

FICTION

Arthur Stringer

The Silver Poppy

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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THE SILVER POPPY

A NOVEL

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER



NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
MCMIII

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THE SILVER POPPY

CHAPTER I

THE VOICE IN THE NIGHT

From her dark towers she lightly threw
To him three roses red;
He spake no word, but pale he grew,
And bowed his troubled head.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

To make your heart, you must first break your heart! --"The Silver Poppy."

It was a warm, humid evening of early September, and every window and skylight of Repellier's huge studio was open its widest. Between the muffled rhythm and beat of an orchestra the sound of laughter and merriment, and the murmur of many voices, floated out on the hot night air.

Of a sudden the throb of the music and the hum of voices ceased, expectantly, for it had been whispered from group to group that the supreme event of an evening of surprises was about to occur.

Then out from its hiding-place behind a bank of azaleas there floated into the crowded, hushed studio a Venetian gondola of black and gold. Three slim young girls, in the brightest of red and yellow silk, reclined with studied languor on the boat's curved prow, and to the music of guitars suddenly broke out into an Italian boat-song. The strange craft, piloted with much skill by Hanchett, the portrait-painter, glided slowly up and down the great, high-ceilinged room with its rows of canvases and tapestries and Daghestan rugs, with its methodic litter of small-arms and casts and trophies and costumes, cruising cautiously in and out over a flashing, many-tinted course of applauding men and women.

It was not until the barcarole had all but come to a close that the gondola was discovered to be nothing more than Mrs. Alfred Spaulding's motor runabout, deftly enclosed in a canvas-covered framework. And although, at the last, something went wrong with the steering-gear and the automobile had to be shouldered ignominiously back into its corner, it was unhesitatingly agreed that its short-lived cruise had been a triumph of novelty. The patter of a hundred clapping hands showed, indeed, that the *bizarrerie* of Repellier's *entr'acte* was a success, and a success with an audience sadly used to novelties.

For of those who stood about and approved so applaudingly many had that day come down from Newport, or reluctantly forsaken the coolness of Sound and seashore, while a diplomat or two--who chanced to have been friends of Repellier abroad--had even journeyed up through the heat from Washington. Yet no one who knew Repellier cared to miss one of this old artist's birthday gatherings. Many among the crowds that swarmed and buzzed about the studio, it is true, were artists and workers whom the fall of the first leaf had brought flocking back to the city, and actresses and leading men whom the rise of the first curtain had brought scurrying back from Europe, though that vaguely denominated element Society itself was not averse to come panting up Repellier's long stairs with a secret sense of bravado in what seemed a decorous enough ascent into the bewildering freedom of Bohemianism.

"But poets are my penchant!" a florid woman with a mannish but kindly face, that blossomed incongruously out of a gown of turquoise-blue, was declaring to John Hartley, who as a young man fresh from Oxford had been brought over to the corner wherein she held sway. It had startled her a little, obviously, to learn that this wide-shouldered young giant was a disciple of what she knew to be an exigent master, the ink-pot.

"But not in the wild state," parried the young man, who still wore his metrical spurs somewhat awkwardly. That night he had felt for the first time that poetry was a thing to be lived down.

"That's just it!" lamented the lady in turquoise-blue. "We can't get at you wild--you're all as unsatisfying as--as the caribou up in the Park. You either get blue-penciled out of existence or pink-teaed and petted out of decency!"

The group of men clustered about Miss Short laughed encouragingly, for she was both well known and well liked, a personage most outspoken of opinion and most prodigal of epigram, relishing not a little her undisputed reputation for bluntness, lamenting even more her lapses into a quixotic soft-heartedness which left her the easy prey of those fellow-workers in a profession where mendicancy is not unheard of. Yet among those who knew her best her flashing wit seemed to save her to the last, for it was, to her, a sort of spade-bayonet with which she in some way entrenched

herself when not piercing her enemy.

"You're like our California plums," she went on genially; "you have all the bloom rubbed off before we can get hold of you."

"But that's the trouble with genius in our age," interrupted Henry Slater, who declared himself to be a publisher and therefore to know whereof he spoke; "it has to be picked green, like watermelons, so as not to spoil on the market."

"Still, I don't believe you're spoiled yet, Mr. Hartley. That's why I believe I'm going to like you," Miss Short added, with even more disconcerting candor. "And that's why I'm going to take you off and give you some good advice." There was a murmur of simulated jealousy.

"The first of which should be a word or two about wearing the hair longer," said a tired-looking young man with a Turkish cigarette.

"Right enough, Wheelock," said the publisher. "Heaven has given the snake his rattles, and the poet his hair. So that when we hear the one, Miss Short, and see the other, we all know what to do!"

"And you might drop a hint about the Mills House often being the avenue to the Hall of Fame." It was Clive Hodge, the dramatist, speaking in his startlingly thin and girlish voice.

"And why not a word about sneaking back to London and landing on us again in velvet and ruffles and a pre-Raphaelite get-up--with a hint to the reporters beforehand?"

"And a warning, a sorrowful warning, Miss Short, to cultivate the camel-like capacity for hoofing the Desert of Dreams on, say, three square meals a week."

Miss Short turned and looked at them scornfully.

"All acidulated nonsense, my dears--and there are too many little home-made Aristophaneses running around America already."

Then she turned back, good-naturedly, to Hartley, who had been puzzled just how to take it all. It was, in a way, the first time he had seen Celebrity on parade. There was a self-consciousness and a somewhat bewildering flashiness about it that he had not counted on. He was most eager to appear among them anything but ponderous, yet he felt some insurmountable paling of prejudice to be shutting him out from them.

"I guess that's what you Oxford men call ragging," his champion went on conciliatingly. "But I suppose you've been taught not to take New Yorkers too seriously long before this. You see, we Americans have never learned to irrigate the alkali out of our humor."

She bore him away, like a harbor-tug swinging out a liner, and looked with him from one of the broad-silled studio windows. Hartley was half afraid of women; they saw it, and liked him for it. "It's so much keener chasing the bee than having the bee chase you," the Dean of Worcester's daughter had confessed one afternoon--for now and then the children of wisdom are given to wilfulness--after four fruitlessly challenging hours with him in a punt on the Cherwell.

"Mr. Repellier tells me he knew you in Oxford--he hopes you're going to do something worth while."

Hartley flushed youthfully. He was becoming de-anglicized with difficulty; he was still of that nation where reticence is a convention.

"Yes, I believe I was pointed out to him by the master of my college as the man who was sure to make a mess of life."

Miss Short raised her bushy eyebrows interrogatively.

"He said I had an overdose of ideality to work off, and was hard-headed enough to declare that epicureanism on one hundred and fifteen pounds a year was an absurdity."

"And to show him how wrong he was you're flinging yourself into this silly settlement work over here? Well, I don't see why you crawl into America by our back door!"

Hartley hesitated about explaining that to the destitute this back door came cheaper, for even the one hundred and fifteen pounds were now a thing of the past.

"I'm not really doing settlement work," he corrected, however. "It turned out that I wasn't orthodox enough for our East London Anglican Order to make room for me. Your own university settlement shut its doors on me as an outlander, and the only public institution that offered to take me in was a convalescent home in Harlem; they wanted a janitor. It would

never have done, of course, to turn tail at the last moment, so I made the plunge alone. And now I'm simply trying to look at life in the raw; to get near it, you know; and understand it; and make the most of it."

He spoke lightly, but there was an undertone of bitterness in his words, a hint of the claws under the velvet of unconcern. For the first time Miss Short forgot the broad shoulders, and noticed the unlooked-for sternness about the young man's mouth, the hitherto uncaught thin chiseling of the ascetic nose and the puzzling dreaminess of the calm eyes. He was a man who had not found himself.

"But I could never see the use of going about being a student of evil," she said gently enough. "For I assure you you'll never do our East Side any good--though, perhaps, in another way, it *may* do you a lot of good. Tell me, though, what started you at it?"

"Repellier, more than any one else, I think. He told me to get Americanized, to come out of the mud-pond and get into the rapids. He suspected, you know, that all I did was loaf about Oxford and write radical verse."

"Well, perhaps it's best you did give up your poetry, and all that. We haven't much time for mooning over here, and if you'd come among us with the writing habit you'd soon have seen what a pitiful, pot-boiling lot we are, and you'd have got soured, and gone on one of the dailies, or dropped into translating, or drifted into a syndicate, and ended up by being still another young Israelite looking for an impossible promised land of American literature!"

Hartley winced a little and remained silent.

"It wouldn't have taken you long to find out what a lot of fakirs we are. Don't look shocked--fakirs is the only word; I'm one myself."

"But a fakir never confesses, does he?"

"Fifteen years ago I was earnest, ambitious, penniless, and proud-spirited. I imagined I was going to write the great American novel. Now I'm a silly, egotistical, spoiled old woman, writing advertisements for a Brooklyn soap-maker, publishing Sunday-school stories under seven different names, grinding out short stories and verses that I despise, and concocting a novel now and then that I abominate! That is the crown of thorns the city puts on your head. If I'd only stayed out in my little Wisconsin village, and gone hungry, and been unhappy, and waited, some day I might have written my great book!"

"Then why not go back, and wait, and be unhappy, and hungry, even, and write it?"

"It's too late; I can't. And that's the worst of it all. You see that bent, tired-looking old man sitting by the woman in gray? Well, he's the editor of 'The Republic.' For twenty years now he's been talking about the little peach-farm he's going to buy somewhere back in the New Jersey hills. He's never done it, poor old fellow! And he'll never do it. That's only his *fata morgana*, for he's foredoomed to die in harness. He couldn't break away from this life if he wanted to; he'd get homesick for the glare and noise and rush and rattle of it in a week, and perish of loneliness. But still he goes grinding away, dreaming about his peach-farm among the hills, and putting it continually off for one year more, and then still one year more. But there--you're beginning to think I'm a regular Jeremiah wailing in the desert of American mediocrity, so I'm going to leave you here alone to think it all over."

From the shadowy quietness of his window-seat Hartley looked out on the shifting, bewildering scene before him, a panorama of movement and color and energy that seemed to lose none of its unrest as midnight approached and waned. The young Oxonian felt that it was all a more or less disturbing glimpse of a new world that was opening up before him. He seemed able to catch at no order or meaning in the trend of it. At his Old World university, and in London itself, he had come more or less in touch with many of the great men of his age. About these Old World men there had always seemed to be an atmosphere--an almost repellent atmosphere--of academic calm, of intellectual reserve. When need be, they seemed able to surround themselves with a cuttlefish cloud of austerity. At that late day, a little to his distress, he was learning that eminence was not always august, that now and then even a lion could gambol. He wondered, in his perplexity, if it was some unexpected and belated blossoming of American humor, of that American humor which still so puzzled him. He did not condemn what seemed the eternal facetiousness of the American--he was still too avid of impression and too open-minded for that--but it disquieted him, and made him feel ill at ease.

Yet, disturbed as he was in spirit, Hartley felt not altogether unthankful for being thrown in with Repellier and his friends. As he looked out on them he even forgot, for the time being, how he had first come to Repellier, a forlorn and somewhat shabbily dressed young foreigner--forgot how the two of them had first met in America, by accident, under the maples of Madison Square. It was the very morning that Hartley had lost the Platt interview for the United News Bureau, and after his polite ejection from the crowded committee rooms in the Fifth Avenue Hotel, when he walked hot and indignant up and down the shade of the open square. There the two friends had met, and Hartley had grimly

confessed that his first week on a New York newspaper had resulted in prompt dismissal, that his efforts as a literary free-lance had been equally disastrous, and that he had finally drifted into one of those literary syndicates which dispose of news and delectable sensation in copper-plate, by the column, gratuitously typed and boxed for the rural reader. He also dolefully confessed that he had been sent out to pick up interviews--"With any old guy worth while, only put ginger in 'em," were the somewhat disconcerting instructions to the young man to whom New York still stood as a sealed book. Repellier had thought the thing over for a moment. "Why not come and interview me?" he had asked, though Hartley little dreamed the old artist in doing so was breaking a lifelong principle of reticence. It was this interview which, in the words of his managing editor, had saved his scalp.

Hartley had, accordingly, reason to be drawn toward Repellier, and to nurse as well a vicarious affection for the numerous enough friends of the old artist now gathered about him. The humiliating memory, too, of his own ignominy and the meagerness of his own accomplishments prompted the young scholar from Oxford again and again to tell himself that he was a lucky beggar, that he ought to be only too glad to rub elbows with these obviously successful men and women of the world, even though they did chance, at that particular moment, to be frolicking about like a band of undergraduates after a bump-race, and variedly shocking his youthful sense of propriety.

For the old artist's army of friends had brought along with them armfuls of gifts, many of them costly, many of them ingeniously grotesque, and the traditional formality of presenting these tokens, with many cheers and shouts of laughter and much clapping of hands, again left Hartley puzzling over a phase of American humor which is, perhaps, always incomprehensible to the outlander.

The proceedings began when a slip of a girl--who had been pointed out to Hartley as the author of no less than three lugubrious historical romances--timidly approached the old artist, and blushing thrust her great armful of Jacque roses into his hands. "There's one for every year," she said prettily enough, "and one over, sir, to grow on." Then the white-haired old editor of "The Republic" came marching up with a toy drum, beating a vigorous tattoo thereon, and with even more solemnity bestowed it in turn upon the artist. After him came an attenuated novelist in spectacles, bearing an old horseshoe and a chocolate pig. A stout, florid-looking man, with all the earmarks of the musician, soberly produced a huge tin trumpet, and a demure and quite shy-looking young lady, who had been pointed out as Frohman's new leading woman, tripped over to her host with a bag of pink candies and a jumping-jack. Of the agility of the jumping-jack she gave a sober and conscientious exhibition, after which came a Noah's ark from some one else, with a solemn caution that the paint was not to be sucked off, and then a portrait of Repellier himself, done in yellow and indigo blue, with cotton-wool hair attached to the canvas and eyes that rolled automatically.

