee set down in a tropical garden!

The hotel they entered, sprawled over an acre. To the west and the north, blue mountains stood sentinel. Allotted two chambers with sitting-room connecting, the printer insisted that they 'phone "George" at once.

"You jus' get th' number," he told the girl excitedly, "an' lemme do th' talkin'!"

"But Potiphar," she ordered, "you must first promise something. You must agree not to say anything about father's mission or death, or the reasons for our trip, until I've done so first."

"Not if you don't want I should, Miss Louise."

"Let me give my version of why it is we've come here—after we've learned how much Robling knows—after I've seen the type of man he is."
Again the printer promised and she dialed for her number.

"Yes?" a woman's voice responded.

"Is Mr. Robling there, please?"

"Who wishes to speak to Mr. Robling?"

Despite her heart-constriction, Louise was astonished. Where had she heard that woman's voice before?

"Is this . . . Miss Duncan?"

"Yes—it's Miss Duncan."

"This is Miss Garland. Why, you must have come out on the same train that we did—"

"We?"

"Mr. Buss and I—unless you came by airplane."

"I did come by plane. I do it almost weekly."

"Oh! . . . well, . . . if Mr. Robling's available will you kindly inform him his old friend would speak to him. Mr. Buss is here with me."

Louise arose and gave Potiphar the instrument. She did it with vexation. So the grand dame secretary was out here to be dealt with? . . .

"Hello?" cried Potiphar. "Hello? . . . is this you, Georgie? This is P-P-Potiphar B-Buss!" Beads of sweat dampened the excited printer's forehead; his blue-veined hands were trembling as in ague.

"What say? . . . yeah, all th' way 'cross Americky t' see you, Georgie, . . . why ain't you never let me know—what say? . . . you did! . . . well, well, life's funny, ain't it? . . . your voice sounds changed, Georgie. I s'pose you've changed too. What say?
... yeah, Diplomats' Hotel. Swell rooms. Three of 'em. An' a bathroom we can use any time o' day we want."

At last he hooked the receiver and turned.

"He'll be right over, he says, Miss Lou. An' we made a mistake takin' these rooms. He claims he wants us out t' his house."

"Did he say where he lived?"

"Yeah, he told me. On a mountaintop somewhere."

"On a ... mountaintop!"

"He says he felt I was turnin' up this fall—that's sort o' queer, ain't it? You claimed you didn't mention me t' them folks in his office."

"I told you the truth. I never said a word."

"Well, he's been expectin' us—"

"But I never even intimated I was coming to the Coast. I haven't even told my people in New York!"

"All the same, Miss Lou, he knows all about us. Guess I'll go down an' wait in th' lobby."

"No, you'd better stay here. There's the chance you might miss him. I want you around when we come face to face."

In the next twenty minutes Louise fumbled badly. Her hair would not dress; her bags were in confusion. She felt like a school-girl awaiting the arrival of a sophomore lover and was angry with herself.

Soon she heard the 'phone ring. Potiphar re-
sponded. Almost at once he pounded on her door.

"Miss Lou, Miss Lou! He's downstairs—my Georgie! I answered th' tellyphone an' told him t' come up."

"You admit him, Potiphar. I'll join you in a moment."

More minutes ticked away. Elevator gates clicked. Then knocks on a door. Sharp exclama-
tions. A rich voice cried thickly—

"Potiphar! Potiphar! . . . you dear old Lazau-
rus, . . . raised from the dead!"

Heart throttling raggedly, Louise left her room. She effected it carelessly. Who was this Robling that she should be so exercised?

She was conscious of a man by the table at her left. She heard Potiphar's voice—

"Miss Lou, this is Georgie!"

"How do you do, Mr. Robling?"

Louise started forward, raising her glance. Her eyes met the "stranger's" . . .

She halted and froze.

"How do you do, Miss Garland?" that rich voice responded. "Some time has elapsed since the two of us last met!"
"YOU'RE—George—Robling?"

"For the time that remains," he responded amiably. But something in his glance filled Louise with disquiet. She should have been annoyed by his sapient scrutiny. Instead, she was inveigled.

Potiphar Buss was likewise perturbed. His gaze was for the man but his speech for Louise.

"You know Georgie?" he gasped when he could talk.

"You recall I spoke of a person—who guided me to a house in Shawsville the night I sought my father?"

"Him!" cried the printer. "But you said he was a loafer!"

"And so he was," their caller asserted, "though the term is inadequate."

"I declare, I need my specks—not t' help my eyesight. Who'd ever dreamt that feller was you?"

"Crediting the obvious may sometimes be a privilege." Their artless consternation made Robling smile broadly. "After all, why not? Won't the Cosmic Lodestone have its little miracle?"

The Cosmic Lodestone! What did he mean? Louise felt abashed. Abashed and dismayed. She
had always recalled her guide of that evening as slight and bow-shoulder, taciturn and sullen. His complexion had been pallid; he had whimpered when he spoke. Seventeen years later, face to face again, she found him a stalwart, self-confident Personage. His backbone had straightened, his eyes twinkled genially. And the strain had dissolved from his weather-bronzed countenance; it no longer showed lines, though it showed something else; a sturdy tranquillity that perplexed and dismayed her.

“You’ve changed,” she remarked. She knew it was trite, but her mind was chaotic.

“Say rather, awakened,” he qualified gently. “And might I add, Miss Garland, that I’ve constantly regretted the vindictive thing I did. I’d gone back to Shawsville for a talk with your father. When he wouldn’t let me have it, I’d loitered at his plant. I’d worked for a time on the paper in Shawsville, so I knew the reputation of the place to which I took you. I meant to hurt your father, though later I realized I’d done you a service.”

“Service!”

“You perceive it, I think, from the trend of what’s resulted.”

“Well, you’re forgiven—not that it’s of consequence.”

“Thank you, Miss Garland. That makes the readjustment.”

She had not meant to pardon him, but something
in his character disarmed her of pique. Confused though she was, she recalled a line of Kipling's: "—his was a face for a woman to dream about; for a man to try to carve on a pipe-head afterward."

Yet more than his features disorganized her thoughts. He seemed to project a trenchant equanimity—something she felt—something that was physical as well as mental. It awed as it thrilled her. Few men she had encountered were possessed of that ability. She responded to it willingly and wondered that she did so. "Well buttressed" he was, of a height with herself, easy in his carriage, nonchalant yet kindly. His temples showed frostbite; his lips came together with a trace of placidity. He disclosed what Basil lacked: a spiritual composure which conflict awards—inhuman conflict—the crucible of poise. Not that Van Dyke was deficient in poise. But Robling had attained what Basil had inherited. And it made him the stronger. Louise sensed that strength and her own paid it homage.

"Why don't we sit down?" she suggested in her fluster.

Robling laid a hat of white felt on the table. Coatless he had come there, in soft-collared shirt and white flannel trousers. The only color about him was a tie of cool blue that hung down his shirtfront.

They drew up three chairs.

Could this be the hapless lad who had stolen a
payroll to save his baby's life? Yes, she could credit it. The years had matured him and given him comity. It was his contrast with the picture she had sketched of him, that she resented—the picture of a gruff, self-assertive male who had flattened obstruction by the force of his temperament and sabered his way from defeat to dominion. Instead he must have won by intellect and kindliness. Yes, and something else—something she did not like to admit—something that altered her attitude radically—something she labeled for the present as Magnetism.

But what was the cause of his startling renaissance?

"Of course," he said presently, "condolences on the change in the status of your father have no meaning. But his Setting Forth from Potiphar's house was ironical, wasn't it? —in view of the search he was making for me."

She glanced at him startled. "You know about that?"

"How could I help it?"

"Mr. Perry told you?"

"No, that wasn't necessary."

Along with his compatibility, she suddenly perceived that his eyes held surprise, not mental surprise like hers and old Potiphar's, rather a physical astonishment growing deeper on his face.

Although his gaze held, it seemed to look beyond her—or slightly above her—as though attracted
by her hat. She was wearing no hat and soon felt embarrassed. What could he be studying: some rumple of her hair? But whatever it was, it altered his attitude. Instead of reserve he showed her camaraderie, as though he had perceived an emblem in her headdress suggestively marking her as in caste with himself. But what caste? Why should he deport himself with this cryptic cordiality and why should it affect her?

For she in her turn was obliged to reciprocate. She felt an elation provokingly pleasant—physical, and mental, and deeper than both. She had heard of love at first meeting, the shibboleth of typists, waitresses and salesgirls, and explained it as flowering of autosuggestion. Now she wasn't so sure. Affinity too, was an overworked term. She explained it as license. But confronting George Robling upset all her assumptions. She saw it was possible for the right type of man to walk through her defenses as though they were cardboard; she would utter no protest if he tore off her armor and exposed her to wolves.

"I feel," she said nervously, "as though I'd been hoaxed—worse than by your prank in Shawsville."

"Hoaxed?" he asked.

"I went to Chicago looking for a printer, a man who worked for wages. The disclosures that resulted were a series of shocks."

"Yet you knew what to do when you found out the truth!"
"You're most entertaining. But I can't understand why no word reached me of your altered fortunes—why my father never knew—?"

"Yeah," put in the printer, "it sort o' hurts me, Georgie, that you never wrote an' told me how well you'd made out."

"That," responded Robling, pulling his eyes from Louise with an effort, "is all bound up in a general bale of explanations which require sorting out.

"How so?" asked Potiphar.

"Because they concern crises and changes in my life that aren't generally credited. So I keep the bale in storage."

"But Georgie, I should think—?"

"You say you're surprised to find me what I am? Well, I'm surprised too. I'm surprised that noting what I do in connection with you both, you should think it unusual to find me of affluence."

"That's befuddling," said Louise.

"Well, what I mean is this: I've had reasons for knowing that you'd come out to see me in due Cycle of Event. To write and tell you what was happening would usurp the function of the Cosmic Lodestone—altering careers that were not for my directing—precipitating futures that would have free play in Time. What was to be, would be! I think we have evidence."

Louise chanced to be looking toward the printer at the moment. And a startling expression came
into his face. One minute it had been anxious, even doleful: at Robling’s declaration it energized with interest. The tin-colored eyes became riveted on Robling, the puckered mouth dropped open, over Potiphar’s countenance came astonished cognition. Cognition of what? Significance stalked behind George Robling’s words that could only be grasped by fellow initiates. But there again, mystery: initiates in what? Along with slight anger the woman felt panic. It seemed as though she too recognized something, yet it could not break through into cerebral consciousness.

After Basil’s veiled speeches back in New York, had she made this wild excursion to encounter more exasperating interclusions in the attitudes of those whom she met in California? She had the chagrined, hapless feeling that had come to her in girlhood: when once she had marveled that a roomful of men had arisen at her entrance, to remain on their feet until she was seated. A bit of social comity, that, of which for a time she had not been aware. Growing older, learning etiquette by painful humiliations, blind fury often seized her at being thus hampered. Self-pity was in it, some diffidence, the functioning of the same inferiority complex that had wrought her attainments. But knowing its factors did not lessen her distress. Were there other comities, other usages, other practices and acceptances, of which she was igno-
rant even now in middle womanhood? Potiphar's attitude toward his protégé altered from that incident and was not the same again. *In God's name, what had happened?*

The printer's brown cob was belching vile fumes. Whimsically he asked—

"How long you been in Chicago, Georgie?"
"Since I came to myself on returning from war."
"You went t' th' war?"
"Um-m—I sometimes believe the war came to me."
"You got through it all right?"
"Well, I'm still lugging around a chunk of shrapnel that I know I've got in me each day it rains."
"You was shot, Georgie? Where?"
"In the Saint Mihiel salient. I saw enough war to last me a lifetime lying with four other fellows in a cellar-sized shell hole for three days and nights. I saw other things, too!"
"I meant t' ask, Georgie, where was you wounded—what part o' your body?"
"Where wasn't I wounded? The doctors picked out all the pieces they dared. Seven in my legs had stopped me in that fight. The one in my lungs they decided to leave."
"Your lungs!"
"Oh, it's long become encapsulated, though I'm forced to avoid any violent exercise."
"An' you come back fr'm war an' commenced buildin' skyscrapers? Where'd you get th' boodle?"
"Money's the easiest thing in the world to get, Potiphar, when you know its true function. I got my etheric principles right and capital followed as a matter of course."

"Etheric principles!" Louise Garland frowned.

"The structures I've built," Robling explained, are known as Coöperative. Firms buy portions of them as permanent office homes, instead of leasing, owning their section like any other realty."

"Coöperative!" echoed Potiphar. He fondled the word.

"But it's all behind me now—the construction—the money making period. I'll describe to you later how I've funded my interests. I'll have to, of course, with Miss Garland involved."

"I?" Louise galvanized.

"Why yes—don't you know?"

"Know what, for pity's sake?"

"The reasons underlying your trip and your presence here?"

"I came out here to consult you in regard to my father's legacy left us in common—not that I meant to mention it so soon. What else am I concerned in?"

Robling debated.

"This really isn't the place or time to tell you, Miss Garland. You see—I thought—from that light about your head—"

"What light about my head?"

"You're not aware of it?" Her behavior puz-
zled him. "How could it be there if your errand were so trivial—?"

"My errand is anything but trivial to me. And what sort of light do you see about my head?"

"Why—the Light of your Identity? Don’t you understand?"

"Indeed I do not. I’m amazed by such reference."

"You’re not even grounded in your cosmic fundamentals? You mean I must instruct you?"

"Apparently—yes."

"But such explanations need time to present them. Aren’t you aware of the province of Light?"

"What province of Light?"

"The projection of Reality—the structure of the universe."

"The structure of the universe is something I don’t bother with. And the only Reality I know is making two dollars out of one hundred cents. You ought to concur, after what you’ve accomplished."

"But I haven’t accomplished anything, Miss Garland. I’ve simply acquiesced to the Principles of Love."

"Love!" cried Louise. What maudlinity was this?

"Certainly, Love. Oh I don’t mean romance, nor do I mean affection—"

"Altruism, then?"

"No, not altruism. Rather, the virile phenomenon that’s the essence of Power."
"The only Love I know about—that's the essence of Power—is the greed of the race for banknotes and influence."

"No, you're quite wrong. That's a force so destructive that it's often catastrophic. I'll explain to you later." He was pensive a moment, then he turned to the printer. "How can accomplishment be attained without a knowledge of First Principles? Do you get it, Potiphar?"

The printer was troubled. "Blindness, Georgie, ain't allus lack o' sight. What we call blindness can be lack o' perception. I've studied Miss Lou an' I know she's got eyes. She simply refuses t' credit what she sees."

"Sight, or perception," Louise said with vigor, "is a matter of discerning the factors of success. Beyond that, I'm bored. Logic as logic is something for poets—idealists—people who live for hobbies and 'isms' while I'm a materialist whose religion is Work."

Robling seemed amused. "Yes?" he said indulgently.

Louise changed the subject before she lost her temper. "Mr. World said you'd given up active supervision of your company because of failing health. I didn't tell Potiphar, thinking it might worry him. What did he mean—that you'd permanently retired?"

"No," Robling answered. "Merely changed my objective. As for my health, old Ben meant my..."
wound. The climate of Chicago aggravates the trouble in my lungs."

"Georgie," broke in Potiphar, "what become o' your wife?"

"She's here on the Coast. She married a banker and they live in Los Angeles. Her husband and I are very good friends."

"Pshaw, you can't mean it!"

"It amuses me constantly," Robling declared, "that two people must keep up a manufactured hatred simply because their marriage went amiss. Nellie doesn't know why we married as we did, but sooner or later its significance will reach her. She'll know in the end that Marriage is of spirit. Anything else is a physical make-shift."

"You ever married a second time, Georgie?"

"No," said the other, "the Plan had it otherwise."

"Well, how 'bout your infant?—warn't his name Donald?"

"Donald got his Transfer a year ago, Potiphar. He flew over, so t' speak, while learning to be a pilot."

Potiphar gasped.

"You don't mean you lost him!"

The father's voice held whimsy: "I suppose flying with a mechanical contrivance irked him, Potiphar. He found he might dispense with it. Anyhow, he did!"
“Where is it you live when you’re here t’ th’ Coast?”

“You’re referring to my house? Up on that mountain you can see beyond those trees. Supposing we go there,” he suddenly energized. “Staying at a hotel while you’re here in California is not to be thought of. You must cancel these rooms and come out as my guests.”

A person is of importance in exact ratio to the distance that one will travel to confront him—as Romance may be the extent of one’s ignorance about another. Peter Garland’s daughter had traversed a continent. She had made a mental sketch of a man in Chicago—while viewing his masterpiece—and named it George Robling. Coordinating that portrait with actuality might be as vexatious as she was finding it novel, but returning to Manhattan till she had probed and dismissed the enigma of his metamorphosis was quite as absurd as it had seemed in the east.

“You’re proposing something that makes me very happy. I’m sure Potiphar too wants to see your mountain home,”—and Louise dropped her glance at the approval on their faces.

Downstairs they went, some thirty minutes later, and Robling led the way to a heavy sports-roadster. The russet-brown car had a hood that meant power. With their bags in the rumble-seat they purred
down the grade and veered to the left into Beverly Drive.

Westward to Vine Street and through the heart of Hollywood they drove, the printer boggle-eyed at the motion-picture studios. Out Sunset Boulevard they traveled, pausing only for semaphores, tooling the traffic with expert precision. Louise ventured once as they left Gardner Junction—

"Do you drive your 'plane also?"

"No," answered Robling, "I'm arriving at the Ferry by quite a different route."

Before entering Beverly Hills they turned sharply to the right. Up a mountain grade they started, steadily climbing curve after curve.

And the world fell away. The vista grew stupendous.

"My stars," cried the printer, "be we headin' for heaven?"

"Why not?" laughed the man.

Higher they mounted and the air became purer. It grew thinner likewise, and bubbled at their ear-drums. Set back on embankments or cupped in ravines were patrician residences; deploying on open scarps they saw Hollywood, Beverly Hills, the Los Angeles valley plain from the City Hall campanile to Santa Monica, spread on the floor of a purple-rimmed world. Afar on the west lay the shimmering Pacific.

"Glory!" gasped Potiphar.

"It is!" affirmed Louise.
Their car gained the summit far up in the heights. Along a plateau they presently sped, up into a bowl that opened southwestward. On the left-hand side of this bowl, up against another summit, they arrived at an estate—an acre of lawn with an Elizabethan house—walls smothered in vines. Such vines! They seemed to grow everywhere: over the trellises and up along the roofs—Japanese hop and vagrant wisteria, red flowering cypress and Cecil Brunner roses—scarcely a surface but what had its variety. Into a private driveway they turned and the roadster rolled up to a wrought-iron gate.

A door with hammered hinges swung back as they alighted. A woman confronted them.

"Miss Garland," said Robling, "this is Miss Sarah Twitch."

Louise nodded, smiling. But Potiphar blinked. Again came disconcertion at something odd in servants.

"I guess you got me stopped, Georgie," the printer chuckled presently. "I thought Daisy was cute, but your housekeeper’s cuter."

Four feet in height was Miss Sarah Twitch, a compact little person with compact little manner. Like most stunted folk her age was indefinite. She was clad in a dress that was riotous with flowers, with a scarf about her shoulders that was nearly a shawl. The antithesis of Margaret in every way she was, emphatically in color, being pasty
white of face excepting in the nose. That was quite small and red, not unlike a crap-apple.

"I'm glad you've both got here," she declared to the guests. "I dunno when anybody's come to this house who's meant so much to Georgie."

She turned and led them in. Down two broad steps from the hallway she went, to pause at a divan as though showing the room.

It merited showing—a spacious, low-studded, dimly-lit library, its walls black with books, its floors soft with rugs. A luxurious retreat it seemed, after the glare of the tropic sunlight, gold frames and white marble gleaming in its coolness and its great southern window the show place of the Height.

A second woman descended the staircase: Miss Sybil Duncan. She came down slowly with head carried high, like a small-kingdom queen concerned about her homage. She was clad in a sleeveless frock of brown chiffon with a cable of beads that clicked as she moved.

Louise had met Sybil the men quickly saw. But Potiphar Buss required presentation.

"You're staying at the Ambassador?" Miss Duncan inquired.

"So we had planned," Louise answered pleasantly, "till your employer informed us we had to come here."

"Here?" exclaimed Sybil. She turned and faced Robling as though he had erred . . .
A JAPANESE boy unloaded their bags. The guests went above stairs where spacious chambers welcomed them.

Potiphar and Robling remained to talk privately. The library was empty when Louise came down first. About the western side of the house a wall enclosed a garden, spreading out from a patio roofed by a pepper tree. A fountain in a fish-basin made a pleasant centerpiece in an upward sweep of turf that was dotted with shrubs. Louise had reached the fountain when she saw the pert secretary. Miss Duncan clipped roses that climbed a low wall.

"How strange," remarked Louise, "that a house of such charm could be built on this height."

"It's a tribute to his genius," answered Sybil, meaning Robling, "though few people know it. You expect to remain very long on the Coast?"

"I'm going back shortly. My business commands it."

"Yes, I've heard of your places. Their success has often puzzled me. I think they're quite ordinary."
"That’s lamentable, Miss Duncan. To be a real success then in your estimation, I’ll have to go back to my chicken-farm project."

"You’ve really run a chicken-farm?"

"No, I’m saving that farm for my Indian Summer."

"How very too-bad it’s coming so quickly. Then you don’t expect to be married at all?"

"It hadn’t occurred to me," and Louise laughed brusquely to cover her pique. "You see, it’s most difficult to make progress in romance and try to run a business."

"You’re right in a degree. It depends on one’s equipment."

"Well, mine has been faulty—till I got here on the Coast."

Miss Duncan started. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," said Louise. "Nothing and everything! What pretty little roses! How regrettable to kill them."

"You’ve made an assertion I think you should explain."

"Why should I explain it? You can’t possibly be interested."

Sybil Duncan flushed. "But for a person of your handicaps—"

"Handicaps! Um-m, . . . you think I’ve got handicaps?"

"Haven’t you?" asked Sybil. She jabbed at the roses.
"Yours being incomparable to mine, I assume you should know."

"I haven't many handicaps that matter to men. But women are usually so biased, you see. They can't help resenting it when other women score."

"Or is it pity for other women who try to score and fail?"

"When their vision is faulty they often show that weakness."

"I admit we make mistakes in some of our perceptions. But isn't it fortunate that men are so stupid—else how could we continue deceiving them so neatly?"

Sybil was furious. "Then you can't have met many clever ones," she said.

"No, perhaps not. Which is doubtless the reason that I've accomplished what I have."

"Then you really shouldn't stop. A person of your handicaps must let well enough alone."

"My handicaps worry you?"

"No, not at all. I'm rather glad you have them. You mustn't think, however, that they're general with your sex."

"You charm me, Miss Duncan—you're so very astute."

"I'm happy to hear you say it."

"But are obvious handicaps worth giving much thought? If poor man perceives them, he knows what to avoid."

Sybil was concerned that perhaps she had been
worsted. She went on cutting flowers. And Louise watched her thoughtfully. For the first time Peter Garland’s daughter perceived a certain voluptuousness about Sybil Duncan’s body—and the fact that her head was too small and round.

"Don’t you find it thrilling," Louise tried anew, "making the flight between Chicago and the Coast? Aren’t you afraid that some day you’ll crash?"

"I’ve crashed many times, though not in an airplane. I’m superior to tragedies."

The statement was inane and the secretary knew it. But Louise only smiled. Sybil added quickly—"Thrills of an airplane flight don’t begin to compare with other thrills, Miss Garland."

"Romantic thrills, for instance?"

"No—spiritual thrills. Perhaps, however, you don’t know what I mean?"

That shot hit its mark. "You got that from Mr. Robling, it seems. I perceive you have a weakness for following him blindly."

"You can’t always tell when things are original?"

"On the contrary—yes!"

"Perhaps you should ask him, since you’re here as his guest."

"That reminds me . . . are you?"

"I don’t understand you."

"I merely wondered if all the women who came here were treated as guests."

"You have an idea that some of them aren’t?"

"It occurred to me to note that some seem more
favored. Or rather, let's say, are allowed greater privileges."

"You resent it that some get attention you covet?"

"Not covet. Enjoy! How is it accomplished—I ask for information?"

"Some get their gifts for their capacity to use them. But I marvel, Miss Garland, that you come to me for cues."

"H'm! . . . does Mr. Robling fly? Does he often make the air trip?"

"When it's convenient he does it for enjoyment. He thinks flying's next to godliness. I got that from him, please be advised!"

"And that's why you don't like it?"

"Who said I didn't like it? Miss Garland, don't be rude."

"Am I? I'm sorry."

"I try to show Mr. Robling that his life's too valuable to risk in a monoplane——"

"And is Mr. Robling happy in having you as mentor?"

"He's made no complaint."

"Well, some men are fastidious—keeping from others their debts of self-expression."

"Their debts of what?"

"Their private obligations, contracted—we'll put it—in delicate circumstances."

"You think I've been in . . . delicate circumstances . . . with Mr. Robling?"
"You said you were clever. I took you at your word."

Sybil dropped her roses. They spilled upon the grass.

"I'll have you know—I've done nothing with Mr. Robling—that anyone can criticize—"

"Then you're not clever. Instead you're merely cute."

"Oh—so I'm cute?"

"It takes brains of a sort, to be the thing I mentioned."

"Does it, Miss Garland? You speak from experience?"

"Maybe I do, and maybe I don't."

"But you have the capacity for it, it seems."

"If you're so decorous, how do you know?"

"I don't think this sort of thing is getting us anywhere."