Then the entire gathering lined up in a final laughing procession, and the horn was tooted, and the drum was beaten, and the orchestra struck up For he's a Jolly Good Fellow, and Repellier himself was taken possession of, and carried triumphantly off on the shoulders of the men. They hoisted him bodily up into a chair on the studio table, and all joined hands and danced round him, men and women alike, as children dance about a May-pole. Then they crowded in on him and clamored for a speech. It was not a very good speech, and it had many interruptions, but it was delivered in time and agreed to, point by point, and vigorously applauded. The great depleted punch-bowls were brought over to the table, and glasses, cups, vases, and steins were seized on for a final toast, in which the artists themselves led, with up-pouised glasses, singing the while the reminiscent lines of a Parisian cabaret song. Then the men filed past, one by one, all wringing his hand, some patting him familiarly and affectionately on his stooping old shoulder. Then a body of women and girls suddenly seized on him, and amid hostile demonstrations and much mockery of envy, fluttered up boldly, one by one, and kissed him fearlessly. Then back behind its bank of azaleas the muffled orchestra once more broke out with Auld Lang Syne, and they sang it together, with joined hands, till there was just the suspicion of a tear or two in Repellier's kindly gray eyes as he turned to the bewildered Hartley and said it was all very, very nearly worth growing old for.

Then somebody discovered a way to the roof, and nothing would do but every one must go climbing and scrambling gaily up a rickety old ladder to the fresh night air, where Hartley noticed that a number of the women were taking advantage of the gloom of the housetop to steal a quiet puff or two at a cigarette. And while he was noting this lamentable lapse from what was fit and proper somewhere in the half light behind him he heard a woman's voice say: "Mr. Repellier, won't you introduce me to that nice, big, clean-looking boy you have here?"

There was a moment's silence, while Repellier seemed to be looking down at her.

"If you promise not to break his heart, Miss Vaughan."

A woman's low, quiet little laugh drifted softly through the night air. Hartley tried to look at the Great Bear, and not listen to more.

"Here's my hand on it." Then the jesting voice grew suddenly serious. "But women's hearts never break nowadays, do

they? They only wither." Hartley, who had grown hot and cold through his six feet of embarrassed bone and nerve, was dimly conscious the next minute of Repellier's leading over to him a slim-looking figure in yellow.

Women accept the confusion of stalwart manhood, it has been said, as the profoundest tribute to their own power; and after Hartley had murmured something about the honor of meeting so eminent a novelist and in his honest embarrassment blurted out that he had often seen her name on the city ash-barrels, Cordelia Vaughan forgot her hazily indefinite yet deep-rooted hatred of everything English, and waited a moment for his next words.

"They've dramatized a book of mine--that explains the ash-barrels," she explained deprecatively, seeing that he stood silent, laughing at her contempt of the ash-barrels. Hartley liked her the better for that touch of modesty.

Her eyes had followed Repellier's retreating figure through the gloom. "Do you know, I always felt half afraid of Mr. Repellier, in some way? I wonder why it is?"

"We always *are* half afraid of great men; they're so apt to be rugged and lonely."

"Yes, rugged and lonely, like lighthouses--but very useful."

Hartley waited for her voice again. By moonlight all waters and all women may look the same, but Luna had no such leveling power, he knew, with voices.

"He confessed to me you were the Hartley who wrote a study of slum life for Stetson's," the flute-like contralto was saying again. "Then you *do* write?"

The darkness of the night made it impossible for him to catch even the slightest outline of her face, but as he listened to her gloom-encompassed voice he wondered, in a sudden inner fury, just what she had meant by calling him clean-looking. He had a sense, nevertheless, of losing himself in the sweep of eddying breakers.

"It always seemed to me," the soft contralto was murmuring once more, "that writers and artists should never be viewed at close range. They're like sugar; they should be left to sweeten life, without being put under the microscope, to show all their poor little writhing realities. So in one way it's just as well that we two *will* never know each other when next we meet."

He felt certain, as she ended with her warm little laugh, that she was looking up at him through the darkness, and he vehemently asked himself if she was still making fun of him.

"I wonder if we two *will* know each other again?"

"I want to, so much!" said Hartley. He was very human.

"Then you may interview me," she said gaily, infecting him with the sudden romance of the situation. "Then you can tear me to pieces afterward." And they both laughed youthfully as he told her of his last assignment, a request to demand five of New York's most eminent men to draw a pig with their eyes shut, for an illustrated page of the United News Bureau.

They grew serious once more, and he asked if there was nothing in which he *could* help her.

"Couldn't I, in any way?" he begged, the darkness helping him out.

"Would you?" she said, quite gravely now, leaning imperceptibly closer to him in the muffling twilight. Her flash of woman's intuition had not misled her; there was much about him that she liked.

"Won't you let me?" he asked again even more earnestly. He was still half afraid it was all mere play, but his artistic soul's sense of dramatic values chained him to the part.

"Yes," she said simply, "I will." Her voice carried with it a timorous and tacit something, a something which flashed over the heads of a hundred dancing maskers in the hall of the Capulets when a young Montague first met the glance of his Juliet.

They shook hands in parting, and brief as that hand-clasp was, it appeared portentous to both of them. To Hartley himself it seemed almost as if his fingers had pressed the hidden button of an incandescent light, for, at the moment, he noticed the fleeting, half-phosphorescent luminousness of the other's eyes, even through the dusk that clung about them and divided them. Then the young woman gathered up her rustling yellow skirts and hurried down the ladder to join the others, taking themselves off by twos and threes.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT OF THE CITY

All clad in mail he rode for Christ,
And his strait pathway trod;
Nor scorned he to be sacrificed
For his most jealous God.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

Our Manhattans of the mind always have their Boweries of the blood.--"The Silver Poppy."

"Wonderful, isn't it?" cried Hartley, leaning out of the wide-silled studio window where Repellier sat smoking wearily. He sniffed eagerly at the warm night air, with its mingled odors of asphalt and dust and cooling masonry.

The last of the evening's guests were gone. Hartley had been only too glad to linger on for a while with Repellier alone, seizing as an excuse the chance for one last look at his Motherhood picture, which was to be carried off to Paris by the next steamer. It was a canvas in the artist's newest style, a Hester Street mother suckling her child in the dusk of a little shaded doorstep, brooding there grave-eyed, deep-bosomed, and calm-souled, while the turgid life of the slums flowed back and forth about her, unfelt, unthought of, unseen.

Now they both looked down in silence to where the city lay beneath them, a garden of glimmering lights--pearl and opal and amethyst, with a flickering ruby or two in the remoter velvety blackness.

"Yes," said the older man, "it *is* wonderful."

"And what a place you have here to work! Where one can be alone, and yet dip into life, just as one would dip one's wrist into a stream."

The dull sounds of the midnight streets, broken, as they looked, by the sharp clanging of an ambulance bell, the rumbling of car-wheels mingled with the rattle of a pavement sweeper and the intermittent patter of hoofs on the asphalt came up faintly through the odorous, calm air. There was a mysterious charm about the great, incongruous, huddled city, picturesque in its very defiance of symmetry and beauty.

"That's Broadway, isn't it," said Hartley, pointing with his finger, "still looking like a Milky Way of lights?"

"Yes; and those glowing crowns of light are the roof-gardens; and there's Fifth Avenue, spangled with its twin rows of white electric globes, for all the world like a double thread of pearls hanging down the breast of the city. Those crawling snakes with the golden scales are the Ltrains. That cobweb of light is Brooklyn Bridge, and those little ruby fireflies are the ferries on the North River."

"And that crown of old gold and rose stands over Brooklyn, I know, and the lower bay."

An unknown city had always held vague terrors for Hartley; once, even, as a child, he had burst into sudden tears over an old atlas of the world; "it was so big and lonesome," he had tried to tell his uncomprehending nurse. But now, as he followed Repellier's finger with his eyes, he was dimly conscious of that sense of fugitive terror lifting and drifting away from the sea of scattered lights beneath him. For a moment he felt more drawn toward the city than of old, though his first vivid, photographic impression of it floated mockingly back through his mind.

The smell of the willows of the Isis and the hyacinths of Holywell had scarcely fallen from him as he walked those first few miles of the New World--a New World which seemed to his timid and homesick eyes to be but streets of chaotic turbulence through which pulsed the ceaseless cry of Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! He recalled the blind beggar with his quick, shrill cry of "Please help the blind! Please help the blind!" tapping hideously along the crowded pavement. He remembered the groups of sallow-faced men, young, yet already old, lounging about the entrances of what seemed countless hotels; the cluster of swarthy, foreign-looking workmen tearing up the asphalt under the strong glare of gasoline torches; the cars and hansom that rattled past; the two express-wagons that crashed together and locked wheels amid curses and loud cries; the pedlers and news-boys and fruit-venders barking and crying through the streets; the bilious-hued moon shining brokenly down through air heavy with dust; the serrated line of the distant sky-scrapers that seemed to bite up at the darkness like teeth; and the white glare of the electric lights bunched so

alluringly about the gilt-lettered, gaudy-faced corner saloons. It was not until afterward that he found he had traversed but one rough rind of the city itself; but it had all seemed so glaring, so blatant, so hopelessly unlovely to his bewildered eyes, that with the bitterness of a second Job he had asked: Is this, then, the soul of their republicanism? Is this the America of which the Old World had dreamed such envious, foolish, happy dreams?

Leaning there out of the lofty studio window, the young alien sighed with the burden of his youthful disappointments and his great things still undone. He looked less hopelessly down at the lights of a city which he had grown, in a softer mood, to think of as more beautiful.

Then he glanced at Repellier once more. This quiet man beside him, he felt, must have dreamed his way even more slowly into the heart of that turbulent life. For from a withered old hack writer on his news bureau Hartley had picked up a fragmentary story to the effect that Repellier had first come to New York a broken-hearted man, in search of a runaway sister. She had killed herself, he remembered the story went, when Repellier had tried to take her home, for she had passed through things that are seldom forgiven, and never forgotten. Recalling this, Hartley peered through the gloom at the other man, as though to read his face more closely. But the past seemed to have left no trace.

"That disorderly, happy-go-lucky tangle and snarl of lights on your left," his companion was saying quietly, "is your East Side, and that sinister scar of brighter light across it like a sword-gash is the Bowery itself. You can see how different they are to these primrows on the West Side!"

"Which stand for happiness, and, accordingly, more or less for dulness."

"There's a good deal of nonsense talked and written about the slums, Hartley, and they're wept and prayed and shuddered over, through lorgnettes, but, after all, you hear about as much laughing on Hester Street as you do on West End Avenue."

Hartley recalled the sounds that crept up to his little tenement room of a hot midsummer night. "And quite as much weeping."

"Perhaps a little more, for the Submerged Tenth has never been taught to nurse its sorrows in silence. But it's all taught me one big lesson—it's a truth so obvious that it puzzles me to think it should come so late in life. Wherever it beats," and here the older man's voice dropped into a sudden deeper tone of earnestness, "the old unchanging human heart runs with the same old unchanging human blood, and aches with the same old unchanging human aches. It's such a simple old truth, though, the world never accepts it."

The younger man shook his head in vague dissent. The even, dispassionate tones of this man who had looked deep into life fell like a cold hand on the throat of his lighter-pinioned ideality.

"The slum sins most," he protested, "and therefore suffers most."

"It sins openly, and suffers openly."

The younger man, looking down over the dim city, with his chin on his hand, did not reply. He was saying to himself that they had not taught them these things over in Oxford, and was wondering how often, ages and ages ago, in old Athenian gardens, some young Platonist and some aged Aristotelian had wrangled over the same ancient problem. Through the murmurous night air he dreamily noted the creeping hansoms and the crawling Ltrains and the street-cars, the minute corpuscles of the now languid life-blood with which the huge city would soon run so feverishly.

The unrest, the haste, the movement of the momentarily lulled life beneath him took on a strangeness, a mystery, an inscrutable element that filled him with a wordless disquiet. What was the end of it all? And what did it all stand for? And whither was it trending? His mind went back to one calm night when he and another stood under the white Italian stars, up under the olives and chestnuts of Fiesole, and asked the same questions of life. Then his thoughts drifted again to his last days in Oxford, when he and a young scholar of Magdalen went out by night to Boars Hill to listen to the nightingales. From the shadowy hillside of the quiet wood they had watched the lights of Oxford swarming luminously in the dark little valley of the Isis below, glimmering through the humid English spring night like pearls in a goblet of wine. How strangely full and deep and good life had seemed to them that lyric night, as they walked home through the moonlight, with all the world before them!

But to Hartley the great restless New World city seemed so bewilderingly different. The spirit of it was so elusive! It so engulfed one with its passionate movement! It made man such a microscopic unit! It held life so cheap, and youth so lightly! He had been nearly four months in New York; it had swallowed him up as a maelstrom might, and he had accomplished nothing, or what stood as good as nothing. He remembered half bitterly how he had broken disconsolately away from the twilight languor of his sleepy old university town, and with his few carefully hoarded pounds had turned to America, young yet already old, hopeful and yet already heart-weary, in search of more

strenuous effort and struggle. That London evening paper which at times printed his copy, he recalled, had rather grandiloquently announced that Mr. John Hartley, M.A., was to do for the East Side of New York what Besant had done for the East Side of London, and even ventured to prophesy that a great number of Mr. Hartley's friends and admirers would await his book with interest. From the first he felt that there had been something ominous in that initial deception. And now he had foundered in the very sea from which he was to sweep both gold and glory--even, as he told himself, after tossing overboard his jetsam of undergraduate dreams. Now, indeed, he was thankful enough for his daily bread; and there were, he knew, hundreds and thousands like him--thousands of aspiring men and women whom the great city had called from the towns and farms of the West, from the wide Dominion above the Lakes, from the South, from the Old World itself.

As he gazed wonderingly down through the darkness he thought of the friendlier, more intimate voice that had groped out through the housetop gloom to him that night. He wondered into what corner of the sleeping vastness of the city that wistful voice had crept. The mere thought and memory of it seemed to give a warm spot to the meaningless, shadowy solitude beneath him, like one small ember in a waste of ashes.

He turned to Repellier.

"Who is Cordelia Vaughan?" he asked.

Repellier drew back from the window and stood in the dim light of the studio lamps.

"Miss Vaughan--Cordelia Vaughan--is a young Kentucky woman who writes books, and I understand one of her dramatized novels is soon to be put on the stage. People are petting her--petting her a good deal too much, this season--but still, she seems to stand it well."

"I suppose she has written quite a bit?" Hartley casually inquired.

"I've known her only since last year, and I don't read, you know. But they tell me she's clever--when she writes, I mean, for most of these bookish women, unfortunately, are trimmed back and stunted for the sake of the fruit."

Hartley looked round at Repellier, missing from the other's voice some note of enthusiasm which he had expected to be there. The older man's succeeding question, however, bridging as it apparently did some disrupted line of thought, adequately accounted for his judicial coldness of tone.

"Are you getting broken in to work over here, Hartley--to good, hard work?"

The younger man smiled. With him Euterpe and Eros, obviously, must not house together.

"Jolly well broken in," was all he answered.

"Work is our eternal redemption," Repellier said, with his hand on the younger man's shoulder. Then he sighed wearily. "But to a good many of us Americans a life of hurry, I guess, has become the only life of ease."



CHAPTER III

AN INTERLUDE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The lute forgetful of its note;
The wing remembering not to fly
In some sweet flight's mad ecstasy;
The heart that failed to carve the form
Since once the musing soul grew warm
With love for her who sat for him
Of too alluring moonbeam limb.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Lost Voice."

"The defeated heart," sighed the woman in black, "has the habit of burying its own dead!"--"The Silver Poppy."

For one virtue alone Cordelia Vaughan was looked on as a rare acquisition by Mrs. Alfred Spaulding. That virtue was her young ward's punctilious attention to all those social duties with regard to which she herself was prone to be deplorably careless. With the accession of Cordelia, therefore, she reveled in a vicarious ceremoniousness that wiped out many discomforting memories, ranging all the way from forgotten dinners to neglected dentist's engagements.

It was but a little after eleven, on the morning following Repellier's birthday gathering, when Cordelia Vaughan alighted from the Spauldings' brougham and once more climbed the long stairs to the old artist's studio. Both she and Mrs. Spaulding had begged to come and help Repellier "clear up." Mrs. Spaulding, however, no longer dazzled by the glow that radiated, to her eyes, from the brow of that great artist, found in the depths of a soft pillow and a darkened room that the spirit was willing but the flesh lamentably weak. She told Cordelia to run along by herself; she had a headache to sleep off.

And as Cordelia mounted lightly to the upper regions of Repellier's workrooms she felt in no way sorry for the promise. Some rudimentary simplicity in her character could always blithely sweep away the cobwebs of either propriety or impropriety--cobwebs so potentially tantalizing to one less ingenuous. Her late hours, too, seemed to have left no depression of spirits, no reaction of *ennui*, and she floated in before Repellier bright, buoyant, smiling, like a breath of the open morning itself, a confusion of mellow autumnal colors in her wine-colored gown and hat of roses and mottled leaves.

But before she had so much as drawn off her gloves--and they were always the most spotless of white gloves--she glanced about in mock dismay and saw that the last of the righting-up had already been done. There was not even a book for her to replace, or a plaque to tuck away. She pouted at this, prettily and girlishly; she had hurried away from her coffee and rolls just to help him.

Repellier, in his lighter moods, had an affectionate and quite fatherly way about him that was all-conquering. He penitently pinned a long-stemmed American Beauty rose on her wine-tinted gown, and shaking his head dolefully over the color combination, replaced it with a cluster of gardenias. She fluttered femininely to a mirror, to view the result of the added touch, and then bowed her gratitude with arch solemnity. She was not slow to realize the lighter mood in Repellier, and was glad of it. Then, talking the while of the night before, she went over to his book-table, and hovered restlessly over the different volumes scattered about, scarcely knowing just how to wear the conversation through its tides of change into that particular slip where it was to be hawsered. To Repellier she seemed like a humming-bird darting about a little high-walled garden, ready to be off like a flash when the last flower had been rifled.

He watched her, smiling, while she hovered on from topic to topic, looking up at him now and then; now and then nervously turning over the books on the table before her, and wondering within herself just why it was this man had always vaguely intimidated her. She was about to open her lips when he suddenly stopped her.

"Did you know that that's Hartley's book you have there?"

For one quick, searching second she looked up at him, and then casually opened the little volume upon which her hand had fallen by accident. Repellier had once thought her the sort of woman that never blushed.

"*Atalanta and Other Poems*, by John Hartley," she read aloud idly, with raised eyebrows. "And a dedication as well:

'To C. M.' Did he leave it last night, or is he the kind that always sends them round next day?'

"Hartley's not that sort at all."

The woman slipped into a chair, and with her chin on her hand, meditatively turned over a page or two. Then she closed the book nonchalantly, almost disdainfully. She confessed that she had no particular love for poetry.

"Tell me about him, though," she finally said quite seriously and quite openly. "I'd like to know something about him--*all* about him."

Repellier, who had been adjusting a great paint-besplattered easel, came over and took up the thin, green volume.

"This is what I want to knock out of him," he said, tapping the little book, "for a while, at least. And I think, Miss Vaughan, you are the happy possessor of a lot I'd like to pound into him."

"And that is----"

"Oh, I mean poise and balance--good, practical judgment."

"Thank you." She caught up her skirts and courtesied.

Repellier raised a deprecating hand, and laughed.

"Well, you know what I mean. And that's why I'm glad you like him."

"I hardly said that."

"I mean all he wants is ballasting with a little of that business spirit which we call American push."

"Thanks," she murmured. "But tell me about him."

"Well, there isn't much to tell--at least not much that I know."

"But you knew him abroad?"

"Yes, I met him two years ago at Lady Meredith's--those were the Woodstock Merediths of Meredith Hall. I was doing a portrait of Connie Meredith--that's the 'C. M.' of the book--and he used to tramp over from Oxford now and then. His father was Sir Harry Hartley, who was killed in the Dunstable Hunt four or five years ago. Hartley himself was wasting his time about Oxford, unsettled, unsatisfied, impecunious, and unrecognized. As I said, I saw a good deal of him at the Merediths'. He was to have married the girl--it was she who gave me that volume--but she was always delicate. In fact, they had to pack her off to the south of England, and then to Italy. She died at Fiesole. On my way back from the Continent I ran across Hartley again, and asked him why he didn't try America."

"And will he ever do anything--anything worth while, I mean?"

She still held the thin, green volume of verse in her hand, almost contemptuously--suddenly depressed in spirits, she could not fathom why.

"He has already done something worth while."

"What is it?"

"Small things, I mean, but of the right sort."

"I never heard of him before," murmured the woman, closing the volume with a gentle little snap of finality.

"But you will," said Repellier as his guest slowly drew on her white gloves and arranged her hair before his mirror as she passed.

"You will," he repeated as he swung his easel around to the light, and opening a door on his left called his model in for what was to be a morning of work for both of them.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORLD AND THE WOMAN

Leave not thy slumbering melodies
To dream too long within thine eyes;
Let not all time thy bosom hold
Song in that overfragrant fold,
Lest thou a tardy gleaner prove
And thy reluctant hand but move
The overgolden sheaf, to find
Thy tenderest touch can never bind
These thoughts too long unharvested--
Lest on some byway stern be shed
That golden, sad, ungarnered grain,
When thou canst sow nor reap again.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Lost Voice."

These souls of ours are like railway bridges--they can be reconstructed even when the trains of temptation and trial are creeping over them--"The Silver Poppy."

Hartley's first impression of Cordelia Vaughan was a happy confusion of yellows. Her hair, luxuriant and heavily massed on the small head, was a sort of tawny gold. Her skin, which more than once had been described as like old ivory, was in truth neither ivory nor olive, but almost a pale, rose-like yellow with a transfusing warmth to its pallor, as though the lights of an open fire were playing upon it. The eyes themselves seemed, at times, a soft, jade-like yellowish green, muffled, unsatisfied, often mournful, with a latent hint of tragedy, shading off in strong lights to a sea gray; by lamplight showing a deep violet. In moments of excitement or exaltation they were slightly phosphorescent, glowing with an almost animal-like luminosity that temporarily relieved and illumined the ascetically cold chiseling of the face itself, suggesting a possible emotional power that might be stronger at times than the shell which housed it. Yet they were eyes that looked out on the world with quiet, brooding melancholy, wistful in repose, with some fugitive sadness--eyes that suggested, to the young poet at least, some wayward note of autumn, of twilight, of woodland loneliness. They seemed to betoken the dreamer in life more than the pioneer and the actor, in periods of weariness taking on a heavy, languorous, indolent look of half-careless defiance, like a tired and wilful child's.

At one moment, indeed, Cordelia Vaughan reminded Hartley of an old-fashioned tea-rose, quaintly anachronistic in her modish twentieth-century gown; at another moment she brought insistently to his mind the thought of a piece of fragile chinaware with which the slag of every-day life had not yet been infused, sadly to convert it into the ironstone of ordinary mortality.

"I find I am not very strong," she had confessed to him. "My work seems to take a great deal out of me." And the thought that some great internal fire was burning away both the youth and beauty of a pale priestess of Mnemosyne seemed to give to her pallor a new and redeeming touch of poignancy. For in Cordelia's days of weariness envious women, lacking her own strange resiliency of vigor, now and then maliciously declared that on such occasions she "looked her age."

"I am sure I can help you a little," she was saying now, looking up at Hartley. "But first you must tell me something about yourself and your work."

He was but four-and-twenty, and accustomed to the coldness and the reserve of his own older-fashioned countrywomen. So the open warmth and directness of his companion's manner at first embarrassed him a little.

"That's jolly good of you; but really, you know, I haven't done anything worth talking about."

"But you've got it in you; I can see you have," said the other, on her cushion of Princeton orange, looking back unhesitatingly into his searching eyes. "And then Repellier says so, too," she added encouragingly.

For a releasing moment or two the young man basked in the sunlight of the tawny gold hair and the half-pleading eyes,

wondering the while why her face should be so wistfully melancholy. It had its allurements, this finding in a great city a strange girl ready to take an interest in one's secret aspirations, a being willing to repose in one such immediate woman's faith. Hartley's four months of loneliness and solitude had been weighing heavily on his exuberant young soul. His first impulse was to pour out his heart to her, little as she might understand, and drain the momentary cup of new-found comradeship to its last dregs. He fumbled irresolutely with his note-book, then finally decided that the doctrine of silence was best. He preferred men, he told himself, who could consume their own smoke.

"You're very kind, and all that," he said almost stiffly, smiling an embarrassed smile, "but we have this promised interview of ours to finish, you know."

He took up his note-book again--which he was still reportorial amateur enough to lean on in such cases.

"I have your first book, and its title, and that you are a Southerner. Your girlhood was spent in Kentucky, but you say your family is really a Virginia one. I have you here as passionately fond of horses and hunting, and all that. Am I right in saying that it was your mother who rode through the Northern lines on a Kentucky thoroughbred to save that Confederate captive's life you spoke of? Good; I'll jot down a note of his name here. I think that will make an excellent little story. Then I have the anecdote about Judge Wilder and The Silver Poppy; and I can make a paragraph of your New York success, and about the novel being dramatized. Oh, yes, you would like the social element brought out, of course. There's just one other thing our editor usually asks for--if you don't mind--the age, you know," he added tentatively.

"I am almost twenty-three," answered the woman.

The young Oxonian buried himself in his note-book.

"Yes, twenty-three," he repeated, as he penciled a note of it. He felt, as he wrote, that for some unknown reason she was laughing at him.

"Why have you never written a second book?" he asked her.

"I *am* writing one," she answered quietly, he thought rather wearily, as the smile faded from her face.

"Then I'd better put that in."

"If you like," she added, as if uninterested. He liked her better for that second touch of diffidence.

"Now there is just one point I'm not clear about. You mentioned the fact that you and Mrs. Spaulding were about to give a series of receptions--er--literary receptions, I think you called them--during the coming season. Pardon my asking, but is Mrs. Spaulding also devoted to the writing of books?"

"Oh, dear me, no!" she answered. "She's only devoted to the people who happen to be doing the writing."

"Then you are her guest at present?"

"Mrs. Spaulding has asked me to live with her, for the winter, at any rate. She was more than kind, when I came, about fixing up this little den for me to work in. You can see, she has made me only too comfortable."

Hartley looked at her, puzzled.

"It's hard to work--in some places." She walked to the window and was looking out when next she spoke. "And I want to be free."

He thought that he understood, and he would have drawn back from any more intimate prying into an unfortunate environment, but Cordelia herself spoke on:

"Mrs. Spaulding, of course, has not exactly the artistic temperament, but she is the soul of goodness, and has wealth and position, and when she asked me to come with her, I was only too glad to have a real friend, and a friend who could be a sort of social patroness as well."

"After all, the patron is not the poor figure that history has made him out to be, do you think?" asked the young Oxford man, busy with his note-book. Yet it seemed one of life's keenest small ironies that out of such pale-tinted atmospheres should come the volumes which the turgid, hurrying, surging world was so ready to devour. It was no wonder, he felt, that she wanted to be free.

"It sounds odd to you, I suppose?" she went on. "But that's because you're an outsider. Here in New York you'll find plenty such persons, anxious enough to shine in the reflected light of the real workers. Mrs. Spaulding is different from the rest--she would be as true as steel, I know. But the ordinary kind are not easy to hold. Their whims change, and you

have to change with them. They take you up just as they'd take up a new design in foulards, or a novelty in their stationery, or a new breed of Pomeranian. We all have our hobbies, you know," she added, with just the slightest touch of bitterness in her voice.

"But *you* have been particularly happy," said her visitor, sweeping the expensively and tastefully furnished study with his quick eye. Then he wondered, as he looked at her, if already she was tired of publicity.

"It's nice to be free," she sighed, as in answer to his glance.

"The road that leads to freedom is always beautiful," agreed the young Oxonian. "But your cage seems rather a golden one."

"It has to be, or I'd eat through the bars. You see, there was really a Waterloo fought over me. Mrs. Simpson-Burgess wanted to capture me--yes, isn't it flattering?--and Mrs. Spaulding wanted me, so they had to fight it out."

"On which, some day, I should like to congratulate Mrs. Spaulding."

"Oh, thanks," sighed the other.

There was a moment of constrained silence. The young man felt that they had been treading on thin ice.

"You must be sure to meet Mrs. Spaulding," went on Cordelia. "I know she'll be interested in you. She'll probably be able to help you, too, in more ways than one. Oh, by the way, does your syndicate publish portraits at all?"

Hartley explained that it did; two pages a week--one of People of the Hour, and the other of Beautiful Women.

As the woman on the orange cushion said nothing for a moment or two, Hartley rose to go.

"Some day you'll have to do Mrs. Spaulding for me," she begged. "She would really be at home on your Beautiful Women page."

Then she looked up and saw that he was standing.

"But don't go; please, don't go!" she cried with the winning ingenuousness and command of a child. "I want you to stop and drink a cup of tea with me, at least."

There was something infectious and pretty, he felt, about her wayward little pout, a momentary mental rejuvenescence, as though her mind had been caught in the undress. Hartley had been almost ready to declare that his time was not his own--which was true enough--but he pulled himself up on the brink of this brusqueness as he looked down in her eyes and wondered which was her truer side. With a sudden return of good-nature he took his seat again, and amiably remarked that it was not often he drank afternoon tea in New York--that, in fact, afternoon tea would take on the nature of a Dionysian festivity in the neighborhood of Chatham Square.