"Nor I. Don't you see, I'm just testing you out."

"Why is it necessary?"

"To see how much competition I've got, in case I decide to take up your challenge."

Sybil felt panic. What had she done? She tossed her small head and retorted in disdain—

"I'll have you understand that Mr. Robling and I enjoy a perfect friendship—unsullied, Miss Garland, by any sort of license."

"Then the man has my sympathy and you're clever after all!"
It jolted Sybil, that. She looked her perplexity. “Because,” explained Louise, “it takes even more brains to revel in the joys of dancing and never be required to compensate the piper.”

“Truly, Miss Garland, your candor is appalling.”

“Yes, I seem to have a knack for exclaiming at the obvious. But tell me, my dear, how have you tolerated your position with him to date—prolific with enticements but deficient in duress?”

“Duress!” cried Sybil. She tried to seem horrified.

“Certainly if you could have forced it, you’d long since have made him marry you. I would, in your place.”

“We don’t subject our loved ones to infamies, when we really love them. But is quarreling necessary because we’re alone?”

“I’m fencing, not quarreling. Don’t you enjoy it?”

“Not when the rapiers are apt to draw blood. Blood isn’t pleasant.”

“But isn’t it the blood that gives fencing its zest?” Then as Sybil made no comment, stooping for her roses: “You see, I’m used to fencing. I have to be skillful or find myself scarred. You live with Mr. Robling?”

“I stay at his house when he needs me on the Coast here.”

“And isn’t it insufferable, keeping to one room?”

“Miss Garland, you’re insulting!”
"Why should we be prudish? No man's about to hear us."

"It's a question of decency," Sybil said stiffly.

"And decency is what?"

"Are you fencing again?"

"No, merely questioning."

"Decency's the capacity for doing what we like so long as we do it cleanly. That didn't come from Mr. Robling, Miss Garland!"

"No, from the dictionary—nothing but words—it doesn't mean a thing." Louise closed one eye.

"I was thinking," she said, "of certain—possibilities."

"Possibilities for what?"

"You want to stop fencing?"

"I think I do, yes."

"Well—possibilities for trapping a man when he doesn't want trapping."

"What's that to do with decency?"

"Nothing, Miss Duncan. Nothing whatever. All the same, I was thinking."

"Yes, and seeing there's no man about, I've thought of it myself."

"Um-m! So I surmised. But you're lacking in courage."

"What?" cried the other.

"Aren't you?" asked Louise.

"If you think I'd take advantage of Mr. Robling—"

"You dare claim you wouldn't?"
“I hope I’m too decent.”
“There you go again! You’re not decent, you’re hopeless.”
“Are you always so frank?”
“What’s frankness, Miss Duncan, but facing life’s facts. You want Mr. Robling—don’t think I can’t see it—and maybe I want him: I haven’t yet said. But one of us may get him, and wouldn’t it be funny if I were that person?”
“You might as well know that Mr. Robling won’t marry any woman unless she forces him to do it.”
“There’s an idea. But just what’s the matter?”
“Since his first wife divorced him, he’s had no use for marriage.”
“But that doesn’t mean—women!”
“What makes you think so?”
“I know from my feelings. No woman-hater could have the effect on me that your employer’s had this day.”
“Oh—he’s had—an effect—?”
“—which is neither here nor there. What about your statement? Why won’t he marry?”
“He’s—somehow—above it.”
“Above it? That’s absurd.”
“No, it’s not absurd. He thinks women are—well—something of a nuisance.”
“Then you’re wiser than I thought. Or perchance a hopeless bungler.”
"I don’t live in New York. If I did, I might know—"

"Do you want to fence some more?"

"I prefer that we didn’t. I only meant—"

"Don’t try to mean anything, my dear Miss Duncan. Say what you think and laugh at what happens. Now about our victim. If he doesn’t want to marry, he must have some reason. Because you can’t grasp it, doesn’t mean he’s invulnerable."

"He thinks women are divided into two classes: earthly women and—and—a sort of angel women—"

"Well, isn’t he right?"

"But not as you think. He believes—having had an experience with one earthly woman, he—won’t be truly married till—after he—dies. Did you notice how he looked at me when I referred to your stopping here? Did you know what it meant?"

"That you were shockingly impolite, if you don’t mind the truth. What do you think it meant?"

"He was comparing the two of us—for a purpose. He knows what he wants but—doesn’t expect to find it. You won’t stay around here long, I guess, without realizing that Mr. Robling is—what might be called eccentric."

"Eccentric! I haven’t noted anything eccentric about him. Eccentric just how?"

Louise had seated herself on the end of a settle in
the shadow of the wall. Sybil sank down on its opposite end.

“He sees things,” she said—with sudden amusement—as a mother might tell a neighbor of the antics of a son.

“Sees things!”

—and hears things. And says he has visions. People come to him for counsel—spiritual counsel of a sort—”

Sybil left her sentence dangling in air. She studied her shoe-point. And Louise grew uneasy. Why did she always feel disquiet of heart when spiritual references were made in conversations?

“I don’t think I get you,” she said in vernacular. “That’s a—concession.”

“No—naturally you wouldn’t. But George Robling’s regarded as somewhat peculiar. You too will discover it.”

“He’s something of a Spiritualist?”

“Goodness, no! you immediately jump to the conclusion that everybody else does! He’s got no interest in Spiritualism—he says that it’s childish.”

“What is his religion?”

“He’s got no religion. He’s practically an atheist. An atheist,” repeated Sybil, “in that he doesn’t believe in God like most of us. He thinks God is Thought. Nothing but Thought!”

Something stirred in Louise. But Sybil hurried on—

“He thinks there’s no such thing as Matter.
Fancy that! The world has its basis in nothing but Energy. You and I aren't sitting on a marble bench: we're sitting on Energy! I don't understand it. It's out of my depth and I'm not ashamed to say so.

"How long has he held such views, Miss Duncan?"

"Since coming back from war. He returned a different person."

"You knew him then, did you, before he went to war?"

"Yes," nodded Sybil. She bit her lip quickly. "We were—better friends then than we've—ever been—since."

Silence came for a time. Birds darted overhead, a truant breeze played about the garden, from deep in the house came the strains of faint music: someone had evidently turned on a radio.

"He goes about appraising people," Sybil tattled on, "not as you and I might, by what they say or do, but—by something he thinks he sees about their heads."

"What?"

"A sort of aureol of light—I learned it from writings he'd forgot to lock away. I gathered that the Chosen People in this world had some sort of halo playing about their heads. They could be trusted. The rest were just trash."

"Trash!"

"Well, not exactly trash, but not for close friend—"
ship. He'd written a paper of some sort upon it. He writes many papers too deep to understand."

"He went to war, you say, and was changed when he returned?"

"Yes," Sybil nodded, "there were those who scarcely knew him. Some of those who'd been closest to him were almost ready to believe that he'd died in the war—that the man who came back in George Robling's body wasn't our George at all! Of course, it's absurd."

"I . . . wonder?" Louise whispered.

Sybil turned sharply.

"Don't tell me you hold the same crazy views!"

"Why should I hold them?"

"Well, you're successful like he is, running big affairs. Maybe you got your help—your inspiration—your counsel—from the same airy sources?"

"Don't be sarcastic. Not on that subject."

Sybil seemed upset, even more than by their fencing. She studied her toe; she studied the garden; she looked toward the house where the sun beat with vigor. She was suddenly candid.

"I've got reasons," she protested. "He scares us to death, the way he often acts."

"How does he act?"

"Well, no one's seen him angry—not once in the time since those Big Nights in France. It's too weird to be normal."

"You call that abnormal?"

"—and sometimes—at night in his room—Sarah
and I have both heard him talking—discussing things in whole conversations as though he were arguing over a 'phone, though his room has no instrument. At other times it seems that he listens—while someone instructs him—not there in flesh."

"Not there in flesh?"

"It worries us to death. What’ll he do next? People in that state jump out of windows—kill others in their sleep—"

"Oh nonsense, Miss Duncan! He isn’t so bad, with that calmness in his eye."

"He has those times, I tell you, and they mean him no good."

"I’d say from appearances they’ve made him a success."

"No, not at all. That came from something else."

"Won’t you tell me what—if you want to be so kind?"

"No, I will not. I’ve said enough already. But I’m giving you warning, be sure of what confronts you. Take it from me, . . . George’s not like the rest of us mortals. He’s got his own code and ideas about Creation. As for marrying a second time, he considers it absurd."

"Then why are you concerned, if he doesn’t mean to marry?"

"I . . . understand him," Sybil contended.

"Which seems to be more nonsense. You just said his views were over your head."
"Well, if he needs any kind of a wife, it's a woman like myself who can hold him to realities. If he married a person too much like he is, they'd both of them fizz up like a couple of rockets."

"I've heard women say the same things before—when they've yearned to tack on to some rocket's tail."

"That's quite enough, Miss Garland. But remember I've warned you—"

"You started the insults by remarking on my tea-rooms. If you feel yourself beaten, why not show some sportsmanship? Tell me, what about Mr. Robling's business? Is he quitting it all with his life but half lived?"

Sybil shook out her roses on the bench and sorted them carefully according to their stems.

"I've told you aplenty . . . as a confidential secretary!"

"Which means," said Louise, "that you really don't know."

"I think I know my rôle."

"Well then, it's obvious that you don't know the lines to discourage my interest. I'm going to know this man better—intimately—he seems to invite it—he intrigues me as no one has done in my life."

She paused for Sybil to make comment. But the other's mouth was firm—firm like old Charlotte's.

"Maybe it's Love," Louise went on bluntly, "but I know it's not hate. This man has accomplished:
he's reaped from Experience. Under his poise lies a secret worth probing. I mean to find it if it costs me my business."

"It may cost you more," Sybil cried tartly.

"All right, I'll pay it; the secret will be worth it! But I buried my father some four weeks ago, and the printer who's with me gave me some jolts—told me some things that hit me in shocks. They left me with hunger that calls for strong food. I don't mean occult things. I don't mean religious. I don't know what I mean, for they're deeper than both!"

"You really don't mean there are things you don't know!"

"I want to find out what the future holds for me. I want to find out why I am what I am. I . . . need a sort of oculist to prescribe for my vision. Perhaps he's George Robling—that remains to be determined. Now then, here comes Potiphar Buss. So let's call it a fight and stand to our guns—stand to our guns till the battle is won."

"Or rather," said Sybil, "change rapiers for sabres?"

"You're the judge of that, if weapons are propitious."

Potiphar had discarded his coat, changed into slippers and kindled his cob. He watched Sybil Duncan enter the house.

"Have you been learning things as I have, Poti-
phar?" and Louise made a gesture for him to sit down.

"She ain't doin' him no good!" the old printer glowered.

"Sybil you mean? Doing George Robling no good?"

"She's a almost-bald nuisance, or that's what I gathered."

"How is she a nuisance?"

"What Georgie sees in her is more'n I get. She must have a hook in him or he'd up an' kick her out."

"You've been discussing her with George?"

"We mentioned her, yeah. An' he says, 'She'd be in a much better way if 'twasn't f'r me.' He seemed t' be worried."

"What did he mean?"

"I says, 'Why don't you pack her 'bout her business?' An' he says in answer, 'What's written is written!' Them's his very words."

"What's written is written?"

"I wisht I was as keen in some subjecks as I've found Georgie is. I guess I'm too much o' a hardened old sinner."

"I doubt if you're the sinner, Potiphar."

"Well, I've served my time in th' matter o' Sin. I'm glad t' go back an' make a fresh start."

"Potiphar Buss, you'd try a saint's patience! Will you stop talking riddles and answer what I asked you?"
“What was it you arst me?”

“Have you been learning things about George Robling the same as I have?—the peculiar beliefs that have made him what he is?”

“Has th’ White Head been gabbin’?”

“We’d not talked two minutes before we started to squabble.”

“Tell me what she said. No use t’ repeat what you’ve already learnt.”

Louise rehearsed the episode. And Potiphar sat thinking.

“They’s questions, Miss Lou, that some of us can’t answer. I said t’ you once that if you was born blind, stone blind, I’d never be able t’ describe t’ you Red. I’ve had a little light on some o’ life’s mysteries, a candle-light sort o’, an’ it’s helped me make th’ Journey. But Georgie’s had a bonfire—a Bonfire on a Mountain—"

“What have you learned?”

“Well, Georgie’s what some folks’d call a Mystic. Which explains not a thing. He’s gone through some terrific experience I’d say, that’s born him all over—he ain’t no more th’ lad I helped t’ Paris than I’m a Pink Esquimo. He’s made discoveries in th’ Eternal, you might call it, an’ they furnished him knowledge that ain’t found in books. Don’t arsk me how it’s happened: he ain’t told me that.”

“Whatever has happened, it’s made him deadly interesting. I wish you’d find out. I feel a kind of challenge.”
The afternoon wore on—an hour of confusions—and Louise was entranced by the vista that opened. She questioned the printer; she questioned herself. Over and over she voiced the query: How could a nondescript printer-boy have ascended to such heights before he reached forty? She tried to argue that Experience had schooled him. She knew she was mistaken. She herself had attended that school yet she was not prating of unearthly capabilities. She tried to get Potiphar to confine himself to Logic—Facts—the tenets of realities. She only started wandering in mazes of philosophy.

“Oh well, what’s the use?” she finally surrendered. “I think I’ll have a headache if this sort of thing keeps up.”

The printer straightened up, declaring somewhat raggedly—

“Th’ Master once says: ‘If you don’t know ’bout earthly things, how th’ Sam-Scratch am I gonna tell you ’bout heavenly things?’ That’s equal t’ saying: ‘If you think everything outside o’ three meals a day, an’ th’ ball scores, an’ who’s runnin’ for dog-catcher, is a lot o’ mystic rubbish—that’s what you called it!—you’re only goin’ t’ be allowed three meals a day, an’ read nothin’ beyond ball scores, an’ live a dog-catcher’s life. I never dreamt there was so much beauty in th’ world till I come t’ Californie. That’s not sayin’ ’twarn’t here all th’ time. But I had t’ come an’ get it, if you know what I mean!”
“Potiphar, Potiphar!—I wish—you’d instruct me!”

“I been tryin’ t’ instruct you, Miss Lou. I been tryin’ it hard, since you up an’ lost your father. Trouble is, you want t’ be boss o’ a business an’ yet go t’ kindergarten, an’ th’ two don’t just jibe.”

“Go to kindergarten!”

“For that’s where you must start. You got t’ go back an’ be a girl agin, Miss Lou. You got t’ unlearn some thirty years o’ nonsense.”

“What kind of nonsense?”

“Business nonsense. Social nonsense. Nonsense ’bout politics, religion, ethicks. You got t’ go back an’ be simple—simple in your heart. Then p’raps you’ll see . . . Him!”

“But why the necessity for such naïveté?”

“It’s th’ way o’ th’ world. No one knows why. Unless—unless—well, you can’t appreciate a beautiful symphony, can you, Miss Lou, if you sit all through it frettin’ ’bout your pocketbook?”

“But you don’t need to be a child, Potiphar, to appreciate a symphony. What normal child does?”

“No. All th’ same, unless you know your musical A-B-C’s, no matter what th’ piece is, it’s just a lot o’ racket.”

She looked at him appealingly, eyelids showing moisture.

“Yet how discern melody in the din I’ve always known?”
"You ain't lived in jail. You could allus go away."
"I have gone away. It seems I've gone nearly four thousand miles away—"
"Miles ain't enough. You got t' go nineteen hundred an' twenty-eight years back, too!"
"That's a sort of retrograde, isn't it, Potiphar?"
"Retrograde nothin'! It's returnin' t' First Principles."
"Your metaphor's cloudy. But I'm willing to be taught."
"Teachin' you, preachin' at you, won't get you nowheres. You got t' go back an' be born all over—live it by knowin'—"
"I c-can't do it, Potiphar. I—don't know the way!"
"You just be willin' an' th' way'll be showed you. Ain't a person on earth can't profit from that!"
The printer's voice mellowed. "What's more—you ain't got t' do it—all by your lonesome. They's—an awful tender Pair o' Hands—waitin' t' uphold you an' point out th' Path."
"Oh that they were literal Hands, Potiphar Buss!"
"That's just what I'm sayin'. They are lit'ral Hands!"
HER quandary grew worse when Potiphar had left her.

A literal Pair of Hands! Their reality implied an equally literal owner—a concrete personality like Potiphar Buss, Basil Van Dyke, this man of strange rumblings whom she found herself visiting—one who had knowledge of her daily activities, heard her diatribes and petulancies, directed her unfoldment like a wise old professor.

She could not admit such an awesome actuality. A form of terror smote her, that if such a One existed old scores might arise which she must settle with Him—infamies committed in spiritual infancy. Then again, if an actual, literal Christ was in existence, where did He keep Himself—in some grandiose heaven that one must die to reach? She had a presentiment such a heaven was absurd. Yet if not in that heaven, then He must be on earth. But how? In what shape? What profited Truth if His celestial ego came and went unseen of men when His physical projection would overcome the universe and effect the Millennium in mundane affairs?

Emotion overcame her at the prospect of such
THE AWAKENING

presence. And yet she felt ecstasy—a wild satisfac-
tion. She wanted to weep without knowing just why. But of this she was certain: She was
being called to something—something so much vast-
ter and more vital than salvaging a derelict that any
comparison partook of the ludicrous. The Call
had begun with the passing of her father but long
before that she had heard it in her spirit. She had
heard it every time that a mightier chance for
activity offered; she had heard it on occasions when
she knew great resentments, frettings at subordi-
nates, chidings of herself for merely garnering dol-
lars. The essence of a Summons Stupendous was
manifesting—how could she ignore it? The mosaic
of circumstance was forming a pattern. The pat-
tern was lighting with the radiance of a Vision.
To discern its high meaning meant a Heart Un-
afraid. And she must evolve it. Why else had
this happened?

Her queries came tumbling. Why was she re-
ceiving this anointing, so to speak, wrenching her
from her business affairs, setting her down on the
g frontier of the Pacific four thousand miles from the
scene of her activities? Who had been her father?
Who was Potiphar Buss with his contentions and
decoys, his pratings and behaviorisms, his allu-
sions to Spirit as practices in Matter? Why did
he not tell her in so many words—like a corporate
report for a Board of Directors—all that he meant
by communions with the Master, his sidelights on
Identity, his enoblement of Mysticism? Why treat her like an infant in divine fundamentals and rebuke her at once for too brazen maturity? More than all else, if spiritual essences were the substance of mortality, why need they be mentioned in vaporous innuendoes? What bafflements and exasperations might easily be avoided if she could only seize Truth in one potent package, breaking its seals at her indolent desire, wondering at its contents as one unwraps a gift!

She turned it all over, the intolerable riddle, and found that her hunger was increasing with her wonderings.

She knew that her life was a compote of Mysteries, even as her heart—even as every woman's heart—was a jewel-chest for Truth. And yet she had a physical organism too, capable of sitting on a bench, directing a business, undergoing childbirth. But what to do to marry flesh with Spirit? Where get the tool to pry the coffer open? Why, in the thirty-fourth year of her age, should enlightenment be descried as a sun behind a cloud?

The answers were of moment yet they begged the creeds of reason: food for the soul yet as nightshade for the brain. She sought a cue first from her father's transgressions, the decrees of his wealth, her rôle in its fecundities. She thought of her lover, Basil the inscrutable, and her thought of him stirred something that made the cloud less fearsome. Yet Basil was behind her, or so she supposed . . .
The enigma's fine savor held honey and aloes. Something wondrously potent, something fraught with dynamics on a vaster plane than Logic, something compounded of Light in its effulgence and Thought in its enticement, gripped her like a courier invited by Desire—a messenger of transport from the hinterland of Knowledge—wanting to caress her, to lie with her in ecstasy on a bed of the Eternal. But what might be their offspring; children of translucence or monsters of mistakes? How could she say in her bigoted spinsterhood?

She felt like a deer pursued by fierce hounds, wanting to pause by a stream of clear water. Her soul felt an ache to keep some sort of tryst.

So the afternoon passed and the world below quieted. She left the stone seat and moved about the garden, quite empty now where the first dews were falling. Something awaited her, she knew, with mystery in its heart yet with light upon its countenance. The future was a riddle but its answer was forthcoming. When it came it would be sweet, though would Robling be its counterpart?

Time had to determine. She relinquished her stake to the parle pours of circumstance.

Robling's house, she perceived, was built like an L, the wing in its rear running back toward the mountain. The house faced the south with verandas on the west: double-decked verandas, the upper one unroofed and turning the elbow out along the
wing. A luxurious pepper tree grew in this corner and the grounds on three sides were enclosed by a wall.

The chamber allotted her looked down on the garden from the main upper corner. The room's walls were stuccoed, with windows hung in chintz, and a door opened out on the upper piazza. The bed was so placed that a generous section of this piazza was visible around the elbow of the wing where the pepper tree screened it.

The saffron day ended with the sun behind the summit. Quickly it was dark. This lack of twilight startled her and likewise the coolness. Lights came on in rows across the far valley; the house lighted also. She did not meet Robling as she went up to dress. He had gone into town, Sarah Twitch told her. Miss Duncan too, appeared to have vanished.

A curious lethargy laved Louise's body while she dressed—laved more than her body—as though something in the atmosphere touched to her soul, a faint exquisite Something that was scented with roses. She spent a longer time than usual making her toilet, surprised at the rouge her spent face required. Someone, under Sarah's direction, had taken the creases from the frocks she had unpacked. She chose a black faille for that potent first evening. But before she had finished, her qualms were renewed.

What was she there for? What really would
come of the whole wild adventure? Had she crossed a continent, abandoned her business, to discuss with a man their legacy in common? Had she come there to bargain and try to buy him off—to satisfy her whim regarding his character and try to determine the secret of his affluence? Or was she in a plight, come there to make a spectacle of herself, to show herself up for a gypsy of the heart? Why the pallor of her cheeks that made her rouge ghastly? Why the glitter in her eyes—these frettings with her hair?

Many times she sickened and supposed it to be physical. She sought the upper balcony and found the night's stars. Clean and high and cool they were, yet like coryphees of insects—clustering midges on the ceiling of earth—enduring their vigilance to gain through to heaven. How could she face Robling with disgust in her heart? How would he interpret the pronouncements of her glances? For she knew he would get them. What man could miss them?

Was all of this Suggestion—the speakings of her spirit? Was she caught in a web of circumstance, nervously trying to play out her rôle? Or had she arrived at that situation where the wrenchings of romance were not to be gainsaid? She wondered at herself as though she were a stranger: a stranger to her instincts, her plagues and her forebodings. But the mountain night steadied her, though it left her queerly tender.
When dinner was announced she felt herself prepared.

Sybil was similarly consecrated—when they gathered in the dining-room. Sybil wore white, a recalcitrant white, meaning by her costume to contrast with Louise. Her hair was done proudly, to add to her stature, a different "transformation" from that affected in the daytime. Robling was in dinner clothes, Potiphar in shirtsleeves—though he promptly sought his coat when he noted their decorum.

Their host, they perceived, was altered in aspect. White linen and black broadcloth lent him a sombreness that on the whole was pleasing, for under this sobriety was a mine of geniality. His temples seemed powdered; his eyes were translucent—how strange that a cataract had once shaded one of them! He offered brief greetings as his guests came together, not missing however, the reserve between the women. Louise caught his glance as Sarah Twitch placed them. He was studying her approvingly: of that she was certain.

And another thing she knew: the dinner held vitalities. So important were they, that the food served was secondary. She sensed their truths impended by disclosures, but not their extent or bearing on her sojourn. It was all a tasty mystery—making a puzzle, so to speak, each segment of which offered splendid entertainment. She hoped that no
reference would be made to her spinsterhood, and yet, inversely she would welcome that allusion—if it offered a chance for discrediting Sybil. For Sybil must be discredited. On that she was determined.

Robling at one end of his table had Louise at his right and Sybil on his left. Even this placing held opportune significance. Sybil found the contrast intended by her frock. She was vexed, it was plain, that she had so blundered but Robling was amused and took small care to hide it. Beyond Sybil sat Potiphar. Little Miss Twitch ate with them, it developed, reserving the chair that was opposite the printer's. The young Japanese attended to the serving; they spoke to him as Nikko and remarked on his performance.

Two items were of note, commencing that repast. Louise was perplexed by a sixth chair at the table: a beautiful piece at the head of that board. It had a concurrent regality, a silent imperiousness, to its carvings and tapestries, commanding that assemblage and yet remaining empty. Louise was wondering if it were placed so in memory of Donald when silence came suggestively. What was the matter? Even Nikko had paused by the door to the pantries.

George bowed his head . . .

Long, long it had been—since Louise had been present where a meal was thus dignified. No words. Merely silence. And her thoughts misbehaved.
Something came to her like Memory: a fragment of a rite that had naught to do with language. And as graphically she had a second forfeiture of spiritual aloofness.

"Who's th' chair for, Georgie? Potiphar made comment. "Is somebody comin' who ain't got here yet?"

"No," replied Robling, his tone strangely mellow. "The Someone who occupies that chair is here already, Potiphar."

No more than this. Yet Potiphar flushed, even weazoned old baldpate who was rarely so visited.

"I'm . . . sorry, Georgie. I arsk your pardon."

"Why ask mine?" the other said goodnaturedly.

It energized Louise. She interposed quickly—

"How comes it that everyone in this house seems to have a facility for being . . . pleasant? The minute I stepped on these premises I felt an influence that couldn't be averted."

"Your idea of pleasantness, Miss Garland, is the highest form of compliment you could pay my house."

"I don't mean it as a comity."