"Then your home *is* England?" asked the other.

He confessed that his English birth was one thing he had yet to live down.

"Oh, no," cried the young authoress; "you'll find it's going to help you a lot. Englishmen are always the vogue with us. And, remember, you must be sure not to waste your accent, and your chances."

Hartley could recall no occasion on which his Anglican origin had materially helped him. But, looking up, he caught her smile, and again he dimly felt that she might still be making fun of him. Yet in the twinkling of an eye she was all soberness once more.

"The moment I saw that study of yours in Stetson's--the Dunes of Sorrow, wasn't it?--I knew that I was finding a new man. The only thing I felt sorry about was that you hadn't placed it with one of the better magazines."

"It was my first and only success, over here," admitted Hartley, catching at those crumbs of praise, the first that had been flung before him during four long months of ceaseless endeavor.

The woman busied herself at the little tea-table, saying that she had always made it a habit to have afternoon tea at her home in the South, and chattering lightly on, in her rich, soft contralto, about Kentucky, and the fineness of its horses, and the beauty of its scenery, and how homesick she sometimes got for it all. Hartley noticed her thin, white hands, so frail that they were almost translucent between the delicate phalanges. He watched them as they fluttered about the tea-things, like pale butterfly wings over a little bed of tulips. In that warming afterglow of appreciation he gathered up boldness enough to tell her how much they did look like butterfly wings.

"How nice!" said the woman at the cups. "That's so good I'm going to use it," she added gratefully. "Do you know you've given me quite a number of ideas for my book already?"

He wondered just what those ideas could have been, and failed utterly to recall anything worthy of remembrance in their talk.

"That idea about the road to liberty being beautiful, especially," she explained. "It's splendid."

"But I'm afraid it's very, very old," said Hartley.

She took the statement as mere self-derogation.

"I know you're going to be a novelist some day," she cried inconsequentially. "Or a poet, at least."

Hartley winced at the after-thought, and remembered his three little thin green volumes so carefully hidden away this many a month.

"But *do* be good and tell me more about yourself, and your work, and what you intend to do. We've been talking about me and my book, and the things I'm to do--and leave undone--and all the time I feel sure you're a man with a *magnum opus*--isn't that what you call it?--somewhere up your sleeve."

She had an odd little bird-like way of holding her head on one side--an attitude that not only suggested a sort of timorous alertness, but endowed her at the same time with a certain flattering, half-ingratiating, dreamy-eyed attentiveness.

When Hartley thought it over in cold blood he could never adequately explain to himself just why it was he had entered into that long and exhaustive revelation of his aims and ambitions, of his great works undone, of his huge books unwritten, of his visionary tasks as yet unbegun. Perhaps it was because the woman beside him listened with such quiet yet unctuous attention. Perhaps it was the suggestion of literary atmosphere which hung over that secluded little many-tinted study, making it stand as a temple of letters and a place not unfit for the confession of those most intimate and sacred dreams of the heart and brain which heretofore he had so carefully guarded in his own reticent bosom.

However that may be, over the little Dresden tea-cups he unbosomed himself unreservedly to his new-found friend. He described to her how and why he had come to New York, of his desperate struggle to get his first position on a daily paper, of his still more desperate struggle to keep that position, of his precarious existence as a "free-lance," of his discoveries in the lore of living on two dollars a week, and of his final grounding on the shoals of the United News Bureau, where he now wrote on probation under thirteen different names and posed as a special correspondent in four different parts of the world on four different days of the week.

He even grew so bold as to tell her of his still unfinished novel, giving a brief but, he thought, impressive outline of its odd plot and its even odder characters. He confessed, too, that he had always believed his best work had been done in verse.

The author of *The Silver Poppy* seemed to lose no word of all he said. Hartley himself, lost for the time being in the outpouring of his own hopes and aims and aspirations, only half appreciated the quiet intensity with which the young woman followed his every sentence. It tempted him to go even farther, and confide in her the secrets of his one great effort, his *Nausicaa*. Into the five hundred lines of this blank-verse poem he was sure he had poured all that was best in him, and he told her how one magazine editor had accepted it, on condition that he take out two hundred lines--an offer which he had indignantly refused. Later, though, he felt it had been a mistake; America was so different to what it was at home.

The woman looked at him for several seconds in silence, as though some new and better side of him had slowly dawned on her consciousness. In that look the free heart of the young scholar felt there was something to half fear and yet something in which to glory. She dropped her eyes and was still for a moment.

"I hope we two shall be friends," she said in her dreamy, half-wistful intonation.

"Why can't we?" he asked, with his grave but boyish smile. She looked at him with eyes that for the time being did not seem to see him.

"We all have to go through the sort of thing you've been speaking of," she said with a sigh, standing before him at the open window, with the sunlight on her hair. "But one person, you know, can so often help another--at least over the rougher places. I feel that already I've a great deal to do to repay you for what you'll make out of this interview. I know you'll say the right thing and it'll help me a lot. I guess, though, I *could* help you a good deal;" she looked at him. "If

you'd only let me," she added. She was speaking very humbly and very earnestly, and her voice moved him almost uncomfortably. There was something so direct, so honest, so open in her kindness that he hesitated before it, disconcerted, despising himself at the time for his very hesitancy.

"I know that I can get rid of some of your things for you," she continued, as though such tasks were a commonplace. "And I want you to meet editors, too, and people of influence. It all counts so much, unfortunately," she added, smiling wearily. Then she seemed to meditate for a second or two. "Couldn't you bring me up a few manuscripts to look over--so that I could know what they were like, you know? I mean what vein they were in?"

Again Hartley vacillated between gratitude and doubt, hating to impose on her what might be the penalty for a moment's too generous impulse. As he hesitated before her Cordelia looked at him studiously, taking note that there was something challengingly dominant and robust about the still boyish stranger whom many such meetings might bring so intimately into her life. He possessed an incipient strength that appealed to her, while at heart she remained half in fear of it. She had always held in her own hands the reins of her destiny. The devious way she had already toiled for herself through life had not been all smoothness, but she had at least been the arbiter of her broken course.

As she thought of these things her visitor rose to go, and she did not further press him for a reluctant decision in one way or the other. But she held her hand out to him, swept by a sudden unreasoning hunger to feel the warmth of his clasp on hers. The actual significance of hand-shaking, the time-worn symbolism of the rite, had never before entered her mind.

"When can you come?" was all she asked, while each once more had the feeling of something portentous in their parting.

"Will you be at home to-morrow at eight?" he asked, still holding her hand.

She had an engagement to dine out, but it could be broken, she said. And with a puzzling resumption of coldness she rang for the Spauldings' footman, who ceremoniously showed her visitor to the door.

With a quickening heart he stepped down into the prim respectability of Seventy-second Street, and in one little hour life seemed to have grown more hopeful to him. For the first time, too, the streets of New York took on a home-like look to his alien eyes.

He walked eastward to the Park, where he caught a south-bound car. From the Circle he could see the long line of Eighth Avenue stretching out into the hazy distance. It lay before him indistinct and golden and misty, with the late afternoon sun slanting transformingly on its dust and smoke and commotion. There was a smell about it that seemed good. It stirred something dormant in him. It seemed like the dust of battle--like the drifting incense of man to all his gods of endeavor. Already a phantasmal shoulder seemed crowding and pushing him out into its untried turbulence.

Hartley decided that Repellier was right when he had said that this great city of the New World could wring out of a man all that was best in him. As he sped southward through the noise and the dust and the crowds, with his thoughts far into the future, he seemed to find some pleasing felicitousness in the very ambiguity of Repellier's phrase. But must the price of success, he asked himself, always be so great?

"Do you know," said Cordelia Vaughan musingly to the Spauldings that night as they drove down through the darkness of Riverside Park on their way home from dining at the Claremont--"do you know, I feel like work, hard work, once more?"

CHAPTER V

BETWEEN BLOSSOM AND FRUIT

Take heed, for the sake of your soul,
Of the song that the city sings--
Of its bantering lip, and its bowl,
And its flutter of fallen wings.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Siren City."

These Lilliputian temptations--they remind us that the threads which kept Gulliver down were very small threads, but then there were so many of them!--"The Silver Poppy."

"How much space shall I give Miss Vaughan?" Hartley asked of his editor. It was the end of the day following the interview, and the gentleman addressed was enjoying what he called a dry smoke, contentedly chewing a black cigar-end into obviously delectable rags and shreds. He allowed his questioner to wait for a minute or two before answering.

"Who's Miss Vaughan?"

Just who that lady was he knew quite well, but he took a secret delight in baiting his probationers--and Hartley above all others.

"She is the lady," and the irate young man laid particular stress on the word, "the lady whom I suggested to you as being more or less before the public, as you may recall--the lady who wrote The Silver Poppy, and----"

"Yes, I know all that. 'Bout how much time did you give her yesterday? The whole afternoon, I guess, wasn't it?"

"I don't see what that has to do with my question," retorted Hartley.

"You don't, eh! H'm; I guess you don't." He seemed bent on provoking beyond endurance the young man with the accent. And the young man with the accent could foresee that it was going to lead to but one end. He swallowed his wrath, however, and his editor swung round in his swivel chair, and replacing his cigar in its accustomed corner of a mouth that seemed to Hartley belligerently dog-like, looked at him shrewdly.

"Give 'er half a column," he said sharply.

"That's not very much, is it?"

"What d'you want to give 'er?"

"It's outside work, you know--work that I'm doing quite gratuitously," he added significantly.

"Well, how much d'you want?"

"Two columns of brevier--without the adornment of the usual line-cut."

The character of the line-cuts used by the bureau, seldom remarkable for their beauty, was a standing joke about the office. The editor smiled enigmatically.

"All right; go ahead and kill your friend with kindness if y' want to." For as a young man he himself had been a dramatic reporter in his time and more than once had been dazzled by the passing refulgence of musical comedy stars--stars with hair not half so golden as Cordelia Vaughan's.

Hartley hurried home through the dingy lower-town streets, turning over many new thoughts in his mind. A revulsion of feeling had come over him. He had not as yet read The Silver Poppy, but he took a sudden, passing, unreasonable dislike to it, wondering within himself how much Cordelia Vaughan's success had been due to caprice and accident.

His thoughts went back to her luxuriously furnished little study, with the writing-desk inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the little gold pen which she had proudly pointed out to him as her mascot--the only pen with which she could compose--the trim rows of handsomely bound books of reference, the huge dictionary on its highly polished revolving stand, the current magazines all so temptingly at hand, the quiet atmosphere and seclusion of the place that in itself was a

stimulus to creation. He thought, not a little wistfully, how good it must be to have a circle of intelligently appreciative friends, an audience to whom to direct one's sincerest and best work, and, above all, to nurse to one's breast the knowledge of some tangible influence in the circle of letters. He remembered that she had told him her gift for writing had come to her unheralded and unlooked for; that one morning she had wakened and rubbed her eyes and found herself famous. How much of it, he wondered, lay in sheer luck, or, at most, in happy coincident? He recalled, not unenviably, his own years of ceaseless effort that had culminated in nothing. It was a gift, this swinging round to the tides of the time, this writing with the ear to the ground. With that gift he felt he might never have been left drifting so aimlessly and so fruitlessly about a world in which there still seemed to be for him no ultimate islands of contentment.

He tried to solace himself with the thought that his failure was the result of his years of undergraduate abstraction; that it was the penalty of the too cloistral life.

The taste of those days when the world has failed to find youth because youth has not yet found itself is unspeakably bitter in the mouth of the young man who knows his strength. And Hartley, striding homeward through the hot, noisy, evening streets, was not altogether happy.

As he noticed, on the stroke of six, the warehouses and shops and factories of the lower East Side disgorging their tides of hurrying, bustling men and women and boys and girls, some alleviating sense of the nobility of labor crept over him, like a breath of cool air from the river front.

In this mood he climbed his steep stairs, and sat down at his little deal table, glowing with the ideas that flowered out of his touch of revolt. The author of *The Silver Poppy* would have opened her gray-green eyes in wonder had she read those sheets which he flung off under his quick, nervous pen. How were these women, he asked himself as he wrote, who wasted so lightly when there were so many in want, how were these women who knew nothing of real life, rustling so well clad through their softly lighted libraries, to know anything of the great tragic, turgid, naked world, of the storm and stress of life? What did they, sitting secluded behind their roses, know of the dust and tumult and tragedy of the street? Let them go out and suffer and learn, and if through hunger and tears and loneliness they found some hidden meaning and purpose in the dark undercurrents of adversity and defeat, then let them in all patience and humility speak what they had to say. Willingly enough the world would listen, without their thousand and one artifices to catch its languid ear. But until then they should get no help from him.

And when he had finished his article on Cordelia Vaughan he sat back in his hard chair and felt more at peace with the world and with himself. He felt, as he glanced around at his broken walls and his ragged furniture, that he had justified himself; for he was at heart still buoyant and young. It is a sorrowful day when the eyes of youth can gaze openly into the eyes of defeat.

Hartley, as a graduate of Oxford and a regenerator of mankind, could not boast unduly of his New World lodgings--he had not yet learned to speak of them as apartments. He still wrote to three or four of his older college friends from time to time, and to these old friends he half-heartedly enlarged on how a few months in the poorer quarters would help him on with his work. He said nothing, however, of the advantages of a furnished room at three dollars a month, with a shop conveniently below where Italian bread--which was perhaps tough of fiber, but still marvelously sustaining--could be bought for three cents a loaf, and coffee at two cents a cup. He did not confess either that there were days when the sights and smells of the place sickened him, and times when the wailing of small children and sick babies kept him feverishly awake through the long, hot summer nights, and the sounds of brutal quarrels drove him distracted into the open streets for hours at a time. Even with himself he still tried to excuse his unsightly surroundings by the sophistry that the stern quest of experience demanded such environment, that these were the refining fires which were to burn away the dross of his dilettanteism.

Hartley had taken up his abode in the very heart of the lower East Side. On that part of Division Street where the Second Avenue elevated railway curls bustling into Chatham Square, very much as a busy little brook curls round a bit of rock, stands one of those crowded hives of toiling men and women known as a sweat-shop. In a little back room at the top of this building Hartley subletted his New York home. The jail-like doorway of this building opened on a street of eternal twilight--a street barred above like a dungeon by the iron girders of the overhead railway, through which only the noonday sun could fret for an hour or two. It was a tunnel of a thousand odors, and over it whimpered and frolicked the elevated trains as they went scurrying up to the open sunlight of the higher city.