"Certainly you don't. That's why I'm gratified."

The meal got under way.

"Georgie," said Potiphar, "you've got me won-d'rin'. You just ain't yourself—not th' feller I knowed. Seems like you've had somethin' happen that ain't in no books. Can't you tell us what? Miss Lou wants t' learn."
“You misinterpret, Potiphar!” Louise exclaimed, nettled.

Why did the old rapscallion have to plunge them into a fresh metaphysical discussion before they had even commenced their eating? It seemed like too much descanting for one day; at least the first day and before they were acclimated.

“Well, I’d like t’ know, then.”

Robling smiled openly. “No, Miss Garland—Potiphar doesn’t misinterpret and in your heart you know it.” His voice took the edge from any discourtesy.

“At least, Mr. Robling, your personal affairs are not of my concern.”

“That remains to be seen. Pardon my boldness, but—many of your reactions are inviting my interest. You have an attitude of \textit{waiting} . . . I hope you’ll indulge me.”

“Indulge you? Of course.”

“Very good, then. While we’re waiting for Nikko I’ll make myself clearer. You came here for a purpose, didn’t you, Miss Garland? You understood I might be persuaded to release my stake in your father’s legacy, for your business requires more money to run it. But now that you’ve come here—”

“Mr. Robling—\textit{please}!”

“Be assured, Miss Garland, that nothing said at this table will become public property.”
"But regarding my business, aren't you assuming?"

"Quite the opposite, Miss Garland. I'm going on a premise. But speaking of assumptions—I've reasons for suspecting you're not known to yourself. You're someone else entirely from the person you've accepted. But you haven't yet grasped it. Many of us may live in that predicament constantly—different souls wholly than mankind accepts us."

"I'm afraid I don't follow—excuse my interruption."

"They're pardonable, Miss Garland, in disclosures of such moment. But hear me out. You have a tendency to protest self-evident truths in order to prove their inherent legality—using the term in its literal sense. You have a weakness for taking things given you and denying their existense even as you take them—professing to be one thing and being quite another. I hope I don't offend you."

"How do you know so much about me? May I ask who told you?"

"Our Unseen Guest," said Robling simply.

Something like an arrow, a lethal arrow, pierced the troubled girl's heart. She was hot, she was cold, she was ill, she was demented. Then at once she was sane—a terrible sanity.

"Go on, Mr. Robling," she begged, steady-voiced.

"I perceive you got it. You got it splendidly, Miss Garland. And came through like a thor-
oughbred. Which you are, my dear, make no mistake about it. I pay you no compliment."

"Please continue, I asked you."

"Well, as I was saying—you have a propensity for believing yourself one person while all the time you're quite another—a popular failing which complicates all living. Your thoughts are chaotic, Miss Garland. I'm trying to help you—because that's why you're here."

"I'm here to be helped?"

"You've come here, Miss Garland, to learn your identity, your true errand in life, your work and destination—"

"You mean I'm possessed of a dual identity?"

"Dual comes from duo, meaning two. And our identities are multiple—if you get what I mean—"

"No, I don't get it."

"—which is just why you're sent here. The Forces decreed it—Forces who've had you in their care every moment since your birth; Forces that have never relaxed their vigilance for the fraction of a second; Forces that humankind might dogmatically term your Guardian Angels—"

"There are such things as guardian angels?"

"Please don't be facetious—it's a manner of sacrilege. There are Guardian Angels of the most enduring vigilence, else you would long ago have been abandoned to your . . . degenerations. For you've had them as I've had them—as every person is bound to have them who comes upward to
Reality by the avenue of the senses. You have a propensity for disregarding obvious truths and clinging to erroneous impressions. Won't you please hear me?"

"Of course," Louise apologized. If Sybil Duncan were only not listening! . . .

"Well, to resume. You've come to earth for a delicate mission—no ordinary mission—we'll go into it later. You've come to accomplish an extraordinary work, and have done it to date through celestial agencies—their conduct of your affairs, let's say—and now you approach a Commencement of endeavor, since all that's gone before has been clever preparation. I hope you follow me."

"I'm trying, Mr. Robling."

"Now, Miss Garland, let me go toward my point in a manner like this: Why do you imagine you're Miss Louise Garland, at thirty-three or four the proprietor of two great corporations whose success has been extraordinary?"

He waited a moment but Louise did not comment.

"You think because of your inherent sagacity? May I remind you that there are scores—hundreds—thousands—of persons equally as smart, perhaps smarter, who've not been called to head corporations, make big wealth, direct hundreds of others. Why has it happened that you, however, have arrived at your status along your specific route?"
Again Robling paused. The room was very quiet.

“I’m sure I’ve wondered myself, Mr. Robling.”

“Yes, and I wondered once, in my own case also. Make no mistake about that, Miss Garland. Now listen to this: You marveled today when I spoke about Light. You marveled, I think, that I stared at your head as though I saw something that pleasantly thrilled me. Well, assuredly I did. I was watching your aureole. It’s particularly beautiful.”

“I’ve got an aureole! . . . that you can really see?”

“Nearly everybody has one. That’s what I’ve been told.”

“You think—?”

“Now then, why do you suppose certain persons come into life with stronger light playing about their heads than is seen about the heads of others —light that can only be distinguished by those who have reached that stage of growth where all senses are awakened?”

Nikko brought the bouillon, which delayed any answering. Not until the Japanese boy had withdrawn for the entrée did Louise venture nervously:

“And you can discern such light about people’s heads, Mr. Robling?”

“I wished you’d call me George,” the man requested kindly. “And allow me in turn to call you Louise. People’s last names are so very insignificant. Last names, you see, are but passing
designations. They identify, we'll put it, our most recent descent into the Vale of Experience. But our first names—so aptly called our Christian names—may designate us through many such excursions and are utilized with permanence by the Forces of the Spirit."

"Of course I'll call you George. I'll consider it a privilege."

"Thank you, Miss Louise. Where was I? Oh yes! . . . Why do you think that such a halo surrounds the heads of certain folks though they're born into life without knowledge of their import, what they have to do, where the Road leads?"

"I haven't a notion, never having known that any but Christ and the angels possessed them."

"That's because our Master is so beautifully strong. But angels are lacking them except as artists' designations. Angels are *all* light. Light is their substance. But to answer my question. What would the world be, unless some of us had volunteered for this magnificent work among baffled men and women?"

"What work?" Louise whispered.

Robling was silent. His face seemed transfigured. Softly he murmured—

"We come and go to help them! We give them the benefit of all we've experienced behind the White Veil! We hope to lead them out of the Ignorances of Mortality and show them the scrolls of iridescent Knowledge. I'm not a Theosophist! I'm
not a Spiritualist or Scientist. I'm one of the band that simply knows the Master—one who has the mission to tell men that He *is*! Oh the beauty of that privilege! For it has its own reward.”

Louise was dumbfounded. Here was a man who went further than Potiphar, further than Basil. He dared to declaim—openly, unashamedly, as other men referred to a political alignment—that he had contact with the Messiah—*a living Messiah!*—that he knew Him from some sublimated association having as its basis the projection of Truth—that the Master was real and the earth His abiding-place—that men and women doubters were slated for benefits in that He existed and had such interpreters. What a colossal piece of insolence or a harkening to Splendor! Truly such candor was beyond understanding.

But was it candor merely? What if he were right? What if she were sitting at the table of some personage from realms of Supernal Harmony who had utilized George Robling's body, energized it, rehabilitated it, made it an organ for virile expounding, and was merely confiding his celestial identity? If the Master Himself had walked about Galilee for a month and a fraction following His sacrifice, unrecognized even by his nearest friends and relatives, why mightn't one credit a lesser transmigration?

Here was a boy who had worked as a printer. Here was a father who had stolen for his infant
son and asked no more of life than a Chance. Here was a husband spurned of his wife—a soldier at the wars—a captain of business. In a high house he sat with fine things about him. And yet he talked of an alliance with the Teacher of the Ages, he spoke as a sage who had visited with Trinity. More than all else, he tried to inform her that she too was concerned in the program of the Infinite. What had he said about her aureole—that it was most exquisite? Why had she that radiance bespeaking Divinity without the least knowledge of it till that day? Yes, she was stupefied. And not a little frightened.

"Your assertions, George Robling, make me feel queer. And you scare me when you tell me that I may have some rôle in the Messiah's Second Coming."

"Second Coming!" smiled Robling. "No one can return who's never been away."

She considered this. "But certainly you'll subscribe that He isn't apparent as He once was in Palestine."

"I wouldn't say that unless I were sure of it."

The girl glanced at Potiphar. The printer was staring at their host in transfixed, forgetting to eat, forgetting his environment, forgetting his identity—all but the discourse. Had he not said exactly those words a few weeks before, back in Vermont? And if these two, on opposite sides of America, years and stations apart, made such state-
ments, mightn’t scores, hundreds, even thousands of others up and down the earth, have cause for expressing a similar sentiment? Of course they wouldn’t boast of it up and down the sidewalks. _But couldn’t it happen?_ Mightn’t there be souls here and there so noble of quality, so kindly of tenor, so beautiful of substance, that in terrible privacy they knew the Intercessor? She choked as she faced it, and tears filmed her vision.

“You can’t credit, I suppose,” George Robling went on, “that in a practical modern year of tabloids and air-flights, oil scandals and talking movies, the King of the Nations can be other than a Fancy—a religious Ideal from the morning mists of Error?”

“It isn’t that, but—”

Well, I can’t blame you, any more than He does. But Life in its essence still catalogs its wonders; it still projects its miracles the same as back in Galilee. Which is the greater miracle: that the injection of chemical powers into water made wine at Cana—or that by merely turning a button in New York you can hear a symphony playing in London? Which is most stupendous: that psychic perceptions told the Galilean fishermen where to let down their nets—or that we should let down nets into a world of spiritual distraction and raise the multitude to conceptions of pure living?”

“Why don’t you ask the man in the street? He’d give you an answer quite as valuable as mine.”
"Taking it all in all, Miss Louise, I think he'd give a better. Because his would be honest while yours would be Pose."

"That's rather frank, George Robling."

"Is it any less frank than the way you spoke to Sybil? Oh don't blame Sybil. She hasn't been tattling."

"You—you overheard then?"

"I overheard perhaps—but not as an eavesdropper. However, let that pass. Potiphar, you've had some perceptions not to be scoffed at. Why haven't you done more to help Miss Louise?"

"I've . . . tried, Georgie. But I felt she warn't ready."

"H'm! You say you've tried. Why haven't you succeeded? I think I'll answer for you as a help to Miss Louise. You've had a propensity for letting the truly vital things be mixed to their hurt with Sentimentality. You've been too soft a vessel, Potiphar, to hold strong concepts so that others could go to you and imbibe them to their profit. Miss Louise, on the other hand, has been so hard a vessel that no one could approach her without suffering abrasions. Between the two of you lies the happy medium of Perfect Service. Let's not get into that. We'll return to it later. I want to discuss this question of auras."

"I'm not so much interested," Louise said raggedly, "in the fact of auras, as . . . how you first came by your knowledge that we had them."
“Precisely. And that’s the aid I’m trying to supply.”

“And isn’t it logical that none of us can be a vessel for Truth without some idea of what Truth comprises? There are scores of definitions. Every enthusiast, every fanatic, I’ve ever encountered—and plenty have hounded me begging for funds—has been absolutely certain he had the definition. The poor word’s worn threadbare.”

“The Truth,” said George carefully, as Nikko served the fowl, “is as abstruse as it is simple. It consists of just this: A literal interpretation of divine essences flowing in and through our lives—a physical manifestation, we’ll say, of precepts and concepts that religionists and faddists convert into Dogma. That’s the truth, Louise, and presently I’ll prove it.”

“A physical manifestation!” the thinking girl echoed.

“Exactly. And by that I don’t mean ghostly rappings, psychic visitations, the curdling groans of phantoms, all the horror-ridden charlatanry that makes manifesting hideous. I mean the sweet, pure, undefiled Spirituality for which our Master was the silver-tongued instrument. For aside from all argument, wasn’t He the Great Mentor that expounded the Law?”

“I’ve got to confess,” Louise said ruefully, “that I’m not overly intimate with the Entity you mention, excepting perhaps in conventional aspects.”
"That, Miss Louise, is a libel on yourself. You wouldn't be sitting in that chair this instant, the woman that you are with your gifts and capabilities, if you didn't have a vibrant, workable, splendid acquaintance with the One who loves you most!"

"I'd . . . have to think that over!" the girl answered weakly.

"Why else have you come here, to arrive at this moment? Why should your father have died on his errand? Why at the home of Potiphar Buss? Why need you have responded to Potiphar's telegram—to be with your father and give him your promise—?"

"You—know—about—that?"

"Don't look so at Potiphar. He, too, hasn't tattled—"

"You know what my father did to yours in the Klondyke?"

"Certainly I know it. I've known it ten years."

"Mr. Robling, you're recounting things that no one living knows, but the persons involved. Who told you of that episode up in Alaska?"

"You'll understand later. Other things must come first. Why have you finally arrived in this room for this discourse? By chance, you imagine? There is no such thing! Because you were motivated by the Forces of Good, industriously laboring to perfect your career!"
It was all far above her. Yet was it above her? She gave thought to George Robling as something else again: a truant personality in boyhood, steadfastly working to attain unto Light. And he had attained to it. Into it he had stepped in the fullness of maturity and now she had met him aglow with its beauty.

“You’ll agree,” he said later, as they waited for dessert, “that life holds certain riddles which terrify the ignorant. You’ll perceive, I think, that all up the ages have been those who arose to power and place in society, enlightening the ignorant or guiding them, with no clearly-cut reasons for that election to posterity. They’ve come equally from hovels and palaces, from hamlets and cities, from stations that were humble and others almost insolent in the social dexterities. You’ll admit they’ve arisen? Then why, may I ask? Why but for the purpose of accomplishing some specific task, that the race might benefit?”

What was coming now, the essence of his preaching? They had to wait, however, till Nikko had withdrawn.

“Always,” went on Robling, “if you’ll examine into the careers of those mentors, you’ll note that they came at a psychologically perfect time—Men and Women of the Moment, society terms them—by really stepping forth as in answer to a summons. Humankind acknowledges the fact of the summoning but refutes its true origin. And why,
again? Because humankind refuses to admit Truth as I defined it for you. Hear me, Miss Louise!—all of you hear me!—humankind has an obsession for greeting its saviors with hands outstretched eagerly, but hoisting them on crosses when their messages grow profound.”

They waited, listening thoughtfully.

“We have then, a condition in society where certain of its elements seek Truth only to destroy it. But that makes small difference. Truth is sent and it works its mission—the race is benefited and goes on in such benefit—followed by another riddle. How comes it that certain men and women know of themselves when to appear at the proper moment to do maximum good? Why do certain souls leap ahead of their brethren, radiantly leading as princes of the spirit? Let’s be frank in our apprizements. Why do certain men and women announce themselves in the world’s tense moments as augurers and prophets, assailers and instructors, Moving Fingers writing on the banquet walls of decaying civilizations?”

“Because they hear Someone?” Louise Garland ventured. She asked it on a hazard.

“Exactly!” cried Robling. “Because the Master calls them! . . . not always, however, as religionists assume.”

“You mean conversion, Georgie?” the printer asked faintly.
“I’d say,” put in Sybil, “it’s beyond all of us and we ought to listen while our betters inform us.”

“Don’t dodge the issue, Sybil,” her employer rebuked.

“But I’m meeting it,” she argued.

Robling was thoughtful. However, he continued—

“Certain persons are called by the Master—the keystone and crown of the whole earthly structure—who has never left this world since His resurrection, not for an instant!—who simply changed His rituals of performance, that the light of His radiance might be seen through finer senses. But we won’t go into that. Certain persons are called by Him, I say. And what happens? How, I mean, is the Calling done?”

“We’re listening,” Sybil prompted. She seemed to appropriate George and exhibit him.

“They’re called,” George continued, “by a most peculiar Summons that has to do with Physics.”

“Don’t you mean psychics?” Louise corrected.

“No, I mean Physics—Physics in this sense: that Light of every description is the basis of Matter and things appertaining to Matter are treated by science in concepts of Physics.”

“How are you speaking of Light—symbolically?”

“Literally,” George answered. “Light is a movement of Eternal Benefaction whether you see it
coming from the sun or breaking in your brain as conscious understanding. A sun-beam or an idea—they’re both the same substance. Light is the power of the Godhead, vitalizing creation wherever there is need. But its province is Physics.”

“Go on,” begged Louise. She was trying to follow him, trying it desperately.

“Physics,” he responded, “includes phenomena on the spiritual plane then, as well as the physical. Because it’s the Science of Vitalities! . . . not the play of grown-up boys amid Leyden jars and levers. Physics is the handwritings of Eternal Beneficence recording for men an increasing revealment.”

“But coming back to aureoles—”

“Yes, coming back to aureoles . . . The Call arrives, let’s admit, by Physics. That means, it comes to certain persons through the functioning of Light. It comes by an abrupt consciousness that about their heads clings a warming aura which gradually interpenetrates their conscious understanding. All of which is nonsense to those not ready to receive it but readily discernible to those of proper age.”

“And I’m reaching that period?”

“Please wait, Miss Louise. The Call comes, I say, through a functioning in Physics, the perfect play of Light—literal Light. I might say in passing that the day is at hand when Science will discover that the life germ itself is implanted in the incubus of
every living creature by interpenetration of the ovule by cosmic Light—"

"Have you mentioned that to scientists?"

"Yes, but they're suspecting it. We who have a mission feel a change in composition. We know that we're different. We awaken to the fact that Thoughts are speaking to us that are not of our coinage—that ideas are coming to us as though we'd tapped into some river of knowledge. From them come urges to follow vocations. *It's all the divine voice of a literal Christ, telling us our rôles and that it's time to play them!* Do all of you get that?"

Louise glanced at Potiphar. His eyes were brimming tears . . .

"The fact," went on Robling, "that all upward through history persons have arisen to the insight of conscience, intellectuality, social and religious abuses, the heart cries of their fellows to have mysteries expounded, should be fairly good proof that Chance is no factor in producing such phenomena—"

"I've always thought them the workings of an inferiority complex energized by unhappy environment," Louise argued.

"Was it an inferiority complex that made Christopher Columbus discover a continent? What of men like Washington who lead a group of struggling revolutionists to found a new nation conceived in liberty of doctrine? What of men like
Michael Angelo who bring to humankind inspiration through Art?"

"They're unique, I'll admit."

"What of immortalities like the Master Himself who appear to found vast structures of worship? Would you term them unique?"

"I suppose," said Louise, "there's design in it somewhere. But what if there is, if we're not aware of it?"

"That's just what I'm trying to tell you, Miss Louise: the Voice of the Master makes us aware of it. It shows us the Design like a splendorful tapestry. Nowhere can you find it written that races or individuals must languish in ignorance. Truth, Knowledge, Elucidation, is as free as Salvation. Because it is Salvation! Can't you perceive it?"

All of them were neglecting their pastries, the printer for one had not touched his at all. "I s'pose, Georgie," he said, "that's th' meanin' o' Seek an' Ye Shall Find: Knock an' It Shall Be Opened?"

"Of course it is, Potiphar! Mankind is here on the earth, a created species, for no other reason than to Seek, and Knock and acquire Education. It's his province and his destiny. That's why so many poor souls wallow in a Slough of Despondency. They think the earth's a variety of paradise where everything should be perfect and when trouble comes they arraign the Creator. I heard a man who'd lost his wife say the other day that he'd thrown all his belief in God and immortality out
of the window of his life because 'God had taken' the woman he worshipped. God hadn’t taken her anymore than I’d taken her. That man had to learn to walk of himself without his wife to lean on: that’s what he needed to teach him self-reliance. For the earth is a school, it isn’t a campus. Now where was I? Let’s see . . . ?”

“You were discussing how the great souls of history had come and seen and conquered——”

“Oh yes—but come and seen and conquered what?”

“Ign’rance, Georgie?”

“More than that, Potiphar: superstition, poverty, the cloyings of pride and the clutchings of greed. They’ve come manifesting in earthly organisms to save humankind for a beauteous purpose. But what purpose? Why save the race at all? And from what? The hell of Dante?—there is no such absurdity. Say rather, the Path of Increasing Error leading far, far down to identity extinction.”

“Extinction!” Louise echoed.

“The Judgment Day of ten thousand sunrises. Oh if Man could only understand that God doesn’t judge him—that he judges himself and selects his own sentence!”

“That’s novel,” said Louise.

“But the truest part of Truth.”

“Which doesn’t leave much room for a Divine Intercessor.”

“On the contrary, Louise—the Terrible Con-
trary! Only we mustn’t think of that Intercessor as counsel for the defense, arguing for souls in some celestial courtroom. He intercedes to save Man from himself by being the Ideal through which captives liberate themselves. They avoid eternal penalties by correcting their behavior. The intercession, as it were, takes place before the judging.”

George ate awhile in silence, his profile downcast. And his woman-guest beside him was assailed by strange weakness. Not for her host, for vaguely he alarmed her. Rather at her future, her proneness to blunder, striving to climb with no rungs to her ladder.

“History, my friends,” their informant concluded, “is replete with examples of men and women born in earth’s slums, whether city or country. Upward they’ve struggled through poverty and heartbreak. They’ve come to know the gratifications of attainment and the beauties of victory over disease, animal appetites, the hordes that bow to Mammon. They’ve climbed up and out of degrading circumstance and found the high paths on Plateaus of Opportunity—to serve their fellows—to respond to the fiats of their Commanding Officer who is conducting His campaign in this generation against error of perception of spiritual truth. And wherever those folk have missed those High Paths, they’ve encountered an insufferable personal dissatisfaction. Wherever they’ve ignored the tocsin of their destinies, or refused to bend eagerly to the
work for which they volunteered before coming into flesh, they’re hounded by packs of angers and alarms. They don’t always grasp just why they’re tormented. But something’s all wrong and inwardly they know it. Success has brought no happiness. Its strain has worked rebellion. And what is their rebellion? Whence comes their resentment?” He looked toward Louise.

“A score of causes might contribute to it,” she defended.

“Contribute to it, yes. But the basic principle underlying their revolt is the divinity within them impelling them to realize that they made a Pact with Him before coming into life! There’s no escaping from it. They can’t run away for there’s nowhere to run. And failing to harken, calamity gets them, for the overthrow the balance of Things as They are Written.”

“You’re insinuating that I made a pact with Him?” Louise exclaimed amazed. “What for? To do what?”

“You’ll recognize it presently: there’s no way to help it. You’ll awake to your promise—your compact with your Chief. And no man or woman, no matter who or where, but hears that Call plainly when the moment is propitious. No matter how humble, no matter how ignorant—each and every one of them has a carefully-mapped-out destiny—that in turn is aligned with the Proposal Eternal: that the race shall be elevated though it requires a
trillion existences to make each one of them a musician in the Orchestra of the Spheres."

It was quiet about that table when Robling had finished.

"You're—very sure then," Louise whispered faintly, "of survival—after death?"

"My dear Miss Louise, you've probably died a hundred physical deaths, yet this present night finds you a guest at my board."

"I . . . never heard anything like this before. Is it some new kind of religious belief?"

"It's older than the mountain on which we're now sitting. Nothing once created can ever be destroyed! It may alter its form but extinction is impossible, except it's self-wrought. That's the Crux of the Cosmos, . . . the Golgotha of Mortality! What was it the Master kept repeating to the multitude: 'Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Light'? That has a double meaning. Some harassed souls have to become literal children a thousand times before they're equipped to go to the Godhead."

George pushed back his chair and threw down his napkin.

To what had she listened? Louise felt distress. She resented certain things which Robling had expounded. She thought for a time she resented George Robling. She did not interpret the cause
of that resentment: that it had its basis mostly in fright—which in turn had its basis in spiritual ignorance. Some superstition was in it too—and the fact that these vitalities had been cast at her so suddenly.

But more than all else, she was balked by that Pact. What Pact? Where and when had she made it? What could it encompass?

She had heard of this Arbiter of spiritual confusions, seen replicas of His torment on crucifixes, known of His words when statesmen—so called—would align Him with their theories. She had observed Humanity's reverence for Him, the hold He had gained on popular credulity. All this and more. In her heart of hearts she knew that He was. But how, or where, or what had become of Him since the time of his Palestinian apprehension for the race, was a page from a breviary not for explanation on the mortal side of death.

She was curious, yes—as all men are curious. But to think of Him as a personage still, who might enter a room, sit in a chair, fondle a child, or rebuke with a horsewhip a Wall Street speculator who had tricked men of their savings, was something so terrific that her mortal brain revolted.

It would alter her life if she admitted Him as a concrete entity—someone who might actually be confronted in some far lonely place, or brought into contact with her problems of the present. How
could she succeed in the commercial conflict if always she were handicapped by His milk-and-water precepts? It abashed and appalled her. She wanted to flee.

Had she made this western trip then, as some sort of blind religious pilgrimage? If Robling were wrong, however . . . if the Mentor of the Century were little more than a fairy caliph stalking the pages of religious romance, why her queer upset at mention of a Pact? Why mention a Pact? Why not any of a score of interlocking relationships equally as vital but far less distressing in effect on her affairs?

This was her problem and the crux of her dilemma. Whatever lay around the road-bend of circumstance, nevertheless one beacon shone clearly: the matters of doubt with which she had labored—which had even gone so far as making her refuse a funeral to her father—were as challenging obstacles set along the trek of an earthly Crusade, meaning to free a Holy Sepulchre of changing ideals from infidel hosts of personal preferences. That she must admit and no argument about it.

Well, she made that admission and it brought her some comfort. But that was not the end: it was only the beginning.

She toyed with her napkin and sought relief in humor. "Hard-Boiled Louise," as many people knew her, sitting on a Hollywood mountaintop and growing upset over stupid metaphysics—what a
spectacle to laugh at! She did laugh. Nervously. Yet her laugh held no mirth.

Was she sacrificing her cool-brained balance that had always been her armor, for this fancy ethical knowledge? Was this man's benignant and prolific mentality persuading her into the quicksands of Mysticism and labeling his beguilement the heartcry of the Spirit? On the other hand, what extraneous senses might she have lying dormant, proving his solutions to her doubtings, answering queries that all men asked when corpses stretched before them?

Once in Montana a native had called her attention to a splendid eagle afar on a crag. Twenty miles distant, he had told her the bird was, and she had taxed her vision striving to discern him. Lo, the eagle had been there, for he later took wing. But had he been of fault for her failure of vision? Then that other anecdote coming out of Africa: of the cruelly tortured missionary made to recant that in England were dogs that protected weak sheep. Were those negroes to blame for their barbarous incredulity, holding that dogs were the scourges of their flocks? When he told them of sleds employed on Arctic wastes, was the tortured one a fool in that somewhere was traction that moved without wheels? Because one was ignorant, did that deny Knowledge? And yet she needed help, a pitiful lot of it, before her plight could be deciphered.
Robling as a character defied her analysis: that she now perceived. He had coffers of Wisdom in maturity's treasure-house, kept in abeyance for the buying of souls. Continuing the metaphor interrogatively, was he seeking to acquire her as he had purchased others: Sybil in point, for some coppers of vibrations? Did he threaten abduction if Louise was not for sale?

It awed as it intrigued her.

Sybil as a sister in banditage, perhaps had sensed the price that he might offer for another. But though cheaply bought herself, did Sybil know something more vital in the circumstance: that Robling as a buyer might not descend to bargaining? He procured for a Croesus, this baffling lord chamberlain. Or rather, his searchings were as one who hunts rare pearls to match them of Flesh for the neck of a Beloved. Her Pact, if there was one and he had a hand in it, carried the essence of displaying to him her values, a vestal volunteering for a place in that exhibit.

Potiphar knew it, had gotten it at once—hence his expression down at the Ambassador. But Potiphar discerned an item in addition: Louise was not like Sybil, a concubine by temperament. A vestal votary, possibly. But not for a harem of mortal satisfactions.

She had to be seized by abductors of Princesses. Her seduction must be wrought by amours of Destiny.
The meal she had dreaded was over, regardless. The demerited Sybil was first to arise. She went toward the library where coffee would be served.

"I think," Louise faltered, "I'll . . . ask to be excused. I may join you later."

"I understand," Robling said, smiling, as a wise old professor might condone with a colleague younger in his tutoring.

She started for her room.

In the hall she faced Sybil.

"Well?" said the secretary.

"Well?" Louise answered.

"Do you know any more than you did this afternoon?"
CHAPTER V

SYBIL was matched in love of Robling by something equally as potent in her life: a desire to serve him that was nearly a mania. The girl was not shallow; instead she had a devil—a demon of mutiny that caromed within her heart whenever danger threatened to him whom she adored.

Born of poor but respectable parents in a small midwestern city, she was made to fetch and carry till her family’s burdens irked her. Out of the ruck of it, this had resulted: she knew in her soul that life was a riddle, that her rôle in it was vague, that its tumults could be cruel, that calamities were real, and that whenever people proposed projects to her, they had their basis in vehement Greed.

Sybil had begun working for Robling under conditions and perceptions that shaped up to her as monstrous. Her father had departed and her mother had been ailing. Brothers and sisters had gone their several ways. She had known poverty, hunger, illness and heartbreak. She admitted that her mother had due need of sympathy but something within the daughter was prone to give too much. What more natural, with them needing funds in common, than for the daughter to enter
on some career in business. She had gone to Chicago.

On arriving in Chicago she had found employment readily. Not till she came to a place where she realized the value of physical endowments in a woman's progress did she gain to a place of comfort in sustainment. Her brothers as men had shown small thought for women: her sisters were the type who cared for themselves. Adrift Sybil was, in a manner of speaking, and she took the days lazily, not concerned with her future.

Never was it whispered that she was immoral. She was on the whole complaisant, taking her game without minding the fowler, lacking in courage for open indiscretion. She had some bad complexes which misfortune abetted. She visioned herself in risqué situations. She saw herself constantly dwelling in harems. Dreams and delusions added to her troubles till she came to the moment when her wits needed whetting.

She met up with Robling.

She met him in an office where the man came for work. Wanting to learn draftsmanship he was, being tired of the printer's trade. He was poor then—a nondescript—wifeless and morose. Sybil took him home to the place where she boarded. She got him a chamber and became his foster-mother.

Being his Aspasia was something beyond her—or rather, it appalled her because of inhibitions. Be-
sides, he was indifferent. She gave of herself in other ways, however. She attended to his clothes and bought him small dainties. When his socks needed darning, she accomplished it somehow—for a needle confused her—she always pricked her fingers . . .

They knew but one night of self-provocation. Robling had been drinking and his reason was befogged. She got him home somehow and into his bed. There she tried to undress him. She managed it badly. She turned down his light but he wanted her to stay. She stayed not unwillingly. She got her kimono and kicked off her shoes. The night went on and on . . . with the door bolted on the inside . . . the chamber lamp extinguished . . .

Gray morning dawned, to find the man angered. He did not revile her; he saved that for himself. Sybil, on the other hand, did not insist he marry her. But she could not meet his eyes for almost a fortnight.

Then came Armageddon.

On the eve of his departure, she made him a proposal. He needed a loved one at home to remember, “to cheer and sustain him” was her manner of phrasing it. If he returned, then would be time to reconsider their relations. If he died in France—well, she would “have her memories.” And she wanted her “memories.” They thrilled as they invited her. She offered vague talkings about “strengthening his courage.” Just how his spirit
would be strengthened by a splurge in indiscretion, she did not reason out. She wasn’t good at reasoning.

Robling, however, had laughed somewhat wryly. She had not attained to a “transformation” in those days and her hair was dispirited—a brand of straw yellow. It often came down and made her look wanton. It was down at the moment.

“You’re a good pal, Syb,” he had said in man’s callousness, “but the risks I’m confronting make me want to keep clean. As for you, you’re a kid. You’ll always be, I’m thinking.”

“You weren’t so particular that night you were drunk.”

“Being drunk is one thing. Deliberately playing hijinks is something not so . . . joyful.”

“You think I’m plain bad?”

“You’re the opposite of bad, that’s why you’re so naïve.”

“I . . . see. You don’t want me.”

“I’ll always want you, Syb—in a manner of speaking. But I’m thinking of your future. Other men might come and some things in life should be treated like razors: the path to an artery starts with a scratch.”

Next day he entrained.

During the war she had “kept herself inviolate”—the term was her own—and sidestepped temptations that were secretly welcomed. Men “leered” at her on trolleys, she said, and “followed” her when
the city's streets were darkened. She called herself "insulted" a dozen times a week. When Robling returned, his eyes showed compassion.

"Poor kid!" was his greeting, "so you've had your war, too?"

"Well, I've won it," she answered. "Now why need we wait?"

"Wait?" He seemed puzzled. Her loyalty dismayed him.

"You owe it to me," she quavered just once.

He debated this point. How much did he owe her?

"Perhaps," he said kindly. "But the cards aren't that way. I'm going into business—a firm of my own."

She saw he was changed and laid it to his injuries. Having heart for those injuries she went on with her spinsterhood.

"What sort of business?" She bit back emotion.

"An idea, Sybil, that hit me in France. Building skyscrapers on cooperative basis."

"Skyscrapers? Goodness, where'll you get the money?"

"The money will come. You see if it doesn't."

The money had come, uncanny of delivery. It seemed as though he had acquired a second sight in France to read the future rightly.

So it had gone and Sybil was still with him. She had conquered stenography purposely to be his sec-
retary. She had seen him succeed with frantic misgivings—and she kept near him constantly, missing no chance to proclaim her affection. Thus the years had passed—twelve of them—with George Robling growing in maturity and affluence. She too had matured, at least in her body. She spryed herself in dress, she bought a "transformation." But always in her heart she was the adolescent bride. Always she saw herself performing her surrender—and at times she bit her fingers in the pain of self-indulgence. Self-indulgence, that is, in a sense of the proprieties.

Small wonder then, she resented Louise. The supple, forceful, keen-witted girl with her nonchalant gaze and double-edged tongue—ten years the younger and athrob with vitality—was someone to be dreaded aside from her prestige. Sybil felt instinctively that action was necessary. Robling "owed it" to her—to award her long loyalty. She had a presentiment that such action should be forced. How could he deny her? She rumpled her bed as she thought of technique.

Robling was hers. On that point she was firm. If loyalty were wasted, what then of compromise? For a long time she lay—with Louise on the opposite side of the wall—and imagined a melodramatic sequence in which she crept stealthily to George Robling's room and held a bright knife at the point of his throat.
“Make your choice or die!” she cried in ultimatim. Thereat she sobbed, and sobbing she slumbered.

She had been in the library after dinner that night, however, when Potiphar came in with Robling behind him.

“Georgie,” said the printer, “you got t’ give full credit t’ Miss Lou. You sprung a lot on her she didn’t understand, but she didn’t fight you much—not as I expected.”

“I know, Potiphar.”

“An’ she ain’t gone abovestairs ’cause she’s got a headache. Not a headache in her head.”

“I’m aware of that as well.”

“She had a hard time back east with her folks; her pa warn’t so careful how he treated her in girlhood. She makes me think o’ that piece I read in a paper—’bout th’ mother with six kids who buried all but one. That one fell sick an’ she got down an’ prayed. ‘Take th’ last one, Lord,’ says she. An’ th’ neighbors was scandalized. They called her right wicked. An’ th’ mother says, ‘No, when this last one’s took, I’ll know how t’ be happy.’”

“Food for thought, Potiphar, but what’s the application?”

The printer smiled dubiously, fingering his pipe.

“Miss Lou’s mothered plenty o’ . . . ideals . . . that have died on her, Georgie—so many, in fact, that she can’t find their graves. But they’s one ideal
left that she’s still got t’ bury—that folks are about
her t’ make her important. When that’s fin’lly
over, she’ll be a real female.”

“Potiphar, you’re wrong for once in your life.
That’s not an ideal. It’s a type of self-pity.”

“Well, mebbe, mebbe.”

“Louise has her cue for her rôle in creation, but
only she can take it. That’s a strange thing Poti­
phar. All the world’s a stage but even the play’s
directors have a part in the performance.”

“Georgie,” cried Potiphar, “just when did you
take yours? What was it waked you up an’ . . .
showed you your . . . destiny?”

Robling was thoughtful. He picked up a cala­
bash pipe and filled it.

“Yes, when did I?” he answered, cogitating.

“Miss Sybil here mentioned you sort o’ seemed
changed when you come back fr’m war. Was you
shell-shocked or somethin’?”

“No, not exactly shell-shocked.”

Robling lighted the pipe and sat down.

“You see, Potiphar, . . . many things happen
throughout a man’s life that lead him to think he
may have a . . . destiny. Some men get it in
boyhood. Some wait for marriage to bring it out
inversely. Others . . . well, it takes something
like a ministration of divinity to make us aware of
it.”

“I—I don’t choose t’ get you.”

“Sybil,” asked Robling, “isn’t there something
you can do elsewhere while Mr. Buss and I discuss our . . . adventures?” His voice was quite kindly.

“Perhaps so,” said Sybil. But she sent the old printer a glance of revolt. Tears were in her eyes too, but anger in her glance. Who were these people to have prior claim on Robling? She went up the stairs and was not seen thereafter.

“I feel sorry for Sybil,” her employer said softly.

“What you got her for, Georgie? She ain’t quite th’ type I’d expect t’ find you livin’ with—seein’ you ain’t married.”

“Living with her, Potiphar?”

“You’re doin’ that, ain’t you?”

Robling laughed amusedly. Then as quickly he sobered. “No,” he responded, “she’s living in my house. There’s quite a bit of difference. All the same, . . . I think a lot of Sybil. She’s true blue in her heart, though I grant you it’s a small one.”

“I didn’t mean nonsense or—anything soiled. You havin’ th’ tough break your first wife give you—”

“I’m not exercised, Pott, at your innuendo. It’s something else than that.”

“What else, Georgie? I arsk you as a father.”

“Sybil never will awaken. She lacks the . . . ingredients. Do you know what I mean? I refer to this life. When she wants a thing she gets it. That classifies her cosmically.”

“She ain’t got you yet,” the little printer argued.

“No, perhaps not. I was speaking of Policy.
And she won't get me, Pott. I'm . . . too close to the end."

"You're what?"

Silence came fraughtly . . .

"Georgie—you can't be—tellin' me—"

"Oh that's all right, Potiphar. Let's confine ourselves to Sybil. She's a bundle of nerves—a bundle of repressions—a very young soul that hasn't made much progress. Her development lacks force. But aside from all that, there's the question of identities. She isn't my caste, if you get what I mean."

"No, I don't get it."

"Well, put it this way: She and I play different parts in the drama of creation. She's one of the coryphees, learning her steps. I'm backing the show but with no eye for chorus girls."

"She's . . . anything but a chorus girl, Georgie."

"Her legs may be hidden by hoop-skirts, Potiphar. But figuratively speaking they're not so unsightly."

Potiphar was pensive.

"Sybil needs helping," Robling went on, "—a frightful lot of helping. I feel that she should get it. She tries to dance to discords and her ballet work is faulty. Unless you work to rhythm your steps will be grotesque—that's a platitude, I think."

"She seems to love you," the printer maintained.

"Vibrations, Potiphar, shouldn't be indicted. Strike certain chords on a piano and a dozen stringed instruments will thrill in response. That's
not saying they’re pianos or that pianos as mechanisms should thereby hold conceit. It’s a natural requisite of the laws controlling harmony.”

Potiphar nodded . . .

“What I’m telling you,” Robling added, “is that here and there are persons aware of their destinies and exactly why they have them. Others are traveling let’s say, for the Journey—they can loiter and learn and nothing much happens.”

Neither man heard the soft step on the stair. Louise was coming down, pausing to discover if she were intruding.

“Well, that fetches us t’ my first question, Georgie. What was it revealed you warn’t . . . like th’ rest o’ us?”

Robling blew pipesmoke out in a funnel. At length he cleared his voice.

“Potiphar,” he said, “I had an experience, lying in that shell-hole.”

“What shell-hole, Georgie?”

“You know what shell-hole. I told you about it in your room this afternoon. For three days and nights the Big Push kept up. I was shot in the foot, the leg and the chest. Then a shell dug a hole as though for my protection. I actually believe that it was for my protection. But the battle was hot and I had to have shelter. I got to it somehow and slept like a dead man. Yes, I did. Regardless of the tumult I slept like a baby.”

“Why didn’t you bleed t’ death?”
“I’ve told you the answer: because I had a mission. I rather think it’s been proven. When I came from my exhaustion, I found it was night. But the whizz-bangs were banging and the star shells were exploding, lighting the terrain with the brilliance of daylight. The vicinity was chaos. Many sights greeted me not mentioned in despatches.”

“What sort o’ sights, Georgie?”

“Well, out of my pit-wall a human hand was thrusting. I crawled up and touched it and it pulled from the gravel—”

“But why touch it, Georgie?”

“On the chance it belonged to someone who was smothering. Then I heard groans. Out in the open, four bodies were sprawled. I went out and got them—”

“Wounded like you was—shot through th’ lungs—you brought in four men?”

“One at a time, Potiphar. It took me half an hour.”

“Where’d you get th’ strength?”

“I got it, Pott, from a source I can’t talk about. But worming my way through that ghastly débris I—I—saw—or rather, I met—well, the battlefields of Europe were resplendent with tales of Visitations, Potiphar. And Help was abroad on that battlefield that night—Help for what I tried when Help was needed sorely. Someone—gave me a hand—with those four buddies—Potiphar. Don’t
ask me how 'twas done, but we managed it to­
gether.”

“Someone!”

“Someone, Potiphar, Whom shrapnel couldn’t
mangle. Need I say more? I don’t ask that you
believe it.”

“Georgie!”

“Get that rightly, Potiphar. But the extraor­
dinary aftermath was: each one of the four lived to
come home and accomplish an equally extraor­
dinary service for Whoever gave me aid in doing
what I did. If I told you their names it would
stun you, old friend.”

Potiphar’s eyes were like drill holes in his skull.
His breathing was belaboured, as though his lungs
hurt him.

“You had personal help, Georgie, from—”

“You didn’t hear me mention any names. But
I know things, Potiphar, that no man or men may
question with impunity. When men ask of Life if
there’s a Personified Beneficence, mark them as souls
who’ve lived to themselves. Many a Legion mem­
ber right here in America this evening knows that
all wars aren’t fought on a battlefield. Some wars
are fought in the abject depths of a man’s riven
spirit, seeking to credit the presentments of events
under gun-fire.”

Potiphar Buss was a small, hairless waxworks.

“The truth of Immortality, Potiphar, is epi­
tomized in lodestone. It magnetizes steel and does
other strange things. There's another type of lodestone not taken from quarries. It's cut from the hearts of men with sealed lips."

This was deep, deep—but the printer got it.

"When a man makes a graven image and bows down to it, he attracts about him worshippers of similar inclusions—especially the image of Selfishness, Potiphar. But worshipping Truth, he opens the universe—and likewise the fountains of Eternal Benefaction. His soul is a shrine where the vestal fire is Love. Give him a loaf and he shares it with his brother. Give him a life and in sharing, he preserves it. That's all that I can tell you. The rest is not for record."

Louise came down the stairs. To go back was petty and marked her for an eavesdropper.

"Mr. Robling," she said, "I heard you. I'm... sorry."

George got to his feet.

"You're sorry for what? I don't understand."

"You said something to Potiphar that perhaps may change my life." The woman's face was hectic.

"Then why should you feel sorry?"

"I'm pilfering something, by staying in this house."

"Pilfering, Miss Garland?"

"Once when I was a little girl, I stole some sweets belonging to a playmate. I thought myself clever,
the way that I did it. But when I came to eat them, they made me ghastly ill. I suffered several days yet no one knew the reason.”

“Well?”

“Had I earned my own candy it would never have happened. Always I’ve believed it. I... believe it even now.”

The three of them sat down.

“Mr. Robling,” she continued, “if you had your life to go back and live over again, would you let yourself be born a hapless, humble nondescript?”

Robling frowned slightly—that Louise should ask the question. “If I had my life to go back and live over again,” he answered slowly, “I’d have myself born whatever I was meant for.”

“You’re begging my question.”

“On the contrary, Miss Louise, I’m answering it most bluntly. I know what you mean—I get it by thought.”

“You—get it—by—thought!”

“Life,” said Robling thoughtfully, “is only a sojourn, a visit, in a room. That room may be in a hovel or it may be in a palace. Going in and out of a room doesn’t alter our characters. When I’ve said that, I’ve given you the Decalog. We come and we go—and we profit as we may. We come and we go—and we serve as we will. Sorrow and joy are the appointments of that room. And when we go out, this is all we recall of it—all that we recall of any room: the way it was lighted! No more
and no less. Think of that well, and remember I’ve said it.”

“You’re very wise, aren’t you?” the woman said faintly.

“No, merely honest,” the other responded.

“Honest! What’s honesty?”

“The capacity, Miss Louise, for accurate thinking—and speaking what we’ve thought—or acting it as necessary.”

“Don’t you mean candor?”

“No—candor is the vessel into which we dump our complexes.”

A bell rang somewhere deeper in the house. Nikko appeared and went to the front door.

“Does a Miss Louise Garland live here?” they heard someone ask. “Telegram for her—Western Union.”

“A telegram for me!” the woman cried amazed.

Nikko brought the book and she signed for it blankly. She told the boy to wait. How could anyone know she had come to this house? She tore open the envelop.

“No bad news?” asked Robling.

“I—can’t—say. Maybe!”

This was the message—

Chicago, Sept 20.

Flying Los Angeles Jack Trent’s plane Stop Arriving Clover Field two o’clock Sunday Stop Important business bearing on Ackermann Stop
Don’t want to worry you but give no interviews to papers Stop Love till I see you

BASIL VAN DYKE

“I’m glad,” said Robling, staring at his calabash. “You’re glad of what?” “That Van is headed west.” “How do you know? Who told you? And why call him Van? You can’t possibly know Basil!” “Not know him? Why not? My dear Louise, don’t try to question the Cosmic Lodestone. The End will be the End. What’s written is Written!”
"I feel that I'm boring you," Robling apologized. "There's always a saturation point in this sort of thing."

"You're far from boring," Louise assured him.

"But on one like yourself, addressed by fancies of a wholly new order, the effect must be fatigue. Which usually results in malicious skepticism."

"Fancies!" she echoed. "You call them that?"

"Isn't that what you think them? You've termed yourself a Materialist."

"I only do that because I've never encountered anyone capable of convincing me there's more profit in being a metaphysician."

"An' you've got t' remember you've started somethin', Georgie," the printer interposed, "when you sit a dozen feet fr'm a woman and practick'ly tell her what she's got in a tellygram."

"Granted," Robling laughed. "But consider my angle. I mustn't be didactic."

"You're not didactic," Louise corrected, "you're uncomfortably mystic. Tell me . . . in the case of this wire . . . do you come by your knowledge by some antic of Thought?"
"Thinking, I submit, isn’t what folks assume. It isn’t pensive imagining; neither is it reasoning. True reasoning would be objective creating, and Man as a phenomenon isn’t a creator so much as an instrument, an expedient, a mortal transformer for transcendent currents."

"Many of the world’s greatest thinkers might hurl bottles at you for that!"

"What I mean is this: Thinking, by and large, is a receiving of billions upon billions of sublimated light granules from the sun of Universal Intelligence, impacting on brain cells, demanding a housing, seeking conversion into the proper vibratory velocity for practical employment—not unlike the process of an electric current in a common Transformer. Great Thinkers are merely easy receivers; their perceptions are sensitized to tune in on the Absolute."

"The Absolute!"

"Well, the accumulated storage of all the phases of Truth that have been converted into human ideas and served the race at the behest of Love—served it, I mean, in the sense of endowing it with methods for survival and spiritual ennoblement."

"All of which is applicable just how, in your reading of my telegram? Some sort of Mental Telepathy?"

"Yes and no," he responded. "The soul to soul transmission of ideas as in Telepathy is inten-
tional, puissant, an attuning of equipments. What happened in your case was this: as you ran through your message I felt the mental impact of a thought-projection—that an airplane with two persons in its cabin was winging toward us somewhere. And along with that premonition went the name of a man, Basil Van Dyke, fairly throbbing at me, one idea superimposed over the other. It was reasonable to conclude therefore, that his arrival was imminent."

"Reasonable perhaps," Louise said nervously, "but I still don't grasp why those impressions should reach you contiguously with my reading of the telegram. Why not before?"

"Because you gave a galvanism to those impressions by the sudden stress of your alarm and worry, stepping them up, as it were, diffusing them radiantly so I could discern them—elemental radio in perfect expression. Remember I make no claim to having read your wire literally, else why should I ask if it held bad news?"

The girl was uncertain. She stared at the sheet still damp from the letter-press. Finally she asked:

"And do you get any . . . mental impressions . . . explaining Basil's errand . . . what particular emergency is bringing him by plane?"

"I think Van's bringing you news of extraordinary tenor. I get the presentiment it has something to do with saving you from trouble."
"How and when did you two get acquainted?"

"Van will tell you that, as circumstances order it. But don't you see faintly what I first tried to show you—that a splendorful mosaic is falling into pattern?"

Louise glanced at Potiphar. The printer was doleful.

"I wish, Georgie," said he, "that I'd paid more attention t' cultivatin' them powers. They'd saved me lots o' scrapes."

"They're not 'powers', Potiphar—unless you're also willing to consider your five physical senses as 'powers'. They're as natural as feeling, or circulation of the blood. Humankind must be patiently instructed out of its obsession that there are any such things as supernatural phenomena. How stupid to say that anything is above Nature, or opposed to it, simply because it's not fully understood—that the mental senses belong in a world of disembodied spirits—that anything above the Physical Ordinary is charlatanry, old wives' whisperings or some sort of witchcraft. The most peculiar people I know in this country are the Spiritualists, who give a religious slant to endowments that belong to the race as naturally as knowing how to walk or appreciating music."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Louise approved.

"Of course it's natural to give a religious cloak to things that awe until they're understood. The savage trips over a tree root and immediately wor-
ships the god in the tree that must have had the power to cast him on his face. The same thing's in process today among all those cult faddists who've been cast on their faces by mental or natural phenomena—that only need analysis and practice to make common goods. But you can't make adepts out of neophytes in a day, and the same thing goes for the whole human race. Even as an infant you had to acquire skill in using your five physical senses or you got some bad bumps. An infant might as well call an adult supernatural because an adult is skilled in his faculties."

"Then you contend, as I get it, that there are mental senses as well as physical senses?"

"Exactly—but those sublimated perceptions, for the man in the street, have become so embalmed under layers of hate, greed, appetites and lusts, that only in exceptional cases do they function. And instead of realizing that every man has a duty to himself to cultivate them, humankind looks upon the exceptional case and cries: 'Here's a faddist, a crank, who would try to have us think he has contacts with Beyond!' And they consign him to the stake of facetious castigation. Sometimes they do worse. I saw a newspaper account of an occultists' convention the other day so derisive that it was pitiful—not that the occultists needed any sympathy but that a great newspaper should assume so gullibly that they were fakirs or crackbrains because their doctrines partook of the weird."
"All the same, claiming to get in talkable touch with departed personalities—as most occult students do whom I've met—is weird."