Long before the sun crept up over the East River this tenement hummed like a beehive with its hundreds of busy sewing-machines, and in and out of its gloomy doorway women came and went at all times of the day with great bundles poised on their heads. It seemed from without only a gloomy building of windows and red bricks, with crazily littered fire-escapes breaking the line of its dull walls. At its center, strangely enough, it formed a little triangular court, after the fashion of its sisters of the Old World, and round this little inner court rose dilapidated wooden galleries, tier after tier, until only a pitiable three-cornered scrap of blue sky could be seen at the top on clear days. At the bottom of

this light-well, even gloomier and more odorous than the street without, there was always a tang of chloride of lime in the air. The broken flagstones forming its floor sloped to the center, where a hydrant-pump stood in a pool of tainted water. From each gallery of the court radiated a number of passages--many-sunked, low-ceilinged passages, tunneling through mysterious twilight for hundreds of feet, and opening through many narrow doors into hundreds of fetid and overcrowded rooms.

In these rooms hundreds of patient backs bent over an equal number of pieces of sewing, most of them unbending only to eat and sleep, for all day long and far into the night sometimes the worn stairs creaked with tired feet as the bundle carriers went back and forth and the busy machines purred and whined for rest. There, kenneled in one small room, Hartley had found that men and women worked and slept and ate, there children were born and old men died, and young faces grew white and young backs grew bent. But the busy machines knew no rest, and night after night the young scholar from the city of bells and towers had thrown himself on his hard little bed with the rumble of their wheels in his ears. Yet more than once, too, in his darkest days, the mysterious companionship of those unseen laborers had strangely buoyed up his failing heart. There were other times, though, when he felt that the depressing poverty which so vividly surrounded him had momentarily paralyzed his creative faculties, that the hardness of life as it lay about him had taken the edge from his once keen fancy, that in time he was to be crushed, Tarpeia-like, by the very hand that was to have given him so much.

But there was something of the stoic in his make-up. He bore it as best he could, grimly chewing the cud of Repellier's advice that it would all prove a good antidote for Oxford. He still kept a keen eye open for the more picturesque elements in the life about him, and often took a quiet delight in his neighbors' somber gaiety. For with all its long hours of work Hartley had noticed that the tenement was not without its scenes of fleeting merriment. If the hive had its dark days little Pietro Salvatore still whistled away as merrily as ever while he sewed his buttons on boys' knickerbockers, fourteen to the piece, hemmed and ribboned at the back, for eleven cents the pair. And there were sly meetings and coy love-makings and gay marryings, and singing in many different tongues, and the feast-days and the christenings and the noisy enough children always playing about the dim corridors, and pale-faced girls flirting from the little wooden balconies, and the strains of concertinas and fiddles from open windows at night, and shrill laughter through the gloom when the midsummer heat drove the sleepers, men and women and children alike, up on the roof top in search of a breath of air--but always, everywhere, the dull undertone of the machines that buzzed so feverishly away. And there were little parties that sallied forth, all decked in hired finery, for a chowder party on the Sound, and there were excursions off to Paradise Park on a bright Sunday, and every now and then wonderful spreads of which the outside world knew nothing--feasts of green peppers, and grated Parmesan, and freckled bologna, and salame, and lupine beans, and macaroni cooked in oil, and spiced Neapolitan meal cakes, with maraschino sometimes, and fine rat-tail cigars, at a penny apiece, for the men at the finish.

Yes, indeed, there were feasts at times, wonderful feasts, that many a night made the disconsolate young scholar on the top floor envy his humbler-minded neighbors. And there were gardens, too--gardens that could be taken in when the policeman ordered it--tufts and shreds of green in tin cans and starch-boxes, as green almost as the grass in the Park. And there was color, bless you--color enough to dazzle one's eyes--on a windy Monday morning, when the pulley-lines that stretched from the windows fluttered and swayed with the week's myriad-tinted washings. But it was all strangely and sadly new to Hartley.

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO VOICES

And so he lost, for like a sword
Still in his bosom prest
Her perilous face, and each soft word
Like thorns still tore his breast.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

It's in the lulls of life that great things are lost and won.... You struggle against the tides that beset you, and you hold your own; but those tides never rest, and in the hour that you wait to call for peace--then the waters shall carry you back.--"The Silver Poppy."

Hartley dined frugally, though somewhat late, that night. Time had slipped away unnoticed in his close little room till he woke to the fact that he was extremely hungry. He was glad to get out into the open night air, but as he sniffed at it gingerly on his way back to his room once more there came to him, with a sudden pang, a memory of the evening odors that hung over the far-away valley of the Isis.

As he stepped in through the jail-like doorway he all but stumbled over Repellier, waiting for him there.

"I was down in this part of town," he explained, "so I decided to drop in on you for a while--I have a model who hangs out in Chatham Street."

"Come up; come up, by all means," cried Hartley, elated.

As the younger man and his visitor picked their way through the narrow halls of the tenement-house it was obvious to them both that the supper hour of that district was not yet over. For the smell of many cooking and overcooked meals, mingling with the odors that drifted at all times of the day up through the crowded building, was not altogether pleasing to the uninitiated nose. Repellier noticed, too, that Hartley looked listless and worn and tired, and in some way strangely altered.

This was the gilded youth he had once beheld in a cushion-bestrewn punt on the Isis, reading Anacreon. Groping after him up the odoriferous narrow stairs, with a sudden deeper note of sympathy he asked Hartley how he had been getting along of late.

"Five editorial rejections to-day," the young man answered half blithely, half solemnly.

"But are you getting--what you expected out of things down here?"

"As you see"--Hartley tried to laugh back, bravely enough--"I'm afraid I'm a sort of Zeno ground in my own mortar of squalidness."

Repellier knew as well as he how, with time, the novelty of such things could lose its early glitter. The old artist felt troubled in spirit.

"Will you take my advice for a second time?" he asked suddenly.

Hartley said he would, gladly.

"Well, I'd suggest that you migrate before long--I think you'd better change quarters, get where you'll have more sun and air. They're pretty wearing, these places; you've been getting too much of a good thing." Then he smiled, but hesitated to say what was on his lips.

"I think I'll stick it out," said Hartley stoutly.

They were in the dingy, squalid room by this time, and for some unknown reason a constraint fell over them. The old artist noticed the Oxford photographs stuck up about the broken walls and the gaps in the sadly depleted shelf of books. He had never thought Hartley had it in him.

And again he felt troubled in spirit--he stood so helpless before the very man on whom he had pinned his faith. He

wondered in what way he could reach a hand out to him—he knew only too well what any open offer of help would mean.

"I wish you'd use your friends a little more," he said, as they sat and smoked together.

"I've so jolly few, I've got to keep them," said Hartley, with his slow English smile.

"You're a punctilious beggar, Hartley! I'm beginning to believe the Dean of Worcester was right when he said you needed some of the Matthew Arnold knocked out of you."

When Repellier had taken his departure, leaving his host with a new-born, indefinite sense of unrest and discontent, Hartley thought it all over. Why did he not use his friends? Repellier had dropped that seed of interrogation on very open soil. Alone in his room Hartley recalled what Cordelia Vaughan had said to him in her soft contralto about nothing succeeding in America so much as success. After all, might there not be such a thing as an overscrupulous judgment of motive and action for the man of the world? Ethics, he tried to argue with himself, were suitable enough for Oxford. What he wanted now was opportunity. He demanded his chance. He had been too thin-skinned. He was in Rome, and he must do what the Romans do. It was all his Anglo-Saxon tendency to be stiff-necked. Why did he not make use of his friends? It was the very nature of such things that made all friendship valuable. It would simply be a matter of give and take between them. It would, too, never become a matter of sentiment—he prided himself that he had his heart too well in hand for that. He had too many great things still undone for any entanglements of that sort. And yet, and yet--as the lonely young author sat back on his hard-bottomed chair and recalled the soft contralto of the Southern voice the noisy rattle of the elevated trains went out of his ears. He was a stranger, and she had been very kind to him. The confusion of yellows that floated and drifted before his eyes darkened and deepened into gold, and the eyes that before had seemed cold to him grew warm and lustrous.

He had been a very lonely young man. In his head fermented a dozen great things still unaccomplished; chance had broken no clean channel through the sour stagnation of those fermenting cross-purposes. And now the artist in him aspired desperately for freedom. Again he wondered if, after all, his older, uncompromising ideality, his older rigid sense of right and wrong, was not the result of mingled priggishness and petulance. Even though he had to stoop a little for this first start, after all, it was a start. And once under way surely some new and unforeseen avenue of escape would offer itself. And if for a time he felt a half-caged conscience beating against its bars, he muffled that last tremulous flutter in his cry for some release from the sordid drudgery and the stultifying gloom that was holding him down.

Sitting up late into the night, Hartley rewrote his article on Cordelia Vaughan. The insinuation of the personal equation into his work was easier than it had looked. Time was, he knew, when he had rejoiced in attacking these seven-day wonders of the world of letters, the noisy idols with their posings and world-old impositions. He himself for months had been doing miserable hack work in the services of an unscrupulous syndicate, for a few paltry dollars a week, that he might hold unpolluted from all that was sordid and commercial that inner and more sacred fount. He had thrown his coat in the mire that his goddess might still walk with white feet. He had never confounded his serious work with the work of the moment. He had not asked for much; he could live on little, very little indeed. He was willing to work humbly, so long as he might only see some ultimate opportunity to labor on unharrassed by the worries and impecuniosities that now hung over him, and all but stifled him. With the Muse there must be no divided love. He had long since learned that while the work of the creative mind is joyous enough, it is likewise exhausting. All he cried out for was opportunity. It was the artist aspiring for his freedom. It was the creator casting about for his chance to create.

There were men in the city, Hartley knew, who were making fortunes by their pen. But they were men who, only too often, had allowed the temporary interest to intervene, men who had sought the immediate reward of the dollar, men who put their finger, adroitly enough, on the pulse of the world and gave it what it asked for, regardless of conscience and consequence. Was he, too, to become one of these? Was this fragile and pale-faced priestess of Mnemosyne, whose friendship had promised so much for him, insidiously to forge the first link in that golden chain which was to bind him down? Yet he had done nothing that was dishonorable. After all, even the artist must have his modern ideas of the business side of life. It was the law of the land.

So Hartley rewrote his article on Cordelia Vaughan. If there was any little rift in the throbbing lute of his enthusiasm he solaced himself with the thought that he was moving with the times, that he was growing more politic, that being down on his luck had knocked some of the sensitiveness out of him. He felt, too, that life of late had been making him more humble. "You're so damned hopelessly honest!" his editor had once disgustingly said of him. But now, as he wrote late into the night, page after page, *The Silver Poppy*, though still unread by him, paragraph by paragraph grew into a wonderful and still more wonderful work, and Cordelia Vaughan, if not the openly accredited George Eliot of America,

was at least the apostle of that newer upward movement which was to carry the American novel from the valley of mental mediocrity to the clearest heights of the intellectual.



CHAPTER VII

THE APRIL OF LOVE

From the book to the battle we go,
And it comes that we travel afar
Unto marts that we do not know,
Where a Philistine people are.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Market-Place."

"I'm not very big," she said wistfully; "I'm only one of those little harbor-tugs that wear the liners of life into their berths--for the port has its perils as well as the open sea."--"The Silver Poppy."

Mrs. Spaulding usually breakfasted at half-past eleven, just four hours later than her husband. That gentleman, indeed, had passed through half a day of delirious Wall Street business before the plump and loosely gowned figure of his belated spouse rustled languidly down to the breakfast room.

Mrs. Spaulding--and at the breakfast hour above all other times--liked to believe that she was a very ill-used and lonely woman. If a touch of forlorn desolation did cling about her even days, it was a desolation quite different to her husband's. Through her loneliness she still groped for something tangible and material; he found little toward which he cared to reach.

He had first made his money in wheat, at Indianapolis. Later he had doubled a substantial fortune by prompt and shrewd investments in the then half-prospected iron-mines of the Lake Superior district. He was an honest and simple-minded man, with a straight-forward and workaday bent of mind, who still fretted at idleness, and was still wordlessly oppressed by the gaieties of life when they chanced to fall before the hour of the dinner gong and the Tuxedo coat.

It was not until his fortune had crept up to the million mark that he ventured to ask for the hand of the youthful and overpretty Lillian Bunting, a belle in her time, and a young lady, it was said, with marked social aspirations for the Middle West.

Then, as time went on and brought with it an increase of prosperity, she hungered, as a millionaire's wife, for that mystic urban El Dorado of the affluent American, New York. Though he felt that he was sacrificing a few hundred thousand by the migration, Alfred Spaulding finally came East and built a handsome home for himself and his wife on West Seventy-second Street.

It was all very dreary and very lonely for them both during their first two years in this new home. But little by little Alfred Spaulding drifted back to that world of business and strenuous effort which constituted life for him. And day by day Mrs. Spaulding hovered more and more closely about that high-walled garden where worldly wealth flowered into sensuous affluence, though as the mere wife of an unknown millionaire she seldom alighted on the borders of society, which to the end she insisted in describing as "The Four Hundred."

But if she could not dine and dance and drive with them, she still had left to her the compensating pleasures of dining and dancing and driving in their wake. She could still reserve their tables at the cafes on off evenings, and their boxes at the theaters when they were elsewhere. There was nothing to prevent their milliners from making hats for her own aspiring head, and she could still buy her jewelry and her flowers in the same shops with them, and even drive bewilderingly near them in the Park.

Then came the advent of Cordelia Vaughan. The young authoress from Kentucky was just at the zenith of her fame; The Silver Poppy had, as Mr. Henry Slater described it, "set the Hudson on fire"; her new-found friends were still reprovably demanding why she held back her second volume, and publishers, it was said, were besieging her for manuscripts. The public press, too, was hinting from time to time that the new Kentucky beauty was laboring on a mysterious volume that was to shake society to its very foundations. Then it was whispered about that she wrote only from memory, that she was living the romance which later should appear in type. Photographers sent to her, begging for a sitting. Niccia, the sculptor, made a little bust of her, and declared she had the only Greek nose in America, and there was a poem or two indited to her "sad, sad crown of golden hair," as one melancholy versifier had put it.