"No more weird than being here in Beverly Hills and getting in 'talkable touch' with someone in New York by telephone. You could communicate intelligently and establish their existence without seeing or touching them, or thinking it necessary for scientists to check up on them. Furthermore, wouldn't it be absurd to start a cult or denomination because the mechanics of telephony aren't generally understood?"

"But they are understood!"

"I submit there isn't one telephone user in ten thousand who knows how a voice is transferred across a wire. You see, Death isn't a change in identity, my dear. It's a change in the velocity of mortal environment. The best analogy I know of is atmospheres."

Whereupon he tried to explain the science of vibration. But a blurred phantasmagora of sights, sounds, preachments and cosmic heraldry, grew in Louise's brain and finally she stopped him. She excused herself for bed. To relieve her head's strumming she went out on her balcony.

The night air was cool and brought back her balance. The plain was now radiant, spreading below her. Vast smears of iridescent sparkles greeted her: an infinite jewel-chest of scintillating dia-
monds. Yet even as she watched, the simile altered. She saw the valley too as a meshwork of frantic fireflies caught under a gauze of etheric dark.

Bright, tawdry glintings, some of them were—or delicate tracings across miles of incandescence. Yet produced by man's cleverness, the handiwork of Science. Still, that was not all; she perceived something more in that copious effulgence. Lamps of Eternal Beneficence were burning across the earth's face too, calling man's attention to the curdle of his blindness until Light were given him.

Why, she thought suddenly, should light have been produced—any kind of light? Take the sun from the sky, make of man something that moved without visual perception, and how could Creation serve a practical purpose—any purpose whatever? Had that eagle been real for her before she discerned him? Were unseen things of import on any plane of being? What mystery was greater, what endowment more commiserate? Whence arrived Light and without it what was? Thoughts and projections, how else could they function? When mankind had excavated and unburied the Eternal, what would he uncover but the flicker of a candle?

Robling's mention of Light in its mood fructifying ovules was apparent then, terrifically, though he spoke from a wisdom not yet released . . .

She undressed herself finally and got into bed. Her brain was in stupor and immediately she slept. Later she wondered that this should have happened.
She ought to have lain awake meditating, laying her plans, considering the trend of the evening's revelations. But Nature had its inning and left her to the morrow.

Yet not quite the morrow.

Between half-past two and three o'clock it was, that she came back to consciousness with light in her room. It frightened her vaguely at first till she saw it was moonlight. The moon had come up late, playing havoc with the stars. The clear California night, rarified of texture when viewed at that height, held a crystalline beauty that was made up of tears. Emotion was in it: the flavor of the æons. A mocking-bird cawed somewhere. The Eternal had a voice.

She found herself restless, once she had aroused. Presently came wonderings, marching in phalanxes. Ten minutes, fifteen, half an hour she lay so—fearsomely thinking of George Robling's courage. She thought of that courage as a factor in her future. How could she avoid it?

The night made her sensitive.

Trooping, trooping, the inquiries came—who she might have been in former spans of consciousness—where the Pact was made that augured of her future—whence the sweet awe in the hint of His reality.

She wondered if her father could be seeing Him with eyes.

Her father! Was he alive then, as two had now
assured her?—yes, even three, for Basil though a lover had not condoned her blasphemies. She gave thought to her father in some altered status: the wrong she might have done, denying him a funeral. Theologians, fundamentalists, dogmatic sentimentals, would have him depicted in some faraway paradise, clothed in white smock with a lyre beneath his elbow—or so she assumed. That, or consigned to lugubrious catacombs where the Three Mouths of Cerebus howled him awake.

Where were the dead? What was their condition?

If she had lived before, it must have been somewhere. Assuming a Pact, where had it been made? If every square mile of the globe had been charted, if philosophers and scientists had explored the sea of Space, where was this "heaven" as a spot on a map? What was it she had heard far back in girlhood—that the kingdom of heaven was within one's own self? What could that mean? A pleasurable emotion? No entities could dwell in a pleasurable emotion. The place must have locality. Life must know realism.

Then came the Queerness that marked the night epochally.

She had closed her eyelids in languor, thinking of her father. Suddenly she perceived the moonlight on her retina, the vestige of the impress left from staring at the window. The oblong seemed to
grow, as light is known in dreams. And in that soft effulgence she perceived her father's figure!

Not grotesque, not fantastic, not a phantom, surrounded by no vagaries, dressed much the same as he always dressed in life, Peter Garland moved toward her and as he moved, he smiled. Smiled! No care was on his countenance. His eyes were not bloodshot. There were no cruel lines from his eaglebeak nose down toward the corners of a mouth like a trap. He was beautifully sublimated in address and aspect, appearing to walk as one strolls for pleasure. Closer and closer he came, and she watched him as in mesmerism.

She was not unconscious. She knew she was not dreaming. Yet what she was seeing was beyond her comprehension. A sort of Beautiful Thought of Peter Garland, clothed in the garments of visual reality, was there in her room and functioning before her: it had walked from soft moonlight on into her brain. She knew it was her father because of his behavior. He made a quaint gesture of friendly recognition! She might have drawn a hundred portraits of him in fancy, moving or otherwise, and never bethought herself to mark him by that sign.

What could she do but credit her senses? For he was of her senses, though her eyelids were fastened. She confronted her father as she had never known him, a smile on his countenance, a beauty
to his person. He moved with strange grace: his clothes had lost their rumple. He was not one on whom Death had rushed as a calamity: his being was ennobled, he knew his attainments.

She saw him so clearly, her impulse was to touch him. And yet something about the whole transvision, something about his aspect and movements, gave her the notion that he was moving as in a mirror! Clear, natural, human, he waited before her but across this mortality was a glass-like translucence.

She remembered none the less, when she came to recall the experience later, that it did not seem at all unnatural for him to be there so—even as the most grotesque dream is clothed in the plausible. She wondered how long he was going to remain there and if he would speak to her. Certainly he had no intent to rebuke her. Neither was he doleful that he was in one place, she in another. Both were in order. Both were Reality.

"I think you'll find, Lou," he said presently, "that the things that are troubling you have been made by yourself."

That was all he said. She heard him and yet she didn't hear him. He spoke with a voice, and yet... it was the sort of voice that speaks in whispers of reason, that dictates comings and goings by hunches and premonitions, that seems terribly intimate—like the beat of one's heart.
Then he turned and walked away—before he got her answer—before it occurred to her to marvel at his address. The “dream” of concretely seeing him did not end like most dreams, quickly, kaleidoscopically. Peter Garland went sauntering off, leisurely, composedly, turning back once and smiling in amusement. *Amusement at what?* But the soft light was deadening. Finally it vanished.

She dreaded to open her eyelids for a moment. And when she bethought to ask herself why, she discovered that her body was drugged with an ecstasy. It would presently be profaned when she gazed upon her chamber. Yet when she had done, came another weird revealment.

Her despicable hatred for her father had vanished—vanished in those moments as though magic had wrought it.

She loved her father dearly! That complex of her girlhood had gone as by abduction. She felt an abandon to forces of affection, toleration, understanding, compassion.

Peter Garland was no longer an Alaskan adventurer who had wronged her through parenthood. He was someone who had aided her to something, opened a door as a gentleman’s gesture. She was deeply in his debt and the knowledge made her contrite.

Contrite! That was the word to describe her whole unfoldment. She was knowing the future
in terms of the past. The knowledge appalled her—and her sense of obligation.
She sat up in bed as though rising to meet it.
The chamber about her partook of strong peace.
CHAPTER VII

SHE awakened next morning to a truce with her pragmatisms. The sunshine aroused her to a chamber in a palace: a fairy room swimming in amber and opal. It touched her electrically. She thrilled to its resonance.

The night came back to her; the evening bygone. Her father's admonition was still strong upon her. A sense of his presence still lingered in her brain. From somewhere, somehow, he had made himself apparent. But not as an old-fashioned phantom of fog. No fearsome rappings and groanings proclaimed him. The most vehement skeptic could not contradict the beauty and whimsy cast about his coming and the manner of the miracle that had set with the moon. She knew she must have other stronger and more dramatic venturings before she could hope to take Robling at his word. Yet all the same she knew that Hate had told a falsehood.

She knew that her father was dwelling in Light!

After a time she got up and dressed. While she was bathing, a mirror reflected her; she caught sight of her body as Galatea Awakened. A roseate conception of surpassing vigor she beheld it, some-
thing to be used for a glorious abiding-place . . .

A strange self-assurance played vaguely in the depths of her, a primordial exquisiteness, the commencement of Awareness. It wanted to lift her above shoddy business and make her to feel that Life was an endowment, something given in privilege, the Call to an attainment. The clean outdoors sang. The Height was an altar.

She almost knew Happiness.

Was it emotion, or glimmering alteration? Was Love coming radiantly, or Mohammed to a mountain? When men had a problem confronting them in physics they awaited its proof in pertinent Fact. When women were baffled by the wonders of Mysticism, what could they do but watch for a Sign? But how could she watch with such light upon this summit? . . . how remain mute with such music seeking voice?

She sensed the new day as a clearing consecration.

Was George Robling right? Was she part of the Substance that gave the morning splendor? Did they breathe in Space together like ripples of God's laughter? Verily it seemed so. Suns might come and go; evening's stars extinguish. But Light was life transfigured and what it touched it glorified. She was getting a knowledge of hinterland Reality—a queer gift for her, High Priestess of Revilement. Light and Life were one and after them the Decalog. This must be the Trinity men had cast out.
She encountered George Robling walking the garden. Potiphar was with him. Again he wore flannels and was smoking his pipe.

"Good morning," he greeted her. "What a beginning for a day!"

"Perfect as a morning," Louise responded, "but considering the day, I'm not quite so certain."

"May I ask how you slept?"

"It makes me nervous to talk with you," she bantered. "I'll worry henceforth lest you're reading my brain."

"But that's only possible in the event that you cooperate."

"Well, . . . I might cooperate and not be aware of it. How are you, Potiphar?"

"Didn't sleep good," the printer complained. "Dreamt like Sam-Scratch—visited with your dad!"

"How's Miss Sybil this morning?" Louise asked Robling quickly.

"She sleeps late on Sundays. She hasn't come down yet."

"It is Sunday, isn't it?"

"Can't you tell fr'm th' sunshine?" the printer asked tartly.

Robling looked at his wrist-watch. "Let me advise you, if you expect to go over to Clover Field to meet Van, not to be too late in starting," he said. "As yet, of course, you've got plenty of time. But our Sabbath traffic is very congested."

“Oh yes—where is Clover Field and how do I get out there?”

“Between Santa Monica and Culver City, a goodly distance. I’d be delighted to drive you over, but under the circumstances I’ll have Nikko do it.”

“Under what circumstances?” Instinctively she knew, but wanted to hear him say it.

“I’m assuming, naturally, that you haven’t a Californian driver’s license.”

“Oh,” laughed Louise ... She was vaguely disappointed ... They breakfasted together in the patio’s coolness. Thrice before departing she tried to corral Potiphar and seek his counsel about the vision of the night. He gave her no chance.

Noon came apace and she started for the Field.

Of her ride there with Nikko, Louise recalled little. Sights and scenes flowed past her: motor cars and billboards, beach-bound excursionists, markets doing business. How irreverent it was, this glistening Sabbath tumult!—she wished she might flee to some wilderness and think. Then came the Field with banners on its airdromes. Its vibrant aircraft snarled. The dust was yellow veiling.

Basil winged down in a great silver dragonfly. A moving jot first appeared high above eastern mountains, growing constantly plainer, brightly armored with sunlight. Closer came the transport, till it swirled above their heads. It was beauteously heroic. She watched it descend with her heart in
her throat. So mighty it was. So self-confident. Its three points touched earth and it taxied in an arc.

She recognized Basil the moment he stepped down. He was handed a suitcase. He set it on the turf and untied his helmet.

"Van!" she called as he came along the ropes.

He stopped and scanned the faces.

"Louise!" he cried, amazed.

Tired he was, disheveled and worried. He was clad in brown corduroy and needed a shave. For almost the first time since she had known him, his moustaches were ragged—not curled to needle points.

"I'm supposed to take you to George Robling's," she told him. To kiss him was instinctive, yet she held herself in check.

"I suppose Robling's told you that I know him rather well?"

"Your wire disclosed it. Tell me—what's happened?"

"Item One: Ackermann's tipped over the apple-cart. Item Two: I realized the significance of your being out here, and knew I'd be needed before your visit ended."

"What's Ackermann done?"

"He came back Wednesday and went straight to Washington. His wife made him do it."

"Wife! Bob Ackermann's? Since when was he married?"
“He married a woman he met aboard ship—an Englishwoman—on his way across to Europe. As I understand it, he spent his bridal night confessing his malfeasance. She was rather conscientious. She said, if the authorities wanted him for anything, he’d have to go back. But she’d return with him and help him fight it through.”

“The . . . fools!”

“Let’s get out of this crowd. Did you come in a car?”

“Yes— a roadster with a chauffeur is parked along the street. What about this ‘Item Two’— that you might be needed—?”

“I’m expecting indictments from Robert’s ‘confession’ . . . which of course may mean arrest. And in view of some matters in which George and I are interested—”

“You’ve got a lot of explaining to do, young man, why you never let me know that the two of you were friends.”

“Lou dear, I couldn’t. I wasn’t permitted.”

“Who wouldn’t permit you?”

“It concerns something so alien to your materialistic philosophy that—that—oh thunder! Mother sends you her regards and likewise her apologies. She’s arranged our bail money in case a third party’s required to go our bond.”

“Your mother . . . sends apologies . . . to me?”

“Something’s gotten through to mother you mightn’t understand.”
"Van, you're hiding something! You know mighty well you're not here merely to look after me in case of my arrest."

"Well—mother—had a heart attack—after a talk with Ackermann's wife. It made her less drastic in some of her relationships." They arrived at the roadster parked beneath the trees. "Change into the rumble seat," Basil told Nikko. "I'll take the chance of driving without a license. Tell me, Louise, is Mr. Buss with you?"

"Yes—how did you know we were here on the Coast?"

"They said in Chicago that George had come out here. And a 'phone call to Vermont proved the printer was still merry-making. I put the two together and took to the air."

"Did you have a good flight?"

"Fair," Basil answered. He started the roadster. "Driving a ship is like a great many other things in life: it doesn't take nerve so much as it takes nerves."

"You did your share of the piloting?"

"'Doing my share of the piloting' seems to be my rôle. Not," he added quickly, "that I mean to complain. On the whole it's a privilege."

"So . . . something's changed your mother?"

"Won't you let that wait until after I've had lunch?"

She glanced at him uneasily as the roadster flashed along.
It was difficult to credit that he wasn’t Robling, he handled the wheel with such dexterous nonchalance. But it wasn’t his skill as a driver that unnerved her. She was thinking of Basil in terms of last night . . .

Did she love this man beside her, this staid young patrician who turned up magically whenever she was threatened? She felt a queer choke at what he represented—what her life might have been these last few years without him. Vaguely she wanted him more than she admitted. He had an appeal for her that was not exactly physical, and yet something about him passed that analysis. Often she felt that if he dared to grow boisterous, seize her by force, bend her, break her—she would suffer to be broken. But the bud of their romance had still to come to flower. She compared him with Robling and regretted his arrival. Again fright controlled her, though she did not name it rightly.

Another fragment of the jig-saw, that held enticement in putting into pattern.

He spoke to her suddenly as though he too read her brain.

“What do you think of Robling?” he asked.

“I don’t know what to think. How well do you know him?”

“How well does anybody know him? He’s enigmatic, but he’s more. He’s the sort who’d go down into his pocket for his last half-dollar to give a beg-
gar and then preach the beggar a sermon on Love. Classify that!"

"Why a sermon on Love right after he’d practiced it?"

"On the chance that the beggar needed food for his soul as well as his stomach."

"Then he’s preachy to everyone?"

"On the contrary, no. That’s why he’s a riddle. I met him at a Chicago houseparty about seven years ago—and throughout the whole time he scarcely talked to anyone. I was the exception."

"Who was giving the party," Louise asked sarcastically, "anyone else I know?"

"Professor Arthur’s wife—you’ve heard me speak of him—the philologist—I took ancient languages under him at Princeton."

"But why should you attend a week-end at his home?"

"I kept up the contact after I graduated. He had a sister I thought pretty fine—that was long before she married, and we became acquainted. Anyhow, Robling was there. I’ve known him ever since."

"All of which is stretching the long arm of coincidence rather far, Van."

"On the contrary, Lou. There’s none in it at all. If I hadn’t met Robling at Arthur’s, I might never have known you."

"What!"

"I first made contact with Arthur as a student;
ancient languages always held a strange fascination for me, anyhow. Then Robling sought Arthur as a factor in his project—"

"What project?"

"George hasn’t told you?"

"All that I know, is that he’s retired from his business."

"Yes, he went into business to get himself the funds."

"Funds! Funds for what? The man’s worth a couple of million dollars, according to some hints he let drop to Mr. Buss."

"He’d have to tell you—it’s not my prerogative."

"He’s implied that I have a rôle in his ‘project.’"

"Yes. And he’s correct."

"How long have you known it?"

"Ever since I’ve known George."

"That long!"

Basil was silent, debating a decision. Finally he reached it. "Louise," he asked whimsically, "has it never occurred to you how strangely we got acquainted?"

What could he be meaning? She braced herself for shock.

"We met because you represented the Beers tribe, wasn’t it? . . . trying to sue my father for my board."

"And it never struck you as odd that I, a fledgling law clerk in New York should have found such
clients in western Indiana? I guess the time for confession has come. It was all a blind, Louise. The suit didn’t fall through. There was never any suit. I was—tracing you—learning about you—on commission from George Robling!"

Louise had her shock, and as quickly got over it. "Indeed, Van! That’s . . . interesting."

"Yes, it’s most interesting. Because George Robling had acquired some weird information about a drama in the Klondyke—in which your father had—had—"

"Killed his father, Basil. Go ahead and say it. But why, if there were witnesses, shouldn’t they have made trouble for Dad—blackmailed him or something?"

"There weren’t any witnesses, that’s just the point."

Again her qualm of panic. "No witnesses?" she echoed. "Then how had Robling known?"

"I gathered, Louise, . . . he’d communicated with his father somehow and gotten all the details." They drove a mile in silence.

"I’m beginning to credit it," Louise finally said. It was Basil’s turn for jolting. "You!" he exclaimed.

"I have reason to believe I saw my own father last night, Basil—or a reflection of him somehow—as he happens to be at present."

"You mean—you saw—his ghost?"
"No, not a ghost. Ghosts are too clammy. But somehow ... I got a reflection of my father. He spoke to me plainly. He said I was to blame for exactly what I was—words to that effect. Basil, do you understand anything about the Fourth Dimension?"

"You think you saw your father in another dimension?"

"I saw something, Basil," and she gave him full details.

"Ask George to explain it," Van Dyke said cryptically.

"Then it boils down to this: there's no coincidence whatever in your knowing Robling. You went to a house party at the home of one of your professors and met him. He retained you to look me up and get details about me. Yet you stuck in my affairs!"

"I had to, Louise. It was part of the Plan."

"But what plan, Basil? This mystery is maddening."

"We're all snarled up together, Lou. George tried to tell me from . . . certain revelations. I pooh-poohed it then. I've since become convinced. Now perhaps you see why I acted the Dumb Simon in letting Perry chase around the country and hunt your man as though I didn't know him."

"I understand nothing of the sort. And you haven't yet answered how you stayed in my affairs."

"Well, in getting information about you for
Robling, I learned about your girlhood. That aroused my interest: that you'd won above so much. I fell in love with you, Lou—first because I liked you personally—second because—because—"

"Well, go ahead. What?"

"Louise, I've been waiting for something to develop. Remember the talk we both had with mother—in your office, I mean, when Mr. Buss was present?"

"You think I've forgotten it?"

"You remember I hinted about a bigger something for you than merely running corporations? I—I had knowledge—I was convinced—I had reasons—"

"What on earth's the matter? You never stumbled and stammered like this before."

"You asked me about mother, and why she'd changed. You asked me why I'd come out here, for some greater reason than attending to your bail. Louise, as the years have gone on since I've known you, I've become more and more convinced that all of us are snarled up together for a Big Work somewhere. Well, I think the time's ripe when it's going to be disclosed. I'm partly out here to see about your bond. But more than that, I've come out here because of a dream mother had—or that's what her physicians called it—last Wednesday night."

"A dream!" cried Louise. "What sort of dream?"

"Don't think me cracked, but . . . what you
said about seeing your father doesn’t startle me at all. *Mother saw your father too, though she never knew him personally!*”

If anyone but Basil had said such a thing, Louise would have been facetious. Instead, she sat transfixed, staring at the hood.

“You asked me if I knew anything about the Fourth Dimension. I believe it’s a type of Interpenetration, Louise. What I mean is this: any high school boy knows that Light is a rate of etheric vibration. Light of low velocity is Red. Stepping up the wave-length, you go through the spectrum till you arrive at the ultra-violet rays of very high velocity. Very good. Now then, Lou, you know, I think, that it’s quite possible to cast a beam of red light through space and yet in the very heart of it also throw a violet beam, we’ll say.”

“Of course,” she assented.

“Then by that process, what are you doing? You’re sending one form of Light of very high velocity through another form of very low velocity, without the two conflicting in the least. And yet considered in space they’re one light ray, aren’t they?”

“Certainly,” she nodded.

“And you could go on putting ultra-violet rays without number in that same beam, couldn’t you? Well, that’s my exposition of a literal heaven!”

“What?” she cried blankly.

“Follow it through. Scientists and chemists have
proven that Matter is only Energy. Break down any substance into atoms and molecules and you arrive at the granule—the electric granule. Which is what? The so-called electrons revolving in different orbits about different forms of a core called protons. These combinations make Materials as we know them: the wood in this steering-wheel, the glass in this windshield, the flesh upon your hand. Now then, if the form of energy that's Light can penetrate and interpenetrate to infinity—according to my allusion to Red and Violet—why can't you have Matter of different velocities interpenetrating without one velocity upsetting another?"

"It's rather deep, Van, but I think I follow you."

"Why then, Louise, from the Vibratory Theory of all Substance, can't you have two worlds—one interpenetrating the other—indeed, why can't you have any number of worlds interpenetrating one another to infinity and yet all in the same area known as Space? I'm not saying that's the Fourth Dimension. I'm only giving you a hypothesis whereby phenomena like those you and mother witnessed might be plausible. Laying facetiousness aside and considering Matter from the physicist's standpoint—why can't you have a whole material city, complete in every detail even to billboards and filling stations, existing in concrete fact within the same space taken up by this city of Los Angeles?"
She gave this idea the consideration it merited.

"But if it's there, Van, why can't we see or collide with it?"

"For the same reason that the violet light rays don't collide with the red. Being finer, they go *between* the red rays—if that's an exposition. As for the finer city not being perceived visually, that's because we lack the finesse of perception to accomplish it. For several generations Science has laid down as a Law of Physics that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Well, Economics laid down another law, that the way to realize profit was to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest—only Henry Ford came along and stood that 'law' on its head, rolling up the greatest modern fortune by doing exactly the opposite. Some day physicists may discover not alone that two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time, but that perhaps, since size and numbers are only relative, hundreds of thousands of interpenetrating bodies can do it: world within world of more and more delicate vibration and perception. Personally, I believe that Death is nothing but the permanent change from an environment of one velocity to that of a finer—a change out of the Red-ray form of sluggish vibration to a higher velocity meaning a more exquisite type of existence. Up through the spectrum, let's put it, till we finally get into the ultra-violet velocities of the Holy of Holies."
"You mean heaven as an actual place is . . . somehow . . . within us?"

"Didn't Christ say so? How else could he have meant it and had it spell sense?"

"You said you thought Death was nothing but 'a permanent change.' That implies the possibility of similar change but temporary, doesn't it?"

"Of course it does. And it's constantly occurring, only people dislike to talk about it for fear of being called cracked. I have reason to believe there are persons who go through the death change almost every night that they fall to sleep. One of the biggest discoveries that physiologists have yet to make is that a human body can go on living without a so-called human soul being inside it!"

"That's rather terrifying, Van. I believe I'm right in saying that Science accepts the quitting of the body by the spirit as death."

"When Science knows the true facts about Death it will also know the true secret of Life—and be able to create and control it. I haven't time now to go into that. I'm simply saying that now and then our sluggish physical senses get a glimpse of affairs in these finer interpenetrating velocities and we have what is vulgarly known as Phenomena—the 'supernatural' of the ignorant and superstitious. You ask me, Where are the dead? I answer you, Right here with us where they've always been, so to speak, insofar as Locality in Space is concerned,
but dwelling in more delicate atmospheres according to the fineness of their faculties and the sensi-
tiveness of their organisms."

"I still don't get why we can't see and contact them at random!"

"Can you see the spokes of a moving car-wheel after its speed passes a certain rate of revolution?"

"N-No, but if you try to walk through them you find out they're there—sometimes tragically."

"Granted—because the material of the spokes is of more compact substance than your body is, let's say. If your body were more solid the wheel would be demolished. But suppose the wheel were of water or gas? The physics of it is faulty, but the metaphor can stand."

"I'm not good at logicizing abstractly, Van. My brain is too practical—I'm at home in realities."