Cordelia Vaughan was indeed a very much talked about young lady, and it was just at this juncture that Mrs. Alfred

Spaulding had swooped down on her and triumphantly carried her off, very much like a plump hen-hawk making away with a homeless duckling. She was still delightfully childlike and ingenuous for one already so great. The poor girl, Mrs. Spaulding held, needed a mother's care. She was giving up too much to her work. She must have more amusement, more diversion. She should have a little den of her own, and she should work when she wanted to, and play when she wanted to. She should be as free as though she were in her own home. It was, too, in no way mildly hinted that under the roof of such a patroness she would have unrivaled opportunities for studying the foibles and weaknesses of New York's most exclusive circles. In fact, Mrs. Spaulding would give a series of receptions and teas and things for her, for she had always wanted to see more of those dear, untidy Bohemians with the long hair.

Though the young authoress from the South had been a willing enough captive, under what roof, indeed, did the eagle wings of genius ever unfurl with ease? Cordelia, however, had hungered for a little of the fulness of life. Her earlier New York existence, bright and attractive as it had seemed to the outer eye, had been an unutterably lonely and hollow one. Life in a Washington Square boarding-house had proved no better than a more irregular existence in a dilapidated old studio on lower Fifth Avenue, where for several months she invariably burned her own toast and regularly boiled her own tea, and where her callers were equally divided between overinquisitive reporters and impoverished authors looking for assistance.

So Mrs. Spaulding felt that she had taken a new grip on life when her timorous little *protegee* was installed in the yellow-tinted study which had been made ready for her. It was an eminence by proxy, but it was better than nonentity; and in her silent gratitude she saw to it that Cordelia wanted for nothing, and, on the whole, was not unhappy.

Alfred Spaulding himself had hoped to see grow up about him a family, but having no children, he drank deep of the anodyne of the dollar; and so, during the day at least, his loneliness was forgotten. In the evening, when not too tired, he dressed and went with his wife to the theater, enjoying it passively, but liking most of all those pieces "which had lots of music," especially those Broadway performances characterized as "Gaiety Successes." Sometimes they dined out, and sometimes he sent Cordelia and his wife off together and ate at home alone. In his earlier day he had looked toward his wife as the symbol and embodiment of that softer and, he thought, that higher life which was necessarily alien to him. Then as her prettiness passed away, and her limitations came poignantly home to him, he concluded with pious secrecy that womankind is the upholstery of life, wearing the soonest where it is the softest.

Cordelia Vaughan, when she became a member of his household, did not fail to realize the narrow and lonely existence he led. This touched her keenly in some way, and she did what she could to throw a little more of the lightness and color of life about his absent-minded coming and going. He saw and appreciated this generous effort, and if the two did not become fast friends, they at least grew into more or less good comrades. Often in the mornings she drove down with him as far as his office, for Southerner though she was, it was an inexorable rule of her life to rise early. In some way, though, she was finding her time of late less and less her own, and their morning drives had become more and more infrequent.

It was the thought of this, and the sudden pang of regret that came with it, that took her down to breakfast with Alfred Spaulding not many days after her first meeting with Hartley. All the way down through the crowded, narrow canon of lower Broadway she talked to him with a wistful attentiveness that left him with his morning papers still contentedly jammed down in his overcoat pocket.

As she drove home alone in the bright, glimmering little yellow-bodied Victoria she wondered if it was the soft balminess of the September air that was stirring in her a new sense of something that she had been crowding out of her life. It was a morning on which one wished to be always young.

As the little Victoria swung from Broadway into Fourth Street, she suddenly caught sight of Hartley, and called for the coachman to pull up at the curb. Before the young Oxonian had quite realized who it was and before he had recovered his composure she was stretching a prettily gloved hand down to him.

"Isn't this lucky?" she cried joyfully.

"It is, indeed," he said, taking her hand and looking into her bright face, across which a tress or two of her hair had blown. There was something so airy and light and buoyant about her that she seemed to him like a bird of passage, alien to the roar and dust about her.

"Can't you steal an hour or two and run away from all this dust and rattle and noise down here?" she asked, bending over him with her tremulously wistful smile.

He hesitated.

"Do come, the air is so beautiful. You look worried and tired, and it'll do you so much good. Do come!"

Still Hartley hesitated. He asked himself why it was he always hesitated before this particular young woman. Then he looked at her again, and did not stop to answer to that inner questioning voice. The next moment he was sitting beside her and the carriage was bowling lightly across the strong sunlight of Washington Square and out under the arch, where the long undulating vista of Fifth Avenue melted into the distance.

As they passed an old studio building on the lower avenue she pointed to one of its highest little windows.

"That's where I used to live," she said simply, and then an involuntary sigh escaped her. "How soon we change, without knowing it!" she added.

"How?" said Hartley looking back at the window.

"Oh, we get hard and selfish and careless." There was a new note of tenderness in her voice when next she spoke. "I wish I could learn to love children and flowers more than I do. Haven't you ever felt that you'd like to be able to give and suffer and endure? That you'd like to throw something out of yourself? Well, that's how I feel sometimes when I think how people--I mean people with ambitions--have to live for themselves. But it can't always be helped."

He looked at her--it was a new facet to the stone.

"For instance, this very afternoon," she went on. "You know I've always wanted to bring my poor old father up to New York to be near me. He's so alone in the world--there's only him and old Mammy Dinah at home now; and week by week I've been putting off seeing about the little apartment I'm leasing for them. I promised to have it settled this afternoon, but at two I have to be at the rehearsal of that great drama they're making out of *The Silver Poppy*; at four I have to be interviewed for a Sunday paper; at five I have a tea and two receptions; and to-night we dine at the Carringtons."

"Let's see about the flat--is it a flat? Now, together," suggested Hartley, with a sudden impulse to share in her mood of passing softness.

She looked at him keenly for a moment or two as he told her he would like to feel that he was doing something for her father; the fleeting shadow of a fear crossed her face.

"No," she said, "let's have our morning together in the Park."

There was already a premonitory touch of autumn in the bright air. They passed through the dazzling, sunlit Plaza and entered the cool, green quietness of the Park itself. There the noises of the city faded down to a quiet rumble and the perfume of flowers and the smell of verdure took the place of the drifting street dust. There was something so detached, and pictorial, and spectacular about it that it seemed to Hartley as if a mental tourniquet was already holding dreamily back life's wasting energies. The *legato* of hoofs, persistent and smooth as a waterfall, the tinkle and clatter of chains, the gloss and luster of the rumbling carriages, the shimmer and gleam of the flanks of perfect horses, the passing faces--proud, young, pale, flushed, weary, eager faces of women--the color and flash of millinery and gown against the cool dark greenness; it seemed to him the sheltered and alluring flowering of life, the quietness and repose of the twilight of accomplishment, never virginal and unconscious, but studied, autumnal, attained. It seemed to him a splendor unmingled and unsoftened by age, not as it might have been in his own land.

Turning to the silent girl at his side, he spoke of the difference between Central Park and the avenues of Hyde Park of an early summer afternoon. He tried to describe to her the forsaken aspect of London's West End during August and the first part of September, when the fashionable world of his own land was, as it were, closed for repairs. He told her of the forlornness of the Drive and the Row, and how at that season only summer tourists invaded Hyde Park, and even then only north of the Serpentine.

Cordelia listened to him, contented and happy--listened almost raptly, as though she was making the most of her day. It was not until he had rambled joyously on and described to her a London summer and the advent of what they called "the silly season" that she asked him a pointed question or two about English scenery and English country life. She had always been greatly puzzled about the peerage, she confessed, and wanted to know why one was just the Countess of Somebody at one time and then Lady Somebody at another. She had met Lady Aberdeen once, in Chicago, she said, at an Irish-lace store there. She had been afraid to say a word to her, she confessed prettily, because she hadn't known just how to address her. And were all the upper classes as simple and unaffected as Lady Aberdeen? And was London so different from New York? And would she ever, she wondered, see the Old Country, and Oxford, and all the other beautiful places he had spoken of? And she asked him if he could believe that at one time she had hated England, and everything English--hated it blindly--which is the worst of all hatreds.

Hartley tried to paint before her eyes the panorama of London from Waterloo Bridge, with its imperial sweep and mass of river front huddling from the Houses of Parliament to the Tower. He tried to make her feel the sober, low-hung English sky, the softened lights, and the more ordered and solemn lines of London's architecture, where New York's

almost universal newness of things was not to be found, and where the dry, hard tones of the New World's brown-stone fronts were likewise happily absent.

She listened intently, and some of her questions were so innocently childlike, and were asked with such a winning ingenuousness that he laughed now and then. It was not until he had finished that she confessed the real cause of her dilemma.

"You see, the book I've been working on so long is partly laid in London, and of course I've never been there. And when you haven't even passed through a place on a train it's pretty hard to get the right local color, isn't it?"

Hartley assumed that it was.

"And I've tried reading it up, but it's no use. I'm afraid I haven't the absorbent mind; some people come out of a book, you see, like a spaniel out of water, scattering a shower of ideas all over you. Well, I can't do that; and what makes it so much harder for me," she added plaintively, "I've known so few nice Englishmen."

Hartley was studying Cleopatra's Needle. As some remote mental vision of the Old Serpent of the Nile drifted through his mind he thought how few nice Americans he had met before.

"That's where they're so ready to catch me up--the critics, you know," she went on.

She looked very pretty and flower-like under her big hat.

"You can imagine how hard it is, can't you?" she added.

He turned to her with a sudden great purpose in his face. The thought of it warmed and glowed through him like wine.

"Why couldn't I help you with it?" he asked eagerly.

Her fluttering eyes rested on him warmly, but only for a moment. Then she shook her head plaintively. "That's *too* much," she murmured.

But he asked her again, humbly.

Unconsciously her gloved fingers touched his arm; there was a confession of deeper things in the movement.

"Would you?" she asked in her soft contralto.

Hartley tried to tell her how happy and proud it would make him. He wondered at the note of humility in her voice, at her half-tristful hesitancy.

"I should love to think it was you who had helped me in a thing like that," she said gratefully. And he could see by the luminous eyes that it was true, and for the rest of that drive no sunlight had sifted through more golden air, no flowers had ever been so odorous, and no green had ever looked so deep to him.

Cordelia insisted that he should drive back and meet Mrs. Spaulding. If he cared to, he could get her own copy of *The Silver Poppy* and also the manuscript of her new book. She had rather, she said, that he went over the manuscript alone; in that way he could judge it more impartially. And she turned homeward, feeling that her day was over and done.

Mrs. Spaulding greeted Hartley with an effusiveness that almost bewildered that somewhat dignified young man, particularly as he could detect in it no lack of genuineness. She had been told what a promising man he was, and how he was going to write a great book some day. She understood he was a great friend of Mr. Repellier's, and she hoped he would make a regular home of their house, and drop in whenever he felt like it. She pressed him to remain for luncheon, "for pot-luck," she called it, but as he was unable to do that she genially brought down a box of her husband's cigars and protested that both she and Cordelia loved smoke.

Hartley--dare it be confessed--was all this time hoping against hope that she was not noticing the too-often clipped fringe about his trouser heels. And the truth was this shrewd and sharp-eyed lady had noticed the tell-tale fringe, but she also had seen a clean-limbed and clear-featured young man, who carried himself with an air of quiet dignity that was well worth studying, and that would look uncommonly well in a theater-box.

It all ended in a promise from him that he would run up some morning and exercise one of her horses with Cordelia. Cordelia, standing silent and aloof, remembered what Hartley had said during their drive about English reticence, and threw him a glance which he could see was meant as a silent palliation of what she could not prevent. For a moment it awoke in him an inner voice of distrust, of perplexity, that left him with the feeling that a softening veil had been lifted from between them. It was as though some hand had shaken a shower of petals from the blossoming tree of

enchantment and left it half bare and empty.

As he said good-by, depressed in spirits and scarcely understanding why it was, Cordelia slipped into his hand a delicately perfumed package tied with blue silk ribbon, together with a copy of *The Silver Poppy*.

"I want you to keep this; it was the first copy from the press," she told him. And she added that she hoped he wouldn't waste too much of his time over the manuscript. She knew he would find it all wrong, that there would be a thousand things to disappoint him. And she begged him to make whatever changes he would; she trusted him implicitly.

"I'm afraid you'll not like it," she said timidly, coming with him to the door. She had slipped one of Mrs. Spaulding's hothouse rosebuds into his button-hole, and she touched it with her fingers with a gesture that meant much. He would have taken her hand, but she drew it back quickly.

"It's been so hard for me to write things this time," she lamented. "I feel that it's all going to fall flat. But whatever happens," and her eyes were eloquent with something more than gratitude, "I've had the happiest morning of my life."

And she closed the door quietly, and left him there. As he stepped out into the hard light of noonday, once more he felt that vague impression of unrest, that reaction of despondency which he had often enough felt when emerging from the music and romance of a theater and passing out into the garish lights and noises of a workaday world. He, too, felt that his day was over and done.



CHAPTER VIII

LIFE'S IRON CROWN

Deep in its ancient center we
Had dreamed its aging heart should be;
Yet there, where should have slept its soul,
Was only darkness and a hollowed bole!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Old Yew at Iffley."

Society, my dear, is like salt water, good to swim in but hard to swallow.--"The Silver Poppy."

When Hartley turned the last page of *The Silver Poppy* he closed the book meditatively but amazed. In it he had found the golden key to a long-closed mystery. In it he had seen revealed the great heart and mind of a misunderstood woman. He had caught the substance where before he had beheld only the shadow. It was as if from the shuttered windows of an empty house he had heard unexpected music. He had found the deeper and truer woman. All suspicion and dread of some elusive element he had never been able to fathom in Cordelia Vaughan at one stroke vanished away. Thereafter he was determined to read her and accept her as she lay revealed in the pages before him.

For he saw that into those pages had escaped some mellow, softer, profounder part of her, a part which when face to face with her at different times he had groped for in vain. For he could see, as plain as his hand, that *The Silver Poppy* was not a book of the moment. It had in it elements of greatness that startled him, and left him gasping. There was a whimsical turn to its tendernesses, a quiet reserve to its humor and pathos so adroitly blended, a quaintness and ingenuous freshness of touch, and, above all, an impersonal, judicial aloofness from life that spoke, at first sight, more of the hand of a man than that of a woman, and a woman still in her youth--at any rate, in her youth as an artist and a creator.

It was this flood of new feeling that bore him, elated and fired with enthusiasm, to the first of Cordelia's and Mrs. Spaulding's receptions late that afternoon. Long beforehand he had determined not to attend this reception. Besides cutting into time which was not altogether his own, he was beginning to see the impossibility of any further incongruous vacillating between the sordidness of Chatham Square and the splendor of the upper West Side; the grim irony in those contrasting pictures of life stung him too unpleasantly. But in his hour of new enlightenment he overcame his older scruples. He had a stern duty of self-humiliation to perform and a once wavering integrity to redeem. And he fell to remembering little speeches that Cordelia Vaughan once had made, and little ways that clung to her, and the tints of her hair and the many little variable intonations of her voice. And thinking of these things he made his way up through the city toward her once more.

A fluttering striped awning and a strip of crimson carpet ran from the Spauldings' doorway to the curb, where forty carriages half blocked the street. It was clear to Hartley that Cordelia's first reception was not to be a failure. That he came conspicuously unadorned and unknown and on foot in no way troubled him as he made his way through the crowd of heterogeneous loungers that fringed the strip of crimson carpet. In other days he had been used to such things. Some touch of the scholar in him, too, contributed to his bearing that sense of remoteness which elevated him above such perturbations.

It was the memory for the second time of his pendulum-like alternating between two such strangely opposing existences, and the cutting, keen irony of the thing that heightened his color as he hurried in from liveried servant to servant, and suddenly found himself in a crush of flowers and waving plumes and rich gowns, with here and there the sober black of a dissonant and desolate-looking man. And above it all the hum of many voices and the breath of many perfumes rose and mingled.

The next moment he caught sight of Cordelia herself, where she stood beside Mrs. Spaulding, greeting her guests one by one and smiling her gratitude for each prettiness of speech borne to her by that tide of new-found friends. Hartley, across the intervening crush, noticed that she looked almost exquisite and flower-like in a gown of white stuff that seemed to accentuate her note of frailty. She reminded him, as he looked, of a pale yellow clicquot.

He noticed, too, that she received her homage with all the girlish dignity of an imperious young queen, a little too coldly and too haughtily, perhaps, and yet with a mild composure that was causing the honest-eyed Mrs. Spaulding to

turn more than once in secret wonderment, and gaze at her admiringly. There was nothing in Cordelia's bearing to reveal any inner ruffling of a spirit tranquil and detached--nothing beyond the pale rose-like flush that had mounted to her softly undulating, almost gently hollowed cheeks, and the luminosity of her outwardly calm eyes.

Cordelia did not see Hartley in the odorous, rustling stream that was slowly bearing him toward her until he was almost at her side. Then she paled a little, and let her eyes rest on him keenly, speaking smilingly, as she looked, to a florid woman confronting her.

In a minute or two he himself was before her and had taken her hand. She had not expected him that afternoon.

"It was so charming of you to come, Mr. Hartley," she murmured. It was the same phrase he had already heard her say at least half a dozen times over; the formality of her welcome chilled him. He had forgotten there were a dozen persons at his heels.

"I *had* to come!" he confessed. Something earnest in his tone frightened her. She showed him by her glance that there were others hemming them in.

"Then you have read it?" she asked quickly, lowering her voice.

"Yes; and I have so much, *so* much to tell you about it. It is all wonderful, and all beautiful."

She looked at him, startled. Her whole rapt face caught fire, and for a moment was suffused with a great light. Only in animals and wild things had he ever before seen that strange phosphorescence of the eyes.

Then she looked into his face once more, and all the color went out of her own. She saw her mistake.

"But which, *which*?" she cried in sudden anguish, under her breath. At first he did not understand. Then slowly he came to see just what she meant.

"The Silver Poppy," he answered her, wondering.

She put her four bent finger-tips up to her parted lips with a sudden odd little gesture, as though she was thrusting and holding back some involuntary small cry. It seemed a movement of both disappointment and despair.

It was all over in a minute, and before Hartley could realize why it was done, or what it had meant, the same stream that had borne him in to her as relentlessly had carried him away. Ebbing into flushed but cooler diffuseness, it left him in another room, where he beheld rustling, laughing groups of women, and palms, and heard the sounds of muffled music and broken snatches of talk.

He looked back toward Cordelia and tried to catch a glimpse of her, but a sea of plumed heads waved between them.

"But life is only a vaudeville, with hunger and love for top-liners," he heard a gaunt tragedian disclaiming to a woman with penciled eyebrows and obviously rouged cheeks and lips.

"Yes, but think how many times we can love!" the rouged lips laughed back at him. Hartley moved on through the crush.

"A woman's eyes," a long-haired young man at his elbow was declaring to a group of listening women, "a woman's eyes are the index of her soul."

An elderly lady in mauve caught him up.

"But our souls, you see, are like the magazines--they mostly come uncut. And that's why only the paper-knife of matrimony really finds us out."

Hartley looked at the group, crestfallen, disappointed, vaguely disgusted. Their brilliance seemed to him the brilliance of tinsel and paper roses. And he asked himself in sudden indeterminate terror if this was the sort of thing he was to waste his days over.

CHAPTER IX

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODDESS

She from her rose-grown turrets came
And laughed up in his eyes;
He flushed to his pale brow with shame,
And spake unto the skies:

"To Christ this woman yet shall bow,
Or be cast down," he said,
"And where she flaunts her scarlet now
Shall float the Cross instead."

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

Put a touch of spring in the air, the thought of a woman in the heart, and keep from poetry if you can.--"The Silver Poppy."

For the second time Cordelia Vaughan had left Hartley stunned and amazed. Twice since he had first met her he looked up in bewilderment and found it necessary to readjust his estimate of her. This second readjustment, though, was somewhat different from the first.

It was not until he had left her (receiving her homage like the acknowledged and imperious young queen she was) that once more back in his dingy little lodging, stiflingly squalid after the richness of the Spauldings' crowded drawing-room, he had untied the blue silk ribbon that so daintily bound the manuscript of her second book. To lose himself in it would be a relief. He was glad to slip away into the unreal world which her hand had opened up to him.

Cordelia had named her story *The Unwise Virgins*. With the open manuscript once before him, Hartley read it through, from start to finish. And it was from that reading he emerged stunned and amazed.

The Unwise Virgins was a failure, a glittering but disheartening failure. Of that there could be no two opinions. The streets of the city had not been so kind to Cordelia Vaughan as had the open hills of Kentucky. Her second book had none of the power and movement of *The Silver Poppy*, none of those whimsical tendernesses and quaint touches of humor and pathos that had half muffled the razor edge of her earlier satiric touch.

From the first Hartley had been led to regard Cordelia as a woman without an affluent sense of humor. Then, after reading *The Silver Poppy*, he had wondered if she had not drained off, as it were, her vanished reservoirs of mirth; if her mental blitheness had not been lost with the too labored advent of her first-born. He had heard not infrequently of "men of one book." Could it be that Cordelia was a woman of one supreme effort? Or was it her newer life that was so altering and wasting and enervating her?

For, hard as he found it to confess to himself, *The Unwise Virgins*, as a whole, held neither accomplishment nor hope. In fact, with his child terror of the trite and the commonplace, and racked as he was by his "torture of form," he found in it nothing but energy miserably misspent. It was a heap of glittering particles that ran elusively through the fingers, a labored thing of shreds and patches. Its simulation of power was almost pedantry, its affectation of *finesse* was time and time again flaccid idling with words half understood.

Each time the wings of his admiration were about to unfold, the stroke of some little banality sent him tumbling down to earth again. Yet through the maze of all this energy misdirected he could get glimpses of the substantial enough central idea on which Cordelia had attempted to build. But on it she had built nothing but a misshapen, chaotic thing which tempted him, with his passion for form, to demolish and rebuild after his own fashion. It stood a challenge to him.

Not that Hartley looked on himself as a master workman in this respect. He could not pride himself on either great experience or great accomplishment. But the enthusiasm of the true disciple was in him; a youth of isolation had been building in him those silent fires which smelt experience and mood into art and expression. He had been a desultory yet rapacious reader. Through an erratic and none too studious college course he had fed hungrily on the older literature of his own tongue, and had also mastered the poets of a tongue which he could never force himself to look on as dead. He had come out of these excursions with a sensitized taste and the gift of a sort of literary bletonism, intuitively

responding to any sign of the artist beyond the effort. And now, with the touch refined and the hand trained, he, as an artist, stood idle, pounding the anvil of journalism when he might be wielding the chisel of the gold-smith.

He followed his first impulse and went to Cordelia herself, at once. She had just come in from the florist's, and she greeted him over an armful of white roses, which she still held unconsciously before her as she let her eyes linger for a studious minute on his face. He felt vaguely sorry for her--there was an inalienable touch of pathos in the thought of the stricken hand of the master. It seemed to leave her so hopeless and alone--for all along he had more than half felt that she was not altogether at rest in the life into which success had forced her.

She led him timidly up to the little yellow study, and waited for him to speak. She had noticed the manuscript in his hand.

He found it very hard to begin.

"You don't like it, I know," she said, tearing a flower to pieces. She looked up at him almost appealingly, and then went on.

"I don't like it myself. I think I've lost my grip on it. It keeps running away from me, and throwing me out, and dragging me after it."

As he looked at her in her helplessness, he tried to tell himself that he had been unduly harsh in his first judgment. Then he turned to her and attempted to explain how with a possible touch or two it might be remodeled, how splendid it would be, once it was whipped into shape.

She only shook her head dolefully.

"I'm tired of it," she said.

Hartley seemed unable to explain to himself why a mere mood of temporary inadequacy should crush her into hopelessness.

"Then let me do it," he suggested.

"Dear friend," she said gratefully but sorrowfully, "what time have you for such things?"

"I couldn't give my days to it, of course," he confessed. "But I have my nights. With a couple of hours in the morning, why, a few weeks ought to see it finished."

She shook her head with childlike dolefulness.

"Then what will you do with it?" he asked her.

The question seemed to frighten her. She scarcely knew, she said. They had been clamoring for it so long. She thought she would put it aside and take it up again with a fresh hand.

"Then let me take it in the meantime," Hartley pleaded.

She made a proposal to him--it seemed to come to her in the form of a sudden inspiration.

"Let's collaborate on it," she cried.

"I would much rather simply help you a bit if I could."

"But don't you see, we can divvy--as we say over here--on the royalties. I've refused twenty per cent and a thousand dollars down. That means two or three thousand dollars, anyway."

Hartley would not hear of it. Cordelia hovered over him and pleaded with him and coaxed him, but he was obdurate to the end. He dreaded to think of that dainty little yellow study ever being converted, to him, into a bookseller's counting-house. A sudden hot sense of dissatisfaction with himself, and with things as they were, crept over him; he felt that he ought to be going, wondering why, during all that visit, Cordelia appeared so far away from him, so unreal and phantasmal.

"There was something I was going to speak to you about," she said, as he rose to go. "You know I've done simply nothing in return for all the things you've done for me." Then she smiled with her wistful smile. "You know, it isn't quite playing fair. As soon as you get home I want you to send me three or four of your short stories. Will you?"

"It's no use--they have been everywhere," said Hartley grimly.

"Perhaps they have, but I feel that I can place them for you--at least some of them."

Hartley shook his head. "I know most of the editors here," Cordelia went on; "there are three or four who have been bothering me for things for months. It makes a world of difference just how a manuscript comes into their hands; they say it doesn't, but they're human, after all. So, you see, I may be able to say a good word or two for you."

"Thank you, no," he answered gently. "When I think of you I want it to be in every sense but a business sense."

Her hand still remained unconsciously in his. He felt the pulsing warmth of it, and without a word raised it to his lips and kissed it. Cordelia, with her head turned away, gazed out of the open window. And there he left her, and stepped out into the freedom of the open air, neither elated nor cast down. He was thinking forlornly how month by month he had sent out those different hopeless, useless manuscripts, and how they had been as persistently returned to him. And still again the artist in him cried out for its opportunity. Yet he felt, in his youthfully candid, self-conscious way, that they were not altogether bad, those stories of his. Perhaps it was the work of the file that they showed too much. Perhaps it was the seriousness of purpose which pervaded them, when everywhere the call was for the airier and lighter effort.

But he did not altogether despair. Again and again he wondered on his way home why he had kissed her hand, and only her hand. And the nearer he drew to Chatham Square the more he was tempted to change his mind and send at least one manuscript to Cordelia.



CHAPTER X

BROKEN LINKS

And vain and empty stole away
Their little seasons, one by one;
And wearied while it yet was day
They fell asleep beneath the sun,
Ere once the dream or magic word
Could swing the gates of life apart,
Ere once some greater passion stirred
The dust from each impassive heart.

JOHN HARTLEY, "Pale Souls."

What are more desolate than life's moral Great Divides.--"The Silver Poppy."

The grimy offices of the United News Bureau were on William Street, almost under the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. In four years this bureau had known three failures and had existed, as well, under three different names. Uneasy on his desk ever rested the heels of its managing editor. There was a tradition, in fact, that this official had, perforce, to take his chair out to lunch with him--otherwise a new man occupied it on his return.

In dusty little pens about the august editorial chair toiled some ten or twelve sadly dilapidated literary hacks, waifs of the sea of journalism that had been washed up on the inhospitable shores of the syndicate bureau. They were, as a rule, old men eking out a simple existence on their few dollars a week, and, after frugal repasts at the noonday hour, when the wheels of creative imagination suspended for luncheon, dilating pensively on the old days, the good old palmy days of Greeley and Dana and Godkin, when to wield the pen was a labor of love and honor, when a newspaper man was not a walking sweat-shop of letters, whereby literature was turned out in job lots and articles were manufactured at so much the dozen.

It had not taken Hartley long to find that the United News Bureau was looked on with considerable contempt, with even hatred, by the ordinary New York newspaper writer. These upholders of sometimes dubiously conventional journalism made it a rule always to refer to the bureau as "the Boiler-Plate Factory," and night and day they watched it with suspicious eyes for evidences of violated copyright. But the bureau knew its business, and the different members of its staff had long since been schooled in the deft execution of what was not inappropriately termed a "plate sneak." This form of literary gymnastics consisted in the bodily appropriation of any desired article, sermon, story, or essay, the copy purloined being neatly disguised by a false face, as it were, in the substitution of a freshly written introduction. An original paragraph or two was attached to the end, with, perhaps, the interpolation of an occasional new sentence throughout the body of the thing purloined. As the bureau dealt in everything from anniversary poetry to syndicated political addresses, the field for its predatory activities was practically unlimited. A short story could be made by transplanting a De Maupassant peasant to a New England farm, or the interjection of a Kipling recruit into an Arizona mining-camp. The old-time action was jealously preserved in the transformation, the only alterations being those essential to a change of climate and conditions--and, presto, one had a new tale as bright and glittering as a freshly minted penny.