"All right, take another example: You've got a goldfish swimming in water in your conservatory. In his sluggish watery element for which his organism is adapted, he sees and lives and functions as a fish. But take him out and lay him on a chair-seat. He's in the same conservatory; not a feature of the environment has been altered. But he can't see or move or 'breathe' in the more rarified element known as air and after a period of torture he 'dies.' That is, his physical organism immediately starts undergoing a change that no longer manifests in the form we know as a goldfish. I submit that while in his watery element, if the goldfish could
logicize, he'd say his brother goldfish was cracked to suggest there was such a thing as Air or that the vaporous forms of human beings they see moving outside the globe's glass might be quite as normal and 'natural' as fish. Don't you perceive what I'm trying to register?"

"I see the sense of it," she conceded.

"Or take another illustration," said Basil. "Compare life on this physical plan to the din in a boiler factory. Into the factory comes a violinist who plays an obbligato. The fact that the boiler-factory noise drowns the sweet, rare strains of the music, doesn't mean that the music isn't there, interpenetrating the uglier, coarser racket. If there's a sudden cessation of the racket, the music becomes at once apparent. But better than that, you know and I know that there are boiler-factory workers who become so accustomed to such tumult that they can discern the music, as though the coarser crashing didn't exist. Well, compare this latter class of adepts in physical hearing to the class of persons the ordinary boilermakers of earth disdainfully term Mystics, and you've got an almost perfect simile."

"George Robling was trying to tell me much the same thing last night, but my drowsiness stopped him. Did you get it from him?"

"No. I don't know where I got it. I've always had it, Lou. At times I'm persuaded that I brought the realization of it into Life with me."
“Why have you never talked to me like this before? You know how the fundamentals of such matters perplexed me.”

“By the same token, I knew that when your time was ripe, you’d come into knowledge of it in circumstance. That’s Life! Reaching the stage of spiritual evolution where we’re eagerly susceptible to transcendant knowledge.”

They drove another half-mile in silence. Then Louise said whimsically—

“It’s funny that no such sensible, scientific explanation has come down to us in the Bible. After all, it doesn’t make heaven any less beautiful to know that it’s right here interpenetrating us, instead of off on some distant planet.”

“My dear girl, while I concede there’s the old saying that the devil can quote Scripture for his purpose, all the same the Bible is so loaded with proofs of such an hypothesis that unscientific theologians can’t see the forest for the trees!”
CHAPTER VIII

THE car climbed the mountain and arrived on the plateau. Potiphar Buss was waiting at the gate. He shook hands with Basil.

"Georgie says t' tell you he was called t' Los Angeles t' see a feller," he announced. "A machine come an' got him jus' after you left."

Sarah appeared and confirmed this information.

"Lawyer Bensing wanted to see him," she specified. "Mr. Bensing's startin' for Texas in the morning and wanted to go over some papers with George. He says Mr. Van Dyke was to have the north room—and he'd try to get back for Sabbath night supper."

"Excellent!" said Basil. "And Mr. Van Dyke will occupy the north room with great diligence as soon as he's had lunch with Miss Louise Garland—begging, of course, Miss Garland's indulgence. He hasn't had his eyes closed since yesterday dawn. A nap will be welcome before meeting his host."

"I'll fetch a tray for both o' you right off," the dwarf said maternally, and trundled away.

They talked business while they ate—Potiphar smoking in a nearby rocker with the old, old aspect
of massaging his shoulder-blades. Basil reported on the *Wreath and Tea-Cup* business. He described his meeting with the new Mrs. Ackermann.

"I've got to go up and lie down, Lou," the lawyer said finally. "Staying awake is a mild form of torture."

Nikko came for their trays and showed him to his room.

The breeze through the patio was delightfully cool: now and then it whispered in the great drooping pepper tree. The sabbath afternoon was exquisitely quiet, exquisitely harmonious, up on this Height. All the love in Nature imbued the house, the grounds, the summit; it was most extraordinary. Louise had felt it one entering the house; she felt it now doubly, enfolding the garden. The fountain gurgled pleasantly. The sunny sky was languid. She neglected to marvel at what Basil had told her. Logic seemed dulled. But the peace of the Height could not be neglected. Potiphar succumbed and soon he was snoring . . .

Louise relaxed too. Once she heard voices out in the road. She paid no attention. Visitors, strangers, were outside her mood. She attempted to concentrate on what lay in the future, but her body was calmed and benumbed by the silence. The minutes ticked away. They became a half-hour.

For the first time in years, emotion was wedging its point in her mood. And she thought she des-
pised it. It partook of instability, an evidence of weakness—emotion, that is, as sentiment in action. She could hate, hate royally, but hatred was an attribute in a class with emotion, not one of its compounds. It was coming to her now that possibly emotion could be an accomplishment, something for attainment, a phase of spirituality. And that too appalled her, it bespoke so very much.

Why hadn't she kissed Basil when she met him at the airdrome? The impulse had been strong: he had seemed to expect it. But no, she had stifled that urge mechanically. Robling couldn't have been the reason; no loyalty was in it for her homage to another. Rather she had consistently smothered its enticements in order to effect a Spartanesque pose. And what was it getting her? Why shouldn't she have long ago alienated Basil—the only true friend of her loveless maturity? It came to her likewise that this Spartanesque pose might be naught but self-indulgence, a furtive bid for pity which she secretly supplied.

She considered Van Dyke in terms of George Robling: how queerly alike they were in their temperaments. Not until Basil had alluded to Robling's philosophy in some of its phases, did she recognize nakedly her own audacious promptings. She wanted to attain to a place beside these men because of what they were, a form of emolument, selfishness rampant. She burned with lazy shame. To love either man demanded no sacrifice: she could
give nothing to them. Strange that she, materialist, should hunger after sacrifice. Yet that hunger was beginning.

What might a psychoanalyst conclude respecting her? If she were a character in a novel instead of a flesh-and-blood business woman who had made a name for herself in Manhattan at thirty-three, would readers admire, despise, or tolerate her? If she wrought no loving respect or admiration in those about her, what was her life as an enduring accomplishment?

She thought she heard her name called.

"Yes?" she responded, surprised at the summons.

She sat forward, listening. Who would address her by her first name but Basil? Was Sybil Duncan still upstairs abed, worse perhaps, and had little Sarah summoned her in the distress of some emergency? Louise went inside.

Nikko, it appeared, was helping a woman whom Louise had not seen until that moment, washing dishes in the pantry. He said he had not called. Louise climbed the stairs. Someone had called her. She met Sarah at the top. Sarah seemed puzzled.

"'Tawn't Mr. Van Dyke," she contended. "I just took in some towels and found him fast asleep. Maybe 'twas Sybil. She's been abed all day."

"Which is her room? Would she mind if I looked in?"

"The one beyond your'n. Go right ahead."

Louise went down the hall. She tapped on the
door and later turned the knob. Sybil was lying undressed in the bed, one arm beneath her head, the other along the coverlet. Without wig or cosmetics, her years were apparent.

"You called me, Miss Duncan?" Louise asked her kindly.

Sybil rolled her head. "Why should I call you?"

"Somebody called me: I heard them from the patio."

"Maybe you're hearing things, same as George Robling."

Louise felt annoyed. Then she was frightened. "Do you mind if I stay a moment?" she begged.

"No, stay if you like. Nothing really matters."

Louise drew a chair up close to the bed. "How are you feeling?" was her nervous inquiry.

"I'm better," said Sybil. "That doesn't matter, either."

"Your dinner last night distressed you, did it?"

"No, it wasn't my dinner!"

"Miss Duncan, tell me honestly, is there anything I might be doing here—to help anyone—anything that needs—?"

"Yes," cried the other. "Go back to New York!"

"But I didn't mean—"

"I know what you meant. Go back to New York! Between you and what you stand for, his career is being wrecked. If you weren't quite so insolent you'd easily perceive it."

"Don't let's quarrel, Miss Duncan. If going back
to New York really solved anything, I'd start this afternoon.”

“Well, one thing that would fix, would be his proposal to go somewhere and dig dirt!”

“Do what?”

“Dig dirt. Excavate. On the other side of the earth. He thinks that's his mission and I have to stand for it!”

“What on earth are you telling me? You mean this liquidating of his interests has something to do with . . . archeology?”

“If that's what you call it. He hasn't told you yet?”

“No, he hasn't told me. And the mystery's maddening, since he says I'm a part of it.”

“Well, I'll tell you what you're part of, and perhaps you'll watch your step. He thinks that you, with your grasp on big business, are going to take charge of his crazy expedition. It needs a strong capable executive and financier—”

“I'll head an expedition! . . . to go somewhere and excavate?”

Sybil in her mood, unleashed her repressions.

“He talks as though he knew his life was closing soon—that's what makes me so frantic. With the making of his fortune to finance the project, his part is completed. Two other people—one of them a woman who's had practical experience in organizing, feeding people, directing their labors—are supposed to carry on—”
“Two other people!”

“One of them’s a lawyer. Who he is, I don’t care. He’s supposed to really head the project, while the woman does the work—”

“That’s very interesting! . . . assuming that she does.”

“These things aren’t important. The only thing that’s important is George’s business, his career, climbing up and up, making a truly great man of himself, and then . . . marrying me!” The secretary’s voice broke. “He . . . owes it to me,” she added miserably. “Haven’t I given up everything for him? Haven’t I stayed an . . . old maid? Who wants me now?”

“Taking that viewpoint,” Louise said stiffly, “why should Robling want you, either?” She hadn’t meant to say it but Sybil offended her. Sybil offended her in the eye, the commonsense, the executive faculties, and last but not least, the heart.

Sybil came wide awake. She sat up in bed. “You won’t get him!” she screeched. Her eyes were green poison. “I’m divinely appointed to run George Robling’s life. I’m—I’m—”

“My dear Miss Duncan, will you kindly control yourself?”

“No, I won’t control myself. I’ll have him, I say. I’ll have him if I have to kill myself to get him—kill him and me too! I won’t let him go on this crazy expedition. What do I care whether or not people ever find out about Jesus Christ?
Who's Jesus Christ to me? Let Him stay buried and all His proofs with him. George Robling's my own, and I'll not be cheated!"

Sybil was irrational and her blasphemies proved it. She kicked her heels; she clawed at the bedclothes.

"My dear—" began Louise.

"Don't you 'dear' me!" Sybil cried madly. "You get back to New York and run your old . . . hash-joints. That's where you belong, not here with a man who owes me his life."

"He owes you his life?"

"He owes me everything he's got. Who's watched him, and tended him, and helped him, and encouraged him? Who kept the light of her chastity burning whilst he was at war—"

"Miss Duncan—please!—don't be ridiculous."

"You dare tell me not to be ridiculous? Who are you, anyhow? What have you ever done for any man? Who have you ever thought of but yourself? What are you now but a brazen-faced thief? If you died tomorrow, who'd come to your funeral and really weep tears? Get out of my room, you red-headed poacher. Go back to your sandwiches and let decent girls alone!"

And Sybil hurled a pillow that struck a vase of flowers. It toppled with a crash and water splashed the rug.

"Now see what you've done!" Sybil cried in fury. "I swear, you hear me!—if you ever step foot in my
room again, I'll get my revolver and shoot you through the heart!"

Louise withdrew reluctantly, for the order of the household.

"Imagine any man marrying a woman with a disposition like that," she remarked to Sarah near the patio door.

"She's got a devil, Sybil has, an' prides herself on it," the housekeeper responded.

"Miss Twitch, what do you know about Mr. Robling organizing some sort of expedition to a foreign country?"

Sarah begged the issue. "If she'd only stop givin' him trouble he mightn't be plannin' t' go off to Europe. All she can think of is marryin', marryin'. Looka me. I ain't ever married and I've got along fine. And why should he do it—marry her, I mean? I tell you, if I was to be arst, I'd pack her out tomorrer and chuck her clothes after her."

"It's in Europe then, is it, that Mr. Robling's excavating?"

"You'd better ask him. She just makes herself a nuisance firin' things 'round I have to pick up. She tried to jump off the balcony one night. If Nikko hadn't caught her, she'd broken her neck."

The afternoon waned. And Basil still slept.

Louise walked the garden. She strolled about the Height. Again and again she sought to get order in her strumming, throbbing head. She rarely had
a headache and when she did, it maddened her. She walked off on a scarp and sat down above the world.

Viewed from the perspective, what a lot of ants men were. How preposterous to think that any divine arbiter of the universe, no matter in what aspect of heaven, could possibly be interested in the insect life that was the Sabbath traffic spread out beneath her. What a conceited lot were these human beings! That brought thoughts of The Valiant One, who had taken upon Himself the physical form of one of the “ants” and wrought such havoc in their ethics nineteen hundred years bygone. Which unerringly brought thoughts of what Sybil had disclosed: “What do I care for Jesus Christ? Let Him stay buried and all His proofs with Him!” The woman who cried them of course could be pardoned. That wasn’t the point. Something impended not knowable by words.

She got back to the house as the lamps were lighting. Potiphar Buss had gone to his room; Basil had not yet awakened; Robling was still down in Los Angeles. With the wonder of all these pyramiding revelations still strong within her, Louise went abovestairs and into her chamber. She sat down at her dressing-table to arrange her mussed hair for the evening that was coming.

Looking at the reflection returned by her mirror brought thoughts of Robling’s talk concerning her aureole. Did she really have one or had he talked nonsense?
Gradually, gradually, she saw herself strangely.

She perceived the wall opposite making her background. Grayish white it was, an unbroken panel. Staring transfixed, with her head outlined against it, she noted a phenomenon. Her head was defined in a way that perturbed her. Her strong copper tresses stood out against pastel, and encircling about them was a faint fringe of opal.

What was it? Not exactly new. She had witnessed it before. But always she had taken it for a fantasy of vision, the contrast of colors colliding on her retina. Now she discerned it as another possibility. Could this be the Light of which Robling had spoken? Was this the corona which he could see nakedly?

She looked and it was gone. She looked and saw it clearly. Faint, faint it was at times. Then it showed so sharply that her hair seemed afire—afame with warm pearl.

Her awakening was a fact demanding much proof. If no other objects evinced that hilation, then her sight might be trusted. So she held up a small empty vase near her shoulder. And her heart sank within her. It never occurred to her that different degrees of the corona’s luminosity might represent standards. She only knew that she saw the phenomenon about the vessel.

So, after all, her vision had tricked her. She sat the vase back and dropped her head forward.

And as she sat so, more understanding reached
her. She did not know whence it came. No concrete voice spoke to her. But up through the depths of her being, not unlike the speaking of Intuition that is every woman’s heritage because feminine organisms are more finely attuned to the Absolute than masculine, an explanation came as a full-born Impression:

Yes, vases were alive—all Substance was alive!—else what was that aura? Out of the Eternal came Light making substance, refracting on ether, meeting it creating. In such creating came elemental radiance. It warmed midget granules and spun them into Energy. Energy deployed and completed the miracle. Refraction was substance, though not confined to shapings. Yet all was apparent to eyes of the Spirit.

She listened to more.

What she had seen was ether rebounding, fusing and glowing—substance transfigured. What she was hearing was the clear voice of Truth, explaining a phase of raw ether functioning, explaining it by Thought which transcended syllables. And she felt a weird prickling surcharging her body. She sensed in those moments that once again her father moved near her; never had she known him so, to feel him. She kept her head bowed, enjoying the sensation.

Something indeed, was reaching inside her. A hand seemed to move and caress her torn spirit. Not a physical hand. No ghostly visitation. Some-
thing infinitely gentle, as impalpable as warmth. She knew that she felt it, and was contrite in the contact.

Men had known miracles before, she was aware. Yet miracles of substance: signs on the horizons. Here was a miracle that evinced itself in ether, the movings of a force that had naught to do with language.

She raised her head finally, surprised at its lightness. Yet she suffered from no vertigo. She gave thought, conscious thought, to her ethereal sentiments.

All things were alive in the vast heart of Light—created through it, made of its substance—the vase, the mirror, the wall behind her, the house on the mountain, that mountain itself! Titanic, stupendous, reared the Energy Colossus. The continent, the planet, throbbed in its magnitude. A thousand trillion suns had the strength of a mustard seed.

And she must be part of it, the incarnate apex. More significant happenings must come about to prove it. But her vision had not tricked her. The cosmos held noMockeries.

After a time she looked at her watch. She frowned in stupefaction. She had come into her chamber a moment before with the hands of the watch showing a quarter to six. The watch still ticked faithfully but its hands had been moved.
They offered the time as twenty minutes after nine o'clock. Three hours and thirty-five minutes was missing from that dial!

She sprang to her feet and went into the hall.

Across from Sybil's door an upper room was lighted. Light came out obliquely and glistened on waxed flooring. Voices she heard: George Robling's, Potiphar's. Then she heard Basil's, in soft ejaculation. She tapped on the panel.

"Come in," Robling called, though almost at once he opened the door.

"I—I must have fallen asleep—or something. What time is it, please?"

"Twenty-one minutes past nine," Robling answered. "Sarah said she went up to call you to supper but found you bowed over your dressing table, dozing. I told her not to disturb you."

"I had—the queerest—experience. It seemed as though someone—lectured me—about this house—this mountain—being alive! I suppose I'm overwrought. Do you mind if I stay, or is this session private?"

"Basil and I have completed our business. You may want to learn of it. Of course you may stay."

She glanced across at Basil and was taken aback. She turned her gaze on Potiphar and felt a qualm of terror. Basil's face was ghastly; his eyes held a glitter. Again the old printer was a small, hair-
less waxworks. The picture they made had an Eden Musee gruesomeness—a weird unreality in which only George was natural.

"Has something happened?" she faltered, advancing.

Basil aroused himself, pushing back his chair. He got to his feet in mechanical politeness. Potiphar got up and brushed past her clumsily.

The room in which she found them had the aspect of an office. It was spacious and pleasant, looking northward toward the city. A great carved desk was its principle adornment.

She saw other things later: stenographic equipment, dictaphones, an electrical typewriter. The chairs were of leather. The place held curios and objets d'art such as a man of affluence might gather about him in a cloistered retreat. Behind the chair in which Basil had been sitting was an alcove with a couch. The air was blue with pipesmoke.

"Louise," said Van Dyke in a throaty whisper, "suppose you and I go outside and wander around a bit. I must talk with you privately."

She knew from long association that when Basil spoke so, the need was urgent—expensively urgent. She turned and looked at Robling.

She saw he was smiling . . .

A week, a month, a year thereafter, she remembered that smile on George Robling's face. All the beauty and wisdom of his character was in it. But
she saw something more. She saw a wistfulness, a poignancy, the sort of smile that prevails between friends at railroad stations, on steamship docks, in the vestibules of hospitals. It gave her a desperate feeling, as though she must do something for him without knowing just what.

"You'll excuse us, George?" asked Basil.

"Better take the documents with you, Van," the other said, nodding. And he handed Basil some blue-backed contracts heavy with seals.

"We'll . . . see you later?" Louise suggested. "I have some writing to do," George answered. "But . . . oh yes, . . . you'll see me later!"

She followed Basil into the hall.
CHAPTER IX

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Never mind my hunger. Where must we go?"

"How about the garden? We can talk undisturbed. I'll get you a wrap."

"Let me get it. I can do it quicker. But is it quite all right to leave Mr. Robling?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because the three of you frighten me. Ever since I got here, my visit has been a series of provoking disquiets."

"Robling's all right for the present, I hope! Hurry with your wrap. I'll explain in the garden."

"I know you're not yourself, Van. You're keeping something from me. You've done it ever since you got here—you've been doing it for weeks, months, years—"

"I know what's afoot. I've got the whole story. Let's get out of the house where I can tell you everything."

She went into her room. Then they started downstairs.

"Louise," began Basil, when they sat in the darkness on the bench beyond the fountain, "did some
woman on these premises that I haven't met yet, make vague references today to you about an excavating project in which Robling—?

"Yes, Sybil Duncan. She's supposed to be his secretary. I thought I heard a voice, as though someone were calling me. I went up to her room and found her abed—"

"You heard a voice! Calling you!"

"Yes, and I responded, to quarrel with Sybil. Before I got out, she'd smashed a vase and threatened me. She said if I ever set foot in her room again, she'd get her revolver and shoot me through the heart."

"So! . . . she's got a revolver? Tell me what happened. Be careful of details."

Louise rehearsed the episode. Van Dyke smoked cigarettes. He consumed half a dozen, lighting one from the other. Louise finished her recount by asking—

"Has he given you the details of his excavating project, Van? In what country is it?"

"Palestine, Louise. Near the city of Capernaum. Louise, tell me—have you ever chanced to encounter any article in newspapers or magazines concerning the tons of undeciphered papyri that are reposing at present in the British Museum?"

"Papyri? What's that? . . . some sort of paper, isn't it?"

"Yes," Basil answered, "the kind used by the ancients, invented in Egypt, on which official
records were transcribed after clay tablets were no longer the vogue. Robling tells me tonight there are several tons of them in existence, recovered from tombs and other excavations in Asia Minor. And this is their significance: they contain expositions and interpretations of early Christian doctrine that may stand the world on its head when they're finally deciphered."

"Stand the world on its head? How could they do that?"

"Because irrefutable facts might come to light, Louise, that would change the whole Christian faith—at least so alter the interpretations of it which modern church people hold, that in a week or a month all the dogma in the sects and creeds might suddenly be cast in one grand bonfire and Christianity have such a purging that society would be shaken to its very foundations."

"You're very trying, Basil. Instead of solving the riddle of this man we're visiting, you're merely adding to it."

"I'm trying to make it clear, my dear. But ... so much must be told ... where can I start?"

"Don't you think you might start with Robling? Why is he interested in 'standing society on its head' by any deciphering of early Christian manuscripts? And why should it be concern of ours? We're business people, not archaeologists or Biblical scholars."
"Louise, . . . we’ve got a mission . . . to assist in this New Revelation, this purging of creeds."

"Have you gone insane?"

"Indeed, I have not. A long time ago I wondered why I ‘went in’ for ancient languages at college. Now I see it plainly. I’m elected to make what Robling’s begun as my big life-work—"

"You are insane!"

"Louise, please hear me. For years you’ve wondered at your facility in organization. For years you’ve wondered at the fate which gave you your girlhood, trained you so peculiarly, brought you up unmarried to the present month and year. Won’t you concede that perhaps some vast ideal has been shaping your career, casting you for some mammoth international labor that may leave its mark on a hundred generations? Wouldn’t you feel elated to know that for a fact?"

"I’m sure I don’t know. Plenty has happened to me this past month to make me realize that perhaps there’s more behind Life than I’ve dreamed. But this business of going off somewhere and digging into the records of the past in order to clarify church dogma . . . it’s a trifle bizarre, Basil. It lacks common sense."

"But supposing, Louise, that George Robling had privately put scholars to work at his own expense on the papyri I mentioned, and discovered scientific, historical indications of the Master’s existence and secrets of His power that would rebuild the
whole world's faith on a new basis—could you and I give ourselves to any greater life-labor than augmenting his discoveries?"

"You think that Robling aims to do something of the sort? To me it introduces an element of disturbance into society that, granted it might be brought about, would appall me."

"On the contrary—suppose it ended the disturbances in society and introduced an era of harmony and peace. Not in one country. Not in ten countries. In the whole mundane universe!"

"The trouble with me is, Van, that being a business woman, I find it difficult to wax enthusiastic over such prosey Biblical topics. As a matter of fact, there isn't one person in fifty who gives a rap whether a literal Christ lived or not—the man in the street, I mean—how He did His miracles or how He died, what Scripture says or doesn't—"

"You think so? You're not aware that church enrollment this past year exceeds in sheer numbers any year since Paul started writing his epistles throughout Mesopotamia? You're not aware that the sales of the Bible surpassed any other single book on any subject published, by nearly a million copies? You don't recognize that never since learning was current among the rank and file, have questions of creed and dogma been so fiercely assailed and debated?"

"Speaking as a business woman of modern Man-
hattran, no!—I see no particular signs of it, the Renaissance that so thrills you."

"You say that, and yet you’ve done your own assailing so fiercely that when your own father came to die, you saw no merit in giving him a funeral."

"Let’s not discuss that now."

"But it’s pertinent to things that have happened—and others about to happen—that increasingly upset you. Look at it this way: Suppose irrefutable proof was forthcoming that the early theologians had interpreted all wrong that dogmatic premise that the Master had appointed Peter and his apostolic successors to be the head of His church on earth: what do you think would happen to the Roman question? Suppose proofs were forthcoming that the Master’s miracles were done by a mental command over Light, and that Flesh as Substance was something wholly different from what even the physicists hold: what would happen to the followers of Christian Science? Suppose that proofs were forthcoming that the Master and the Twelve were right here on earth going in and out of living bodies, or materializing as circumstance required so that they took the forms of great modern thinkers and intellectual leaders: what would happen, do you think, to the Theosophists and Spiritualists? I tell you, Louise, it’s because of the theological muddles that exist today that society happens to be composed as it is. The validity and accuracy
of early Christian doctrine strikes at the very heart of your ordinary, twentieth century workday, back in New York. It's responsible for America's foreign policy, the size of the income tax you pay, whether you can open your shops and keep them open without being looted. Every undertakers' establishment on every street corner is a mute testimony to the Great Mystery out of which comes the essence of every faith."

Louise was silent a moment, considering.

"To say," went on Basil, "that people aren't interested in religion is to insult your own intelligence. You can loot a country and take every man's wife away from him and in time he'll forgive you. You can sack a city and beggar every inhabitant and the wound will be forgotten within a single generation. But you can't take a man's creed away from him without risking your life and the lives of your children to the seventh generation."

"All right. Granted for the moment. Let's get back to Robling."

"Good! Let's get back to him. What do you think of him—I mean as a man?"

"Frankly, Van, I'm baffled. He upsets every law of human nature and common sense. Potiphar Buss knew him as a ragged printerboy with one eye half blinded. Seventeen years later he comes on that nondescript again and confronts a metamorphosis—a rich, successful, erudite personage
with a fund of knowledge that seems supra-human. Remember that I too met George Robling as a loafer in Shawsville. He was no more like this host of ours than night is like day.”

“And you haven’t the slightest explanation of what happened?”

“He explained it to Potiphar that he’d had some weird experience on a French battlefield: he tried to convince the old fellow that either Christ or an angel aided him in dragging four wounded men into a shell-hole. And when he came back from that, he seemed a different person. Sybil even went so far as to say that there were times when his friends thought he wasn’t the fellow who went overseas.”

“Well, Louise, supposing he wasn’t?”

“I don’t understand you,” the girl said faintly.

“Oh yes you do, my dear. You don’t want to admit it. Louise, I’m telling you we’re confronting the Unknowable. We’re facing a problem that has been the basis for more religious hocus-pocus down the years than any other phenomenon in nature. Forces are at work beyond the grasp of all of us. We’re up against the Cosmos, though the word is overworked.”

She debated this in silence. “What forces?” she whispered.

“The Colossal Galvanism behind all mortal life, Lou dear—infinite of detail, gigantic of concep-
GOLDEN RUBBISH

tion, the forces that hold us as individuals in our true relation to the rest of the universe. They have the power to balk or enhance every act of life from the creation of a dynasty to the fall of a sparrow.” He spoke with strange poise.

“God, you mean, Basil?”

“The term may be used. I think it inadequate. God isn’t knowable. But the forces are. And they have us in hand! Louise, where could mankind have gotten the obsession that all miracles came to an end with the opening of the early Christian dispensation? People back in Palestine nineteen centuries ago weren’t one whit different as men and women from those we find today. Life was the same—the same customs and language—all that was lacking was present-day science. Why is it that millions of sincere church people will readily credit that Christ fed the Five Thousand, that an angel rolled the stone away from the entrance to His tomb—all the other Biblical wonders—and yet rise up fiercely if one dares to claim that equal phenomena could take place right now?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Well, Louise, all I can say is this: Taking Christ from men’s hearts is a popular clackery. To cement Him there forever is worthy of our lives!”

“Basil, you unnerve me! How can we cement Christ in men’s hearts forever? I’ve always understood He didn’t need cementing. Christ was there already.”
“If Christ were truly there, would we have had the great world war? The Christ of Capernaum—a fleshly Christ—was only a preface to the vaster thing coming. The Spiritual Christ—a vibrant, living entity—may now be revealed as men have never known Him. I’m not talking religion. I’m talking actualities. New Gospels—may be written—in the next fifty years!”

“We’re going to have the Judgment Day? That’s Adventism, isn’t it?”

“It’s no Second Coming as our church friends conceive it. I’m telling you, Louise—we should consider it a privilege that we can be involved—that we can be instruments—that we can proclaim Him as a historical person—”

“A historical person! Isn’t He that?”

“I mean, in secular history. You know, don’t you, Lou, that there’s no record in contemporary Roman reports that the Master was real, like Herod or Pilate?”

“No, I didn’t know it.”

“Well, for nineteen hundred years we’ve had that mystery with us. We’ve seen the effects of Christ’s life all about us, and yet—tracing back—He turns to a myth. That couldn’t just happen. There were reasons in fact.”

“What reasons?” she asked. “Wasn’t He real?”

“Of course He was real! No mythical character could leave such an impress on human affairs. But—the Faith of mankind must endure of itself."
It must have as its basis a Beautiful Ideal; to found it on a person would make it political. Therein has been its power, and why it's been different. So those records were suppressed, that men in their Faith should go forward of themselves."

"But who suppressed them?" she wondered like a child.

"Agencies, Louise, that dogma doesn't credit—so that after nineteen centuries, when that Faith needed buttressing, when a great new cycle was about to open in human affairs, the thunderbolt of revelation should rive civilization, concretely affirming not only the Master's literal identity but going still further and establishing His reign. For it's coming, Louise, and the end is . . . not yet."

"You telling me this! Are you starting some new creed?"

"Starting one? No. I'm scooping in all creeds. Louise, you hear me, . . . we're going to see the Man of Galilee again in a way that mankind hasn't dared to suspect! Not in literal earthquakes or rivers of fire. Not in tumults of altruisms quickening society. Far greater than these and yet divine in munificence. I've reason to believe He's coming in a way that no sect has conceived since Paul saw his vision on the road to Damascus. Not born into any living body as Theosophists suspect. Not descending from the heavens in panic-making phenomena. But confronting society in a miracle of Light!"
"A miracle . . . of . . . Light!"
"Don't ask me to explain it. You'll be told of yourself."

It was silent in the garden. The stars were like watchwords hung in the sky. The very house before them seemed listening and concurring. The girl turned strangely cold.

"Robling has told you this? And we . . . have something to do about it . . . by excavating somewhere?"

"Robling, Lou dear, has amassed a great fortune. The extent of it has startled me. Not until tonight did I grasp what he's done—done in ten years. For this is the queer part, Lou: This evening is exactly ten years ago to the night and the hour, that George performed those rescues in a shell-hole in France."

She considered this. "You think it holds significance?"

"I think that no man of ordinary clay, ordinary acumen, ordinary opportunities, could even do what he's done in ten years. He's amassed a great fortune. And for what purpose, Lou? To prepare humankind for a great phenomenon that's ahead—that'll change the face of the nations and complete a cycle begun of an evening nineteen centuries ago when a queer light played above a stable in Bethlehem, a light that the ignorant of that generation took to be a star."
“Still . . . I don’t see . . .”

“To amass that fortune, Lou, and create a Foundation for a purpose, was his job on earth. But like Moses, it’s not his prerogative—for some reasons we don’t know, and may never know—to enter into the Promised Land of applying that fortune for the purposes toward which he built it. He’s—well, his work is finished. We pick it up from there. I’ve accepted a commission tonight, Lou. I’m convinced in my soul it’s the Great Commission I came into life to execute. And that goes for you as well.”

“Basil—you’re implying—that George Robling isn’t like ordinary mortals—that he’s—he’s—”

“Hear me, Louise. And believe I’m not crazy. George Robling is one of the Elect, created and sent to earth for a purpose. That purpose is intricate, but . . . it’s to show men their destiny. He’s one of a company of volunteering souls who come into life to make the race better but denied their own awareness till they’re ripened in their roles. Ripened, that is, in control of their characters. Not even an angel could function in flesh until he was facile in physical experience. In the first place, he’d scare folks—”

“You mean George Robling is not like the rest of us? . . . He’s some sort of Christ? . . . don’t tell me that!”

“He’s no more the Christ than any soul any-
where who gives up his selfishness to do good unto others. But in the essence of his creation, . . . he's different from mortals—"

"Different from mortals! You mean . . . he's what the poets call an Angel Unawares?"

"Well, and why not? How do we know there aren't hundreds—thousands—of angels functioning unawares in human bodies right here in America—right here on earth—this very night and hour? Because they manifest in ordinary human bodies, talk like human beings, live in ordinary houses, wear ordinary clothes—does that mean the spirit within them mayn't be of Higher Order? You know I'm not superstitious. And yet in some matters I'm the most fundamental of the Fundamentalists."

"Of course we can't prove it mayn't be so. Still, I can't understand—"

"Louise, I know things I can't tell you or anyone. Ever since boyhood, I've known things I couldn't speak. But you, the woman I love, are the person for my confidences, insofar as I can give them. Hear me when I say—and don't think I'm irrational—that in our subconscious minds, you and I know who George Robling is! I'll go one step further. I'll say I believe that we too are members of that Goodly Company who have found him in earth-life, though he's the more awakened!"

"Basil, are you crazy? It's one thing to have a
stranger like Robling spin such theories—Sybil said he was eccentric. But it's quite another thing to hear you talking so."

"I've got a reason for so thinking. Life, Louise, is a projection by groups. We come into it together, friends of long standing, for we couldn't have a world that was made up of strangers—it wouldn't function socially—we'd be like the reptiles, strict individualists. And so-called social groups come not alone from people who vibrate, let's say, at the same velocity, but from long-built-up acquaintanceships. It takes many cycles to cement souls as friends, for friendships are premised on mutual experiences—with Love as their lubricant as well as their adhesive. When Man reaches the place where the group takes in the universe, we'll cease to inhabit Earth and go into God."

"George spoke of a pact—"

"Yes, and I think this is the essence of it—that we're to carry on the torch that Robling has lighted and thrown us—that he's started something greater than society dreams and we're his supporters, come into life to finish—"

"You talk, Basil, as though something was going to happen to George Robling!"

"I think the work is so big that it can't be predicated on the life of any one individual. So there's a group of us, here to insure the ultimate attainment. Men come into life to learn spiritual aware-
ness but social solidarity. Some of us among them try to teach them to attain both. When our paths cross unexplainably, we cry: 'It's a small world, after all!' What we really mean is: the Lodestone within us bringing us together, though it reaches and pulls from the ends of the earth."

"So that's what George meant by his reference to lodestone!"

"You can't make head and tail to life, Lou, unless you accept it as a series of existences. That's not Theosophy, though Theosophy believes it. It's not Transmigration, either, so offensive—and rightly—to so many real thinkers. Only as we see Life in its full panorama, eighty to a hundred thousand years long for each of us instead of the conventional seventy years in each experience, does it cease to hold the unsoluble mysteries of dogmatism. Look at a section of it, only a little earthly experience of seventy years, and right away you're balked. You can't even explain how half a dozen children of one family, born of the same parents under identical conditions, all have different characters, unless you admit prenatal existences that have each contributed something toward making those characters what they disclose themselves to be. How otherwise explain child prodigies, artistic precocities, the bent which certain souls have toward the creative or mechanical?"

"Science explains it as a transmission of hereditary traits, I've always thought. Anyhow, what
difference does it make? Why fill your head up with all that sort of tosh when after all, the fact remains that we're live men and women with a fortune to make or we land in the poorhouse?"

"So it was tosh, was it, that denied your father funeral services?"

"Oh for pity's sake, stop harping on that!"

"Self-preservation, Louise, is the first law of Nature. Do you mean to tell me it's the only law which has no practical use in the universe? You can't have Law without having Purpose. That's only logic."

"I don't get your application."

"Your horror of death—your own or anybody else's—is only a phase of self-preservation. So long as people are born into flesh and come to the moment when the fleshly organism fails them and becomes a disintegrating corpse, you'll have these questions of dogma, creed, superstition, mysticism—and on the other hand, pure and undefiled spirituality—heckling the race."

"All right, Van. But how long have you and George Robling had these . . . interests . . . in common?"

"I knew almost from the moment of meeting Robling, that I'd known him before, that a group was making up—or perhaps I should put it: reaching one another's sides. But we've got to remember that man is an individualist; you can't make
him group conscious in one year or one life. As a matter of fact, you can’t make him over: he must do that for himself. And we who teach him must exercise patience. And Patience, I submit, commences with ourselves."

“But Basil—if you think we belong to George’s group—a Mentor Group let’s call it—and have made a Pact to do this sort of thing—why haven’t we known about it early in our lives? Take George for instance—”

“Yes, take him. That’s excellent. Take a thousand Mentors like him. If they showed themselves socially as foreign to others, they’d encounter opposition—they’d be booed at, persecuted, accused of insanity. The creeds might revile them, their families disown them, at least men would say they were founding a new church. Or perhaps something worse. They’d be called crooks, cranks, psychic fanatics; find themselves haled before councils and courts. Instead, they are born quite ordinary youngsters. They make the mistakes that all men make in youth, have misfortunes and maladies. Sometimes they’re permitted to engage in business to sharpen their faculties—learn leadership and tact—but not told of their identities till the time comes for functioning—”

He stopped his strange speech. The house-door had opened and closed with a slam. Footsteps came swiftly: the harsh rasp of panting. It was
Potiphar Buss. He sprawled on them headlong.

"Upstairs! . . . Georgie! . . . a Big Light! . . . come quick!"

He caught them and clung on. They could not see his face: the night held only starlight. Yet Potiphar behaved as though stricken by stroke.

"Robling's hurt or something?" They sprang to their feet.

"Lights went out suddenly! . . . I come out t' see why! Then I looked in Georgie's room—I saw—I saw—"

"Yes, yes! Saw what?"

"A Big Light, I tell you—"

A cry sounded houseward, interrupting the printer. Someone was calling from the balcony piazza. It seemed to be Sarah, inarticulate of speech. But why couldn't they see her? What had happened to the lights?

Louise and Basil left Potiphar behind them. In beneath the pepper tree they hurried, across the patio, through solarium and library, the printer in their wake spilling over furniture.

The house was a crypt. Even the night lamps had queerly been extinguished—as though a fuse had "blown" in the basement. Basil struck a match. The three discerned the stairs.

"Let me take your hand!" Basil cried curtly.

He helped Louise up the staircase. But suddenly they stopped. Arriving at the angle of the "land-
ing” both of them began feeling something: something that arrested them from going further. The girl described it later as the same vibratory behavior of air that is felt from an organ when a bass pipe is playing, though it came without sound and defied their analysis.

“What is it?” she whispered.

But she got no answer. Somewhere a voice was speaking—over their heads—

“Men have a humor to know the Unknowable. There is no Unknowable. All is of instruction. That which is given partakes of Cosmic Light. Archangel and angel, seraphim and mortal—each has his part in the Drama of the Aeons.”

Basil clutched Louise. Louise clung to Basil. They dared not go further. The richness, the purity, the clarity, of that voice was potently terrifying. And an invisible strand seemed flung across those stairs in the dark, keeping them from going up, from intruding until the speaker—whoever it might be—had finished.

The voice continued onward, growing stronger in volume—

“Night calls to night: the swirling stars sing. Sunrise mounts on sunrise: the day has an anthem. Nowhere is blindness but for those who will not see. But greater than night shall be the Great
Blindness. Greater than sunrise shall be the Instruction."

A pause came. Their hearts bumped their ribs. Was some sort of Abou Ben Adam visitation taking place in that house on the mountaintop, or was the voice Robling's in super-conscious ecstasy? The voice continued presently, like the reading of a psalm—

"That which is spoken is divine in its essence. That which is Inferred is splendorous in concept. Man goes to his Long Home—have the poets not written it? And have they penned in blindness? The Light is eternal that glows upon the hills. The day is transfigured that comes with the Sun. Allow those to speak who be given authority. By their words ye shall know them. Great shall be the Knowing!"

The vibration kept up. The resonance turned prophetic—

"Out of the Infinite comes a clear Voice! Out of the Absolute comes a high Miracle! Out of the heart of humanity arises the one who shall lead all the Sheep. Man has a humor to know the Eternal. Why does he pause? Why will he demonstrate? When the world's night be gone, where shall go the Blindness? When the world's sun be risen,
where shall go the Darkness? Let the words of the Eternal come as a blessing. Let the night of vast Ignorance melt into morning. Let the high day of Knowledge approach as a season having in its heart the fecundity of Nature!"

The voice seemed to sink and they thought it had ended. Still they could not move, to climb up that stairflight. Robling—a stranger—whoever was speaking in that upper-floor study—suddenly resumed with sublime exultation—

"This be the Blessing—this be the Prophecy: Millions shall be called. One shall be chosen! Thousands shall manifest. One shall be leader! Serving the race comes the Band of the Inspired. Serving humanity comes the Group of the Anointed. Selah! Selah! Selah!"

They waited for more. The seconds ticked away. A moment. Two minutes. Presently they realized that the throbbing was quieting. Finally came the end of the vocal phenomenon—

"Nobly have you toiled, beautifully performed. Other laborers till the vineyard; other workers reap the harvest. Now the sun sinks on your Day in that vineyard. Night draws apace. But the morning comes surely. This be the summons sent from afar. Light and Life Eternal, these be thy
Then after a pause with a strong draft stirring: "Selah! Selah! Selah!"

The strange breeze passed. All settled to quiet on the floor above their heads. Whatever the explanation, the phenomenon had an aftermath. Louise felt intoxicated: her legs were queerly strengthless and yet she did not fall.

"Basil, help me! What's the matter with me? And that Voice, . . . it was so fearfully familiar! . . . it must have been Robling's. And yet . . . ."

A gasp came from somewhere, the suggestion of a moan.

Up the stairs they crept then, as though permission had been accorded them. Basil found the light switch and snapped its button downward. It clicked with no result. The fuses were blown. He fumbled for matches. A small flame grew brighter. "Look!" cried Louise.

Near the threshold of Robling's study Sybil Duncan lay prostrate. She was clad in negligee.

Clutched in one hand was a blue-steel automatic!
A TABLE in that hallway held a brass candelabrum. Six candles were in it and Basil dabbed their wicks.

“She’s alive,” he declared, bending over Sybil, “and seems to be unhurt.”

“Basil!—wait!—I feel so peculiar.”

“Sit down here by this girl. I must look inside the study.”

Into it he went, the candles held high. The printer was behind him.

Across at the desk they saw Robling fallen forward. His nose was misshapen where it pressed upon his blotter. One arm dangled down; its fingers held a pen. Basil touched his shoulder.

“He too is alive,” he told the scared printer.

“Thank th’ lord f’r that!”

“Hold his head, Potiphar, till he comes back to consciousness. I want to attend to that girl in the hall.”

They leaned Robling backward. Nikko appeared, his yellow face pasty. He came up the stairs carrying another candle—a squat, thick-set taper that spilled tallow on his hands.

“Please to tell me what happen?” he ventured.
“We don’t know ourselves yet,” Basil responded. He lifted Sybil’s body. “Someone get the house­keeper. Look in that chamber that opens on the balcony.”

Nikko complied and Basil turned with Sybil. “Lay her on the couch here,” Louise directed. Sarah appeared, supported by Nikko. She halted by the door-frame.

“What happened, Miss Twitch?” Basil addressed her.

Sarah had difficulty working her tongue. “I saw . . . a cloud o’ fire!” she finally informed them.

“A cloud!” exclaimed three voices.

“Well . . . it seemed to be a cloud. I was b-back in Nikko’s room afixin’ of a screen. The lights went out sudden-like . . . an’ I started for this hallway to get myself a candle. We keep candles handy to put in new fuses—”

“If you’ve got any new fuses on the premises, Nikko had better hurry down and restore all the lights.”

“Sarah have down-cellar key,” the Japanese explained. “I come get it, thank you.”

The key was handed over. “Go on, Miss Twitch,” Basil said, turning.

“Well . . . I come back along the corridor an’ . . . turned ’round the corner. An’ there was Georgie’s room . . . as though lighted by an arc lamp.”
"That's right!" affirmed Potiphar. "I see it too!"
"After the lights were out?"
"That's why I was scared."
"What else did you see beside the strange radiance?"
"'Twarn't radiant!" cried Potiphar. "'Twas colored like pearl—with shoots o' blue in it—or they might o' been green. But that's all I see, 'ceptin' that Georgie was queerly lighted—he had an awful look on his face—a surprised sort o' look—an' then he jus' crumpled. I could see through th' door-crack."

Basil had lifted Sybil and put her on the couch. Carefully he untwisted the gun from her fingers. It's barrel was cold.
"She never had the chance to fire it," he said.
"Mebbe," whispered Potiphar, "that's why somethin' happened. She was going in to kill him!"

They turned back to Robling. He still lay flaccid, his head against Potiphar.
"Look! . . . he'd been writing something!" Louise exclaimed. She picked up the pad that seemed to hold a message. Basil bent close; they read it together—flawless of diction—exquisite of penmanship—

"Tell mankind . . . that which cometh hath in it the mercy of Eternal Wisdom: that man be coming to the end of a cycle: that that which radiateth from the Mercy Seat be stupendous of grandeur
and beauteous of power. Tell him that he cometh to the Godhead. Tell him that I Am—that I raise him from a valley and set him on a height. Say that forces of everlasting compassion come as a shower to water thirsty earth: that I am the rainbow that hath beauty in the heavens. Say that his species cometh to a crossroads. It approacheth a junction with Eternity on the one side and Night upon the other. And out of the Darkness crieth a Voice: "We are those who chose wrongly and go downward into sleep." Out of the Radiance ringeth an anthem: 'We be the host who harkened to the Vision and made ourselves palaces not wrought of marble.'"

Louise glanced at Robling after reading this aloud. He seemed to be a living dead man. A weird group it was, candle-lighted, about his inert body.

"There's more!" cried Basil huskily.

Louise read the remainder—

"Listen, My beloved. Harken to My voice. Tell men that that which cometh, Cometh! Verily the Darkness crieth with a wail. Verily the heavens answer with a hymn. Cometh the morning to the whole human race; cometh the midday with sun overhead; cometh the even when flocks seek their folds; cometh the starlight when night is made radiant. But greater than these cometh the Still, Small Voice of a Child saying: 'That which is
Louise swallowed painfully. The room, the house, seemed eerily consecrated. Potiphar spoke.

"Look—Georgie's comin' 'round!"

Louise laid the pad beside her on the desk. Robling was quivering, gasping, jerking. He too swallowed painfully and they saw his eyes open.

"Ugh!" he cried gutturally. The candles caught his gaze.

Basil stroked his shoulder.

"You've had some sort of a seizure, old man. Feeling any better?"

The seated man shook himself—and the pen he had been holding, clacked on the floor. He whetted his lips as though to purge them of bad taste. His glance went to Basil.

"I—don't think—I understand. Where the devil am I? What are you doing here?"

His listeners were shocked—not so much by his address but at something in his voice.

It wasn't Robling's voice! It was throaty, raucous.

"Don't you know where you are?" Basil laughed nervously.

"Do you think if I knew, I'd ask you the question?" He looked at Louise and his forehead-scowl deepened. "Is this your house?" he demanded, short-tempered.
"Mine!" cried Louise. "Of course not. It's yours."

In the candles' flickering dimness, "Robling" glanced about the room. From appointment to appointment he peered—and once he smeared his wrist across his moist forehead. His face was pasty white. At length he saw Sybil, stretched on the sofa.

"Who's that?" he cried, startled.

"That's your secretary—Sybil Duncan."

"Sybil! Sybil Duncan?"

But weakness overcame him and he closed his eyes again. The boggle-eyed printer held his head once more. Not for long, however.

"What's... she doing here? How'd she get here?"

"The evidence," said Basil, "points to the fact that she got a gun and was stalking you in a jealous rage. And so... she was halted."

"Halted? Halted how?"

Horror was in their faces as they looked at one another.

"Come on!" ordered "Robling", his voice growing petulant. "Stop gawking and answer! This is... a fine way to treat a fellow..."

"We was visitin' you, Georgie," the printer explained. "Don't you remember? We spent th' evenin' here with you an' you made your fortune over t' Basil—"

"Shush!" cried Basil angrily.
"What's that? Fortune? You're crazy as loons—I ain't got no fortune—all I want is Sybil—"

He made to arise again but once more fell backward. Then the lights came on suddenly, flooding the study.

"WOW!" gasped "George" sharply. "Whatever did that?"

"Your Japanese boy must have found the bad fuse," Basil answered thoughtfully, staring at the other. All of them were staring . . .

The seated man had thrown up a forearm to cover his eyes. Now slowly, as one who fears to reveal his identity, he lowered it slightly.

Louise gave a start and shrank against Basil. It was the first time in her life that she had so sought protection—from Basil—from any man. And Van Dyke held her close.

The eyes looking at them craftily above that upraised arm, could not be George Robling's. From face to face they glanced. Then the seated man laughed—and his mirth held abandon. He dropped the arm away.

They got their second shock.

"Robling" was old; dramatically old. Through Louise's consciousness went similes with stories she had read in girlhood: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"—Ryder Haggard's "She"—and the horror of it fascinated her. The man's face held lines, his neck had shrunken slightly, his shoulders slumped loosely. Seated before them was someone who sought some-
thing of them—a nondescript, a tramp, the husk of the man they had come there to visit. All the former George Robling's personality—benignant, commanding—seemed to have vanished; even his head beset his shoulders crookedly.

"We . . . ought to call . . . a doctor," Sarah whispered fearfully.

Basil was suddenly in control of them all. Never since she had known him had Louise perceived him in the role he now played. Softly he said, so that "Robling" could not hear:

"No physician could do any good in the case we have before us. Doctors are infants at this sort of thing."

"But—"

"This fellow's quite normal. Humor him and study him." To their subject he said: "You know Sybil rather well, don't you?"

"Sure I know Sybil!" The other's eyes glittered. "I'm goin' to marry her. If you don't believe it, ask her. I've been watchin' her for years—I know what she needs."

"Yes, and I'm equally sure that Miss Duncan will be eager to marry you. I suggest, however, that you take a short nap."

"I've . . . I've got to see Syb!"

"Robling" got up then. Unsteadily he managed it. From chair to chair he guided himself, as a man after illness wobbles when he walks. And the others shrank back. He arrived before the couch.
“Um-m,” he remarked. He feasted his eyes.

Sybil had slipped into an old-rose kimono to steal from her room, thrusting nude feet into Turkish bath slippers. These had dropped off as Basil had lifted her. She lay now inert, graphic of contour, her bosom gaping open.

“Um-m!” repeated he who stared down upon her.

“Van, . . . it’s revolting! . . . take me out quickly!” and Louise made an effort to get toward the door.
CHAPTER XI

THEY gathered in the library below—Louise—Basil—Potiphar—after Van Dyke had carried Sybil into her own chamber where Sarah attended her.