The bureau had a Menu Page, too, made up by a very lean and hungry-looking old gentleman who lunched sparingly on a sandwich each noon, and a Religious Thought Page, edited by a very stout individual who kept a brandy-flask standing beside his ink-bottle. A profitable branch of its business was the preparation of obituaries of eminent men still living, and it is on record that one editor had made it his cheerful practise to submit these touching studies to the different gentlemen whom they most intimately concerned, naively asking if anything further remained to be said. What the bureau fattened on, however, was the uncopyrighted in general, and for all such morsels it watched with hawk-like intensity. An English novel or any less substantial publication which came to it unprotected by the arm of the law was pounced on at once, rapaciously and gleefully. It was renamed, abridged or expanded as the case might require, and in less time than it took the original author to indite his first chapter, it was on the market as a new and thrilling serial, "secured by special arrangement."

The bureau, among other things, paid particular attention to the wants of the farmer, and issued a Dairy Page, edited by

an elderly maiden lady who made Brooklyn her home and beheld a cow not more than once a year. The expert who edited the Agricultural Page, it might be added, had prepared himself for such tasks by many years' labor as an insurance agent. The bureau also boasted of a professional poet, who ran strongly to patriotism, but as his rhymes were manufactured for the convenience of the rather indiscriminating bucolic editor and later on for the delectation of the bucolic reader, his Gems in Verse usually went unchallenged.

Since it took several days for the dissemination of the bureau's material, as everything went from its offices made up into plates and boxed for express, all of its offerings had to be prepared with a wholesome disregard as to dates. This somewhat handicapped the dramatic editor, who found it necessary to write bright and ingenious criticisms of plays without first witnessing their performance--although, it must be confessed, any difficulty on this score was usually obviated by making all notices unreservedly eulogistic--otherwise remote editors later on wrote in complaining of the loss of passes for those same performances when they ventured out on the road and joined hands with the bureau in that common and most commendable pursuit of stimulating the imagination of the masses.

Midsummer in the bureau always saw the staff in the midst of their Christmas literature, which, like its other anniversary material, was made up into pages, with a generous sprinkling of highly appropriate pictures of snow scenes and swinging bells and smiling Santa Clauses. Year after year these same pictures were taken down from their dusty shelves, and then year after year were duly stored away again for another season's use. Summer fiction, in the same way, was always manufactured during the winter months, by writers crouching forlornly over cheerless little gas-heaters. The bureau possessed a couple of "hands" surprisingly expert at this novelette work, who labored with the assistance of the back numbers of the less prominent magazines, and seemed possessed of the pleasing thought that what the world most loved was an old friend in new clothes.

One of Hartley's first lessons--and there were many of them to be learned--had been that no article, editorial, or story must "slop over." This phrase was interpreted to him as meaning that no article must be one line longer than the strictly allotted space. If such proved the case the editorial blue pencil performed the necessary amputation, and the child of the expansive mind was crowded into its page sadly bereft of limbs, and often enough of all genuine sense and coherence. Hartley had acquired the art, too, of writing poetry to order, suitable for the bureau's stock illustrations, while the compositor waited at his elbow, with his make-up suspended until the necessary lines were duly indited.

The young scholar from Oxford had been not a little amused, in secret, at the duties of the person who was known as the comic editor. The chief task of this editor seemed to be a ruthless scalping of the foreign humorous weeklies and a conscientious and often laborious adjustment of the witticisms of Punch to the American understanding. He was equally amused to find that the Republican editor and the Democratic editor were one and the same person, a mild-mannered and kindly faced old gentleman in a faded green suit, who on alternate days furiously wrote the most scathing political leaders back at himself.

Hartley himself had been carefully warned never to touch on religion, politics, or even locality in any of his contributions. It had also been impressed on his bewildered brain that there existed in American public life a mysterious factor known as the "Irish element," and that under no circumstances must he express any opinion or make any allusion which might be interpreted as offensive to this element. If in doubt, his editor commanded, he must be as Anglophobic as possible. He was also to make it a point to wax gently sarcastic, even playfully malicious, when speaking of that effete and overluxurious city New York--the name of which, it appeared, was bitter in the mouth of all outsiders. Hartley could never fathom why this was, but it was. And that seemed enough. He learned to feel less uncomfortable masquerading under his different pen-names after discovering that the heavily bearded old German who smoked bad tobacco at the desk next to his own flourished in the columns of the Woman's and Fashion Page as Daisy Dineen, the unquestioned authority on dumpling recipes in ten thousand unsuspecting homes.

These were the offices and this was the atmosphere into which Hartley listlessly came the morning after his interview with Cordelia Vaughan, when he had faltered in telling her his real verdict on *The Unwise Virgins*. This was the bitter gateway through which he had once dreamed he could enter some Eden of eminence.

As he passed to his desk and mopped the dust from it with an old newspaper, the place and all it stood for filled him with a sudden new-born disgust and weariness, a feeling more reckless than any which had before taken possession of him. He was sick of the smell of turpentine and printers' ink. He was sick of the unventilated rooms and the bad light. Daisy Dineen's tobacco-smoke drifted smotheringly about him. A plaintive minor note seemed to creep into the tinkling chorus of the many busy typewriters behind many little wooden partitions. There seemed something ghoulish and subterranean in the stooped, dimly lighted crooked figures of the patient writers about him. If earth's voracious readers beyond the pale only knew and understood!

Hartley was leaning disconsolately on his elbow, thinking this thought, when the shrill and slightly nasal voice of the managing editor called him. He got up and went listlessly to the editorial desk, still hearing some note of latent pathos

in the patient tinkling of the many typewriters.

"Look here, Lord Haughtly"--from his first day with the bureau they had dubbed him Lord Haughtly, the opprobriousness of which he had born with good-natured and smiling resignation--"what stuff have you turned in this last week?"

It seemed to the young disseminator of information that the question was asked in an unusually peremptory tone of voice. He was ready to overlook such things, however, for in days gone by this rough-and-ready man of affairs had not been altogether unkind to him, in his unconscious, careless way. He remembered, too, that he had come to the bureau an unknown and penniless youth, and that he was still one of the "probationers."

"Nothing much this week, I'm afraid," he answered.

"Nothing, eh?" said the controller of the destinies of journalistic literature, as he viewed the end of his cigar, which had all the appearance of a well-worn paint-brush. "You don't seem to be aching much to get on the pay-roll this week?"

"No, I rather didn't expect to," said Hartley quietly. He was beginning to scent danger ahead.

"Didn't, eh? Well, I guess I've been letting you off kind of easy lately. I've struck a new scheme, and I need a good chesty talker like you to push it through for me. Goin' to try you on a new line of work. I want you to go 'round to the different fancy outfitters and get anything flashy in fall styles for the Fashion Page. Then look up six or seven club-men--well-known club-men--and get me up a breezy two columns on expensive underwear for men of the Four Hundred. Find out what young Van Asteroid pays for his silk things and how many he's got, and all that kind of guff."

There was a moment's silence. The author of *Nausicaa* and *Other Poems* when anger took hold of him always went white and said little. He looked down at his enemy, outwardly calm. But an inner fire was burning away the last link of his bondage.

"I don't think I should care to undertake an assignment of that nature." The oppressor had not seen his face.

"Probably you wouldn't," retorted the unsuspecting editor. "But we ain't all here doing the things we want to. Everybody in this push, I guess, has his dirty work to do. We want that article by four-to-morrow. That clear?"

"Quite clear. But I don't think you understand me," said the other, struggling in vain to rise above his rage.

"You--you mean to tell me you won't! Look here, young man, you were a sandwich-eating, no-account immigrant, starving in the gutters when I picked you up and tried to make a New York newspaper man out of you. There's men from Maine to New Mexico hungering to get the chance I gave you--men who'd pay good money to get into this office. And you can do what I say or get out."

Hartley wondered what strange metamorphosis had taken place somewhere deep within his soul to give rise to the sudden new reckless spirit of independence which swept through him. Before it his anger melted away; he revealed only in a new sense of freedom.

"Very well, then; I get out," he replied, turning on his heel, almost smilingly.

The voice of the managing editor had risen high above the smaller noises of the office, and as Hartley walked to his dusty old desk and took up his hat and somewhat tattered gloves there was a moment of unbroken silence. He stood at the door and looked back. Timidly and nervously the busy typewriters behind the little partitions started to tinkle out their doleful staccato again. The managing editor sat, half turned in his pivot chair, looking through the door after Hartley in amazement. Then he swore at him lustily, and declaring before all that was holy that it would do him good to go out and starve, he snorted the burden of his rage from his mind and savagely commanded Daisy Dineen to give him a match.

And that was the manner in which John Hartley left the services of the United News Bureau for all time.

CHAPTER XI

THE STONIER UPLANDS

So avid of these earthly crumbs of praise,
Behold, how in her need,
From door to door of fame she crawls and prays
One crust to glut her greed.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Mendicant."

Upward through illusion and onward through error, that is life.--"The Silver Poppy."

Hartley was in a dilemma. He counted his money with some trepidation, and found that he possessed, all told, just four dollars and ninety cents, one dollar of which was to go for a month's rent of his typewriter. Seldom before had such things troubled him. If they were not, he felt that they ought to be, the mere accidents, the immaterial phases, of life.

Placing the little pile of money out before him on his worn old work-table, he realized, as he gazed down at it, that it made a very low wall between him and starvation.

Yet he did not altogether regret his breaking away from the United News Bureau. He had never nursed much love for that Grub Street of the New World. He had always realized, too, that journalism in any form could hold out no great hopes for him. He had not the news instinct, that great gift which to an editor, he had learned, only too amply covered the multitudinous sins of illiteracy. Nor had he that patience of spirit which would permit of his ever becoming a humble laborer with the pen of the "pot-boiler."

He recalled to his mind poor old Sissons, who so often had drifted into the bureau office--who for years had written his four books a season, under contract, for his paltry one hundred and forty dollars a volume. Sissons? Sissons? Who was Sissons? The name had not gone ringing down the avenues of fame, and yet few men in New York had written so much, none so laboriously.

In his dilemma Hartley remembered that he had once before earned three dollars a week as a super-numerary in one of the upper Broadway theaters. If the worst came to the worst, he could go back and be a "super"--it would be the refinement of cruelty, he thought, to be cast for a "thinking part" in one of the drawing-room scenes in Cordelia Vaughan's forth-coming comedy. He decided, in the end, though, that he would prefer unloading freight on the East River wharves. Many a day he had watched those ruddy wharf laborers, half enviously; and their lot, to him, had seemed incomparably happier than that of the pale shadows who shambled weakly about the broken old desks of the United News Bureau. And since the day Stevenson's old lodging-house had been pointed out to him he had felt a warmer feeling for both that ragged river front and for that vanished velvet-jacketed vagabond and dreamer of great dreams. Only--there was the inevitable "only"--only if he had never had that intoxicating first taste of another life.

His one glimmer of hope was that Cordelia might yet be able to sell a short story or two for him. And with that glimmer came a sudden passion to repay her in full for anything she might do. For once, and at last, his time and energy were his own. Remembering this, he read again his copy of *The Unwise Virgins*, and before noon of his first free day he was deep at work on his reconstruction of that halting story.

The sense of freedom that came with such work appealed to him. His liberated mind raced like a colt up and down the unfamiliar uplands of the imagination. For three delirious, fleeting days he struggled and battled with the manuscript, writing late into the night, losing himself in his work, medicining his little worries with the great balm of creation, with the unction of tangible accomplishment.

On the morning of the fourth day--a bright September morning with the sparrows twittering and bustling busily about the sunlit housetops, he received an unlooked-for note from Cordelia. He turned it over many times wonderingly, and then opened it over his modest breakfast of coffee and oatmeal porridge. In it was a crisp, spotless check for one hundred and ten dollars and a playfully peremptory command to send on another story at once. She ended with a line or two of congratulations, and casually asked when she was to see him again.

These closing sentences were skimmed over almost unnoticed by Hartley. One hundred and ten dollars! Never before had he been paid so handsomely. He looked at the check again, and wondered just where he could get it cashed. And

still again he held it up to the light and looked at it, and a great content stole over him. It was the beginning.

How bright that morning the sun lay on the housetops and chimneys, and how the elevated trains whisked and danced and frolicked past his vibrating window! The dust that hung over the city seemed a mantle of soft gold. The smell of the open street was a new perfume to him.

He went back to his work happy, light-hearted, assured. He felt come over him a new sense of power and freedom. With it the fires of creation seemed to burn and rage within him. For all time the week that followed remained a blurred and vague memory to him--a memory of hurried and half-eaten meals of chuck steak and strong coffee, of much tobacco-smoke, of feverish snatches at the fresh air by night, of unsettled sleep and an aching anxiety to be once more at work. His brain seemed to have taken the bit in its teeth and run away with him, though not, he knew, as Cordelia's had once bolted despairingly over the same pages.

When several days later he received a plaintive little note from that lady herself, it remained unnoticed. Little Pietro Salvatore crept timidly up to see him, but was not admitted. He could give no time to the empty graces and accidents of life. He was in the world of the spirit. The man in him flickered and went out; and the creator, the artist, awoke, and taking possession of his soul, claimed its own.

How long this mood, or madness--he did not stop to ask which it was--might have lasted he could never tell. But early one day a sharp pounding on his door angered him unreasonably. When it had sounded for the third time he answered it, and found a uniformed messenger-boy with a note from Cordelia. He tossed it aside, and plunged once more into his work. But three hours later he was interrupted again. This time it was a telegram. He opened it belligerently and read it. It was from Cordelia. He remembered that her note had asked something about when he could get up to see her. Now she had wired, "You must come at once."

Hartley sighed wearily. Then he walked his room resentfully. Then, like one awakening from a long sleep, he rubbed his eyes and looked abstractedly up and down his litter of manuscript and notes. He tried to go back to them, but some hand seemed leashing in his whimpering ideas. The spell was broken. He sat back in his chair and stretched himself wearily. He pictured a pale oval face, with its abundance of massed golden-yellow hair like a great crown, and remembered the little hands that seemed to flutter about like butterfly wings. And all at once his room stood before him an unspeakably squalid and lonely place. He wondered why he had been penning himself up for so long.

That afternoon, being unable to work, he walked twelve long miles and blistered his feet and tired his legs. He was in bed, weary of both mind and body before it was dark, and the sun was high before he wakened next morning. The world seemed gray and flat. The singing April of inspiration had passed. But he knew that he had broken the back of his work. The foundations