"George Robling" had been persuaded to lie down in another room where he quickly fell into a type of drugged slumber, sleeping as newly born infants sleep, the coma of fatigue. The horror of something lay on all of them. Louise was still shuddering.

"Basil!" she cried. "Put your arms around me—hold me—it's all too awesome to put into words. Did you see the way he looked at Sybil? The man who smiled at us when we left him to go down to the garden, never would have done that."

"No," agreed Basil, "he never would have done it."

"Basil, much as I dislike Sybil in some ways, she's a woman like myself. I can't leave her in the same house with—"

"Let's look at it this way, Louise: that after all which Sybil contributed to Robling's success, she deserved the sort of reward that she could best ap-"
preciate. Well, she’s got it. Whatever, or whoever, the entity may be that seems to have taken possession of George Robling’s body, we have no means of knowing. How it was accomplished, also is beyond us. But psychiatry is profuse with cases of obsessions and dual personalities, and if we want Biblical affirmations we’ve got the many accounts of the ‘devils’ cast out by the Master—most notably the herd of swine that received them and ran into the sea. This transmigration has both a scientific and a religious basis. In Sybil’s case, I think she’s been saved the sorrow of Robling’s physical death by having some lesser personality take possession of Robling’s body and serve her as a husband. Of course I’m not certain. I submit my hypothesis for what you think it’s worth.”

“But . . . the things he may do to her!”

“The girl is free, white and twenty-one—as the slang phrase has it. If her ‘employer’ suddenly develops traits that are not to her liking or safety, she can always part company with him. From what I knew of her back in Chicago before all this happened, however, she’s the type that’ll welcome a little mauling—providing the ‘right man’ does it.”

Louise cried presently: “But that Voice, Basil! . . . was it Robling’s, do you think?”

“My dear girl, I know no more than you or Potiphar—about what to conclude. All I’m aware of, are certain possibilities that persons unread or
uneducated in such natural phenomena constantly scoff at. If all you wish is a personal opinion, I'll answer that I believe Robling's physical equipment has been utilized consistently as an instrumentality ever since the night in France when he gave himself over utterly to Altruism and Sacrifice. An augmentation, we might call it, to his own fine character, possibly a literal presentation of what the Master meant when he said: 'Abide ye in Me and I in you until I come again.' Most people have taken that instruction symbolically. Perhaps it wasn't meant as a symbol as all. Perhaps there's a way by which in rare cases Christ as a spiritual entity may actually share our bodies with us for the accomplishment of specific good works."

They considered this in its terrific potency.

"How... can we ever explain things?" Potiphhar Buss lamented.

"We're not called to explain anything, Potiphhar. No one would believe us, so why should we try? The Man in the Street will hold that because such demonstrations aren't part of his gross daily life, they're the vaporings and illusions of cranks. So let's not be queer. We'll keep it to ourselves and go on about our business."

"What if George's friends notice a change in him?"

"They will, never fear. But such 'changes' are common. The asylums of the country are choked with similar cases—because humanity in its present
stage of enlightenment doesn’t credit the separate-ness of physical life and spiritual existence, having no way of proving it beyond resultant behavior.”

“But it’s a pretty strong dose to swallow, Van,” Louise protested, “that a living body can be tenanted by more than one soul in the course of that body’s existence. Most people know that when the spirit leaves a body, that’s Death.”

“When humanity gets over its mass terror and begins to take natural research a little less facetiously and more scientifically, much may be discovered and proven that now is ‘irresponsible mysticism.’”

“Basil, what’ll we do now? I don’t know what ails me. Somehow . . . I’m not myself.”

For the second time he was holding her close—embracing her—with her forehead pillowed in the curve of his neck. For the first time in seven years—for the first time in all her life—Louise felt impulses bursting bonds which threatened to engulf her. They were more than passions. She felt deadly ecstasies—such as she had never thought possible in any man’s arms—that made recollection of her business, her prestige, her commercial aspirations, tar and ashes for the moment—ecstasies that turned her whole body to wine.

“Over a period of time,” Basil answered, “we may find quite natural explanations for what’s taken place here tonight. First the light fuses were blown out—and we know that is only brought about by
the application of electric current too heavy for them to withstand. Well, an 'overload' may have come coincidentally through the wires, or some extraneous currents may have played within this house tonight—as lightning bolts also have ruined fuses—"

"But I see a fizzy white light, Mister Basil!" Potiphari argued. "Th' housekeeper see it too!"

"Tomorrow we might find a short circuit of some kind in Robling's study—or Sybil in starting for George's room to shoot him may have tripped over wires—we don't know yet till we've fully investigated. As for the Voice, there may be a radio in George's study we're not yet aware of, and what we heard was a snatch of broadcasting—"

"That queer throbbing, however," Louise protested. "There was something in the air about us concretely disturbing it!"

"Our materialistic friends learning of this night's happenings can be counted on to dish up some explanation or other—and in justice to ourselves, we should give them credence. I agree with you that it's easier to accept the explanation of a visitation of celestial agencies, but we ought to be careful not to hoax ourselves. The Work is too important."

"I could credit any sort of 'rational' explanation of what's happened, Basil, but it'll take a lot of 'rational explaining' to account for this altered
feeling that’s in me—as though something had been awakened in my innermost self that’ll never return to . . . sleep.”

Basil glanced down in her eyes and smiled. Strange, strange it was for Louise to be defending the supernatural phases of the episode. For even Louise’s physical appearance looked altered, though how could she appreciate it.

“Basil . . . I can’t go b-back . . . and be satisfied with prosey business . . . not after this sort of thing’s happened. It’ll distract me for the rest of my natural life!”

“You’re not going back dear—not to be as you were. I haven’t told you everything. We were interrupted out in the garden, remember.”

“What else is there to tell?”

“Upstairs tonight, just before you entered George’s study, Robling had concluded with me the most important business transaction of his life. I think he had a premonition of what was to happen. So he went into the city this afternoon to obtain the papers his lawyer had been weeks in drawing. We executed them tonight, despite it being Sunday, dating them yesterday. I accepted the commission which he fully explained. You and Potiphar coming here, followed by myself, was a Sign he understood. He . . . appointed me trustee of his fortune, Louise, to be expended as the documents he read us, directed.”
"What documents? What's in them?"

Gradually Basil soothed her, quieting the quivering of her beautiful body. She was suddenly very lovable in this new rôle of suppliant—more appealing than the man had supposed that she could be. He continued talking as to a child, for verily—without knowing it as yet—the heart of the woman was becoming strangely child-like.

"Suppose we sit down, Lou dear—the three of us. It may take some time to make everything clear. Then we'll all pack our things and move to a hotel."

"Tonight?"

"We'll avoid much distress if we're absent in the morning. Sybil will be mistress here. We must let her adjust herself without embarrassment from us."

Gently he released her. In a heavy chair he sank, pulling the cord of a nearby reading-lamp. And Louise did a queer thing—for Louise. She procured a cushion from the divan, dropped it on the floor by his feet, sank upon it, and leaned against his knees . . .

Potiphar Buss pulled another chair up close. And from a pocket on one hip Basil took some papers. They were bound in blue covering and were heavy with seals.

"First," he offered, "let me read you the concluding paragraphs of our Instructions. Whether or not Robling wrote them, is not for us to say.
We must take them as we find them—for what they’re worth—then later we’ll discuss them.”

He shuffled through the pages and finally cleared his throat—

“... out of the North shall come a Great Tempest. Out of the Soil shall grow a great Seed. Out of the heart of humanity shall come one who shall lead all the Sheep. Who is he? Where is he? For Captain of the Forces is he—a common man who now walks in darkness of a sort, even the blindness of his true identity. He shall come at a time which men shall forever afterward term the Great Speaking. He shall stand before the nations and weld them into one. That is the Prophecy. That is the Blessing. And when he comes, all men shall pay him homage, for he will lead with a wisdom not born of woman. Harken to his voice, you hosts of Mortality. Give heed to his counsel, for he comes before a Holy One, and after Him interprets. That is the Message that comes with the Sun. That is the Sun! When the Voice of Armageddon speaks, then shall be knowledge.”

Basil paused and glanced at their faces.

“It’s a whole lot like th’ words we heard fr’m th’ landin’,” whispered Potiphar.

“It’s even more so in the rest of it,” Basil answered, “because the phraseology shifts to the solemn form of expression. Listen!—
“. . . Lift up your heads, Ye everlasting Gates, and be Ye lifted up, Ye everlasting Doors, for the King of Glory knocketh! When He that cometh, Cometh, then shall be no tumult. When He that speaketh, Speaketh, then shall be no error. All things are recorded. All things are potent. When He that cometh, Cometh, then shall be no error for he speaketh with authority and the hosts of earth give audience. Selah! Selah! Selah! . . . Rich unto the Morning shall be the world’s sunlight. Fine unto gold shall be the world’s treasure. Out of Capernaum in Galilee cometh the Preface! Harken, ye nations, and bow to your leadership!”

“Is that all?” asked Louise. And Basil nodded: “What’s it all about? It’s all Greek to me.”

Basil laid the papers on a nearby taboret.

“Well—Louise—Potiphar—all I can give you is my own interpretation. Potiphar heard what Robling told us the first of the evening and may have his own conclusions. But speaking for myself, . . . not meaning to be any alarmist, . . . I think that humanity stands on the brink of an alteration in society infinitely more significant than the late world war. You said in the garden a half-hour ago, Louise, that the Man in the Street wasn’t interested in Scriptural origins or the validity of what occurred in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. But ever since mankind acquired a Faith in the Eternal,
he's been interested in what Life means, where he came from, whither he's going, and what happens to him in flesh between the Birth and Death mileposts. Up to a hundred years ago he looked to Mysticism to tell him. During the past century he's besought the various Sciences. Now that the whole globe has been discovered and charted, now that all peoples are known for what they are, now that invention has brought international communication as well as international conflict too terrible to contemplate, the moment is at hand for a new dispensation. I'm audacious enough to maintain that we're instruments of it. I think you'll agree that something is afoot."

"I'll agree that we seem to have been plunged into a series of happenings that can't be explained. But it's all so preposterous that we should be instrumental—"

"Someone, somewhere, must be the instruments. Why not ourselves as well as persons in a far-away country?"

"But these revelations—if we want to term them that—started in with an excavating project, shifted to vague innuendoes about Christ's second coming, and now veer to equally mysterious references about some common man somewhere who shall lead the nations into some sort of union. It's all so confusing. Why not keep to one premise—?"

"Because a sort of program is involved, Lou dear. I don't claim to have accurate enlightenment. You
can take my opinion for what it’s worth. But I’ve told you already that I’ve never accepted that after His Transfiguration the Master departed for some grandiose heaven afar on another planet. I think He’s been here on this literal earth in a status no more visible to mortal eyes than the so-called ‘dead’ are visible to mortal eyes. But society has approached a graduation in its evolution where a finer jurisdiction is necessary—a jurisdiction which Man of himself cannot supply to himself and for himself. Therefore I believe we’re on the brink of new revelations, now manifestations, new miracles, if you will, when we’re going a whole century forward in spiritual enlightenment, in a handful of years."

“You frighten me, Basil. You’ll frighten mankind everywhere, with that sort of talk. No one wants a Second Coming of Christ, down deep in their hearts. They’re plenty willing to let society make progress of itself, without miraculous enlightenment.”

“Yes, and no one wanted the late World War. All the same, it came and was suffered. And out of it has come more ethical and international progress than the race has made in the past fifty centuries. No use running from the Inevitable, Louise. Let’s try to understand it, then it won’t terrify us. However, I haven’t said that Christ was coming as the Adventists hold. I said most emphatically that His reappearance will come by a manner and method
which no creed, no religion, no system of philosophy now existent, has the slightest concept of. I'm not quarrelling with the creeds. I'm counselling them."

"Suppose they don't want counselling. They'll resent it, naturally, else they wouldn't be creeds."

"But I'm not starting any missionary movement. I'm not trying to convince them of anything, sell them any new idea regardless of how novel may be the miraculous events ahead. I'm simply submitting to you and to them what Potiphar and I have learned from George Robling. If he hasn't had light of some kind, Louise, tell me how the phraseology of his writings came about, to say nothing of what we heard with our ears."

Louise shrugged her shoulders. Basil went on—

"Circumstances and events must cause the creeds to ponder. And according to Robling, one of the first things to happen is the execution of this excavation project on Robling's three millions."

"Three millions! He's given you that much?"

"Yes," responded Basil, "that out of the Palestinian revelations of the next few years may come irrefutable proof of Christ's historical reality, coupled with interpretations of His original doctrines that will stupefy and balk further dissensions among theologians. Think what it will mean to Catholicism, some of the mighty ramifications of Protestantism, Mohamedism, even Buddhism, to get an irrefutable interpretation of the Master's doc-
trines. Think what it means to Jewry, for instance, to know that for nineteen hundred years it has repudiated its Messiah. Of course I'm giving you this in crude portions—the main idea—instead of reading this voluminous document—"

"But won't you be inviting a social cataclysm to unearth these proofs and knock the dogmatic props from under present religious structures?"

"Can't you understand, Lou dear, that the only dogmatic props we'll knock away will be those of self-evident Error? Beneath religion we'll drive the mighty bastions of Truth—and Accuracy of Spiritual Conception—that will endure to the end of man's days on this planet. I pay the leaders of the creeds no compliment when I say that their very devoutness will make them the first to acknowledge error, when the burden of proof becomes overwhelming. It's their absolute conviction of their concepts of Right as being errorless, that makes them so powerful as leaders at present."

"But if these proofs are to be discovered in Palestine, why the necessity for a Second Coming? And who's this mysterious commoner who's to 'lead all the Sheep'?"

Basil considered a moment. Finally he said—

"The commoner, Louise, I have reason to believe, is the reborn soul of one of the Master's Disciples, come into flesh in this present generation to take
charge of humanity in the confusion which must result when for a temporary period the creeds are undermined. A flash of his own identity will be given him. He will awaken to his brevet. With the voice of one having authority because he knows his true personality, he will call the peoples of the earth to order and declare to them the Program under way. And when he is doubted, when he is assailed, when the wolves in the great religious structures would tear him to pieces because he threatens them with exposure, then I believe the Man of Galilee will show Himself, in one great, terrific manifestation of Light, over and done with almost as soon as it is produced, but stupefying into utter prostration those clackers and sophists who declare He is a Myth and His spokesman a charlatan! What’s clearer than that?"

Silence followed in that library. Louise stared, bright-eyed.

"And you m-mean ... that we ... it’s our part of the Program ... to take George Robling’s money ... go to Palestine ... and uncover these proofs that bring all that about?"

"What else can we think? We’ve got the evidence of our senses that our lives have been patterned to equip us for such work. We’ve got the actuality of George Robling’s three million dollars left in my hands absolutely. We’ve got the speci-
fic instructions in these documents where to go and what to look for, in our digging. How get around all these especially after the natural phenomena that’s transpired in this house this recent hour?”

“I . . . don’t . . . know!”

“We’re not assailing anything. We’re not challenging anything. We’re to do certain things and let events dictate their fiats to society. What is to be, will be. You or I can’t change it.”

“B-Basil, . . . who do you think the man is, . . . the commoner, . . . the one you say may be the Master’s disciple living somewhere right now as an ordinary man?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea, Louise. No more than have you. But I’m as sure that the Moment is going to bring him forth as I’m sure that a totally new form of society is to maintain on this earth by the year Two Thousand. He will be one who will come unannounced. He will have his own cognition when the time comes for action. Aside from that, however, our guesses are alike. Any one of a hundred million males in America, Europe, Asia, may be that Disciple. We can only wait and see—and meanwhile do our part of the Program in the way we have been advised.”

“Basil, I’m thunderstruck. I’m completely turned over. How can all this possibly be happening to one who’s always termed anything but the materialisms of life a lot of Rubbish? I . . . I feel . . . I’m rebuked.”
“Th’ Master never rebukes anyone, Miss Lou,” the printer put in. “He may go ’way fr’m a Door when He knocks an’ th’ Door ain’t opened. But He don’t get small ’bout it an’ refuse t’ knock agin.”
CHAPTER XII

WHAT could she believe?

Little sleeping was done in the house on the mountaintop that night. For they did not go down to the Los Angeles hotel. Too much impended with the coming of daylight. Furthermore, Louise could not be persuaded to abandon Sybil to the metamorphosed George Robling till the girl understood exactly what had happened.

Louise lay with her hands behind her head for a long, long time, not daring to extinguish her lights, giving thought to Basil's statements in terms of world events, the horrifying thing that had happened to Robling's person, the unexplainable Messages and Prophecies given them. And thinking, she slumbered . . .

It was a fitfull, hectic slumber. What troubled her now was not the lights she had left burning in her chamber but a Greater Illumination growing brighter and brighter in her spirit. Once she dreamed.

She dreamed of walking unhampered by clothing of any sort through a desert place, straight into sunlight that thrilled as it warmed her—elixir in her body, ecstasy in every physical movement—her
pace increasing till she found herself no longer taking strides but moving as though she had lost contact with earth. The sensation was delirious. Even the sun into which she walked grew vaster of size, mightier of power to galvanize and ennoble her. Yet she did not feel heat beyond that first warmth. Rather its brightness seemed like rhythm—tremendous Music—harmony supernal.

She awoke with a feeling that someone was near her. Uncountable numbers of persons were near her. She was no longer an abandoned child or a lone business strategist. Hordes and hordes of the friendliest persons, associates and relatives, engulfed her like a sea. She came wide awake and sat up in bed. The time was six o'clock. Dawn was prying beneath her window-shades.

She did not feel confused. She was not bothered. Earthly problems were no longer antagonisms; life was no longer a challenge. All that seemed childish. The essence of intoxication she had felt the night before while listening to those sublime statements on George Robling's stairs was coming afresh with the new day, with the sensation of wafting faster and faster into tremendous sunlight. It gave a clarity to her thoughts that startled her. Her head seemed light. Her body felt translucent. She could not account for it.

She did not try to account for it. It was no more dramatic than this: that into her heart flooded cloud on cloud of soft, silvery Peace. She loved
Basil. She loved him physically, mentally and spiritually. She saw him now as more than a rich woman's son, favored since birth and surrounded by privilege. She sensed him as a companion with whom she had set out on an Errand back in a different kind of morning though no less bright than the one now coming swiftly. Just across the hall she knew him to be sleeping, yet it was as natural for him to be there as she now found it natural to love him.

For Potiphar too, she felt an odd affection. She thought of old Charlotte, Basil's mother, and discovered that her animus was dead for the Gorgon likewise. She finally made herself a promise.

The revelations of the day before were all too stupendous for her to grasp at once. Weeks, perhaps months, must go by before she could credit the significance of them. She had a long, long way to explore—indeed, all Life must be a sort of increasing exploration—before she could be certain that what she had been told was a prophecy of Fact. But this she said contritely—

"If events show me the way to steer out from my complication with the Government, and someone will make me an offer for my holdings, I'll accept it as proof that all I've learned is bona fide."

She vowed that to herself—to whom she never had broken a promise. For she wanted to believe that what she had learned was bona fide.

She could not sleep longer. She arose, snapped off
the lights and ran up the curtains. The Los Angeles valley was clean-washed in mist. Over the Sierra Madras the bright sun was coming. What a day in which to start eastward on an airflight. She noticed the world for the first time as something of joyous beauty—joyous beauty—joyous in that for the first time all her instincts and endeavors were aligned in a trend that satisfied her spirit.

To go to Palestine with Basil, to assume charge of a three-million-dollar excavating project, with all its vicissitudes and thrills, to direct and manipulate its million details, to the end and aim that a great social cataclysm could be interpreted for the coming generations, suddenly shaped to her as divine in its proscription. What greater labor could she employ herself with, to enhance her prestige or bring her renown? But entirely aside from that earthly reward, what more subtle contribution could she make to Eternity? She felt like the chiming of bells. And the East grew brighter and the valley came awake . . .

She wondered after George Robling, where his spirit might be this exquisite Monday morning—that spirit which had discussed her Pact with her at the dinner table only two nights before. That brought thoughts of her father. Thoughts of her father brought the realization that her promise to old Peter was still unfulfilled.

But how might it ever be fulfilled, now that George Robling had gone also into Light? After
what had transpired, did old Peter himself demand it be fulfilled? Strange to relate, she believed that he did. This thing she could do: the real George Robling had made over nearly three millions in money and securities to Basil. Whether it would result in the founding of some new creed, the effrontery of existing religions, a challenging of the present social system, the success or failure of the bizarre program which Robling seemed to have bequeathed to them, the fact remained that Sybil and her lover must be now nearly penniless. Since Basil had gained so enormously, why shouldn't Louise forestall complications that might arise in that quarter—till the sense or delusion of Robling's revelations was proven, anyhow—by relinquishing to "Robling" one-half her father's fortune?

Yes, she would do it if for no other reason than to explore the validity of the former Robling's contentions and retain the Peace which had come to her so beautifully. Deciding this, she felt an enhancement of her Joyousness. Then Potiphar was rapping frantically on her door, imploring her to open it and hear him.

What new thing had happened? Why should he be wanting her at such an hour of morning?

"Miss Lou, ... Basil's in Georgie's library talking over th' long distance tellyphone with Philly-delphy. He sent me t' fetch you."

Louise adjusted her hair, twisted the girdle of her
negligée the tighter and followed the printer belowstairs. Basil, in a corner alcove, was applying himself to the instrument.

"Yes?" he was saying. "What? . . . yes, I get that. What? . . . Ackermann's voluntarily exonerated us? . . . who am I talking with? . . . is this you, Fred? . . . Fred Frye? . . . go ahead! . . . he's thrown himself on the mercy of the Federal authorities and will bear the brunt of the prosecution? What's made him do that?"

Basil listened several moments without interrupting. He turned and saw Louise. Clasping his palm over the transmitter, he said in a startled aside. "It's four hours earlier in Washington than it is here in California and Monday morning has brought action on those indictments . . . Yes?" he called quickly, turning back to the telephone. "Mother's what? . . . offered to pay Louise how much? . . . seven hundred and fifty thousand? . . . Good Lord!"

More listening. And Louise came close, sinking by his side. Basil took the receiver partially from his ear that she too might hear what was coming across the miles.

"Your mother," she heard the voice of Old Coat-Tails declare, "thinks this whole business better be washed up by you and Louise getting out of the country and spending a couple of years in Europe. I'm inclined to agree with her. She's found that the Thomas Restaurant Chain will be glad to take over
Lou's interests and she'll handle the deal and give us the profits, if any. If Lou's out there with you, try and get her to see sense. This sort of solution may not come again—"

"All right, Fred. Anything else?"

"Yes, your mother's had another of her spells. She lay in a sort of coma for three hours Saturday night with a couple of doctors working over her. Yet she seems to come out of them without the slightest after-effects. They don't understand it. Anyhow, you'd better get back east as quickly as you can make it."

"All right. Tell mother that Louise and I will start back with Jack Trent between now and noon. And I think she'll accept—Louise, I mean. Things have happened out here that make it advisable."

"Fine!" came Frye's answer. "When will you arrive here?"

"We ought to make it by tomorrow night, barring mishaps. But I don't look for mishaps. Give Mother our regards and tell her that Louise and I will be married within the fortnight."

He hooked the receiver and turned to the girl. "Aren't you presuming a bit, Basil?" she demanded.

"Am I, Louise?"

The girl's face was crimson.

"So I'm to be bought after all?" she retorted. "For three-quarters of a million dollars! That's
a rather steep price to give for an orphaned girl. It . . . it makes me wonder . . . if she's really worth it."

"Louise!"

She was thoughtful a moment. All the difficulties in her predicament seemed ironing away—more of the "supernatural phenomena" that might never be explained. Yet she remembered her promise to herself . . .

She faced him eye to eye. Both had arisen.

"Suppose I were willing to be so huckstered?" she demanded.

"Are you, Louise?"

She drew a long breath. All the events since the death of her father passed kaleidoscopically before her. She tilted her chin.

"If you want me on those conditions," she said steadily, "I am!"

"Louise! My dearest!"

"I . . . I feel that I want to go on this Flight with you, Basil. Not merely an airplane flight. Rather . . . a Journey . . . on Wings of the Spirit! Oh Basil!"

His arms were about her. He was holding her tightly.

"—into the Sunrise, it will be, dearest. Don't forget that!"

"I'm not forgetting. On the contrary, I'm remembering. Basil, Basil! . . . suppose it's all true! Suppose that what we've learned on this adventure
is actually to come to pass—what a wondrous Vista opens!"

"There's only one way to prove it—whether it's bona fide or whether it's a hoax—that's to let events happen but be careful not to obstruct them."

"I'll make one admittance, Basil—I'm convinced, at least, that what the world calls Mysticism may be the profoundest Truth, though not yet revealed because mankind isn't ready. I'm ready to retract that happenings are rubbish—even Golden Rubbish, as Potiphar qualified them—merely because they can't be normally explained. Oh Basil, Basil! It'll be the greatest and most splendid gamble that I ever undertook—running down these prophecies and finding out results."

Potiphar Buss beamed on them in embrace.

"I still hold it's jus' th' Literal Hands guidin' you, Miss Lou," he offered. "If my life ain't been worth anything else, it's helped you two folks t' find your own Happiness."

He saw Basil kiss the girl in his arms.

"Into Sunlight!" Basil said softly.

"Into the World's Sunrise, let's put it for the present, Basil!"

"—into the World's Sunrise," he confirmed, . . .

"on Wings!"

Potiphar Buss went upstairs to pack.

THE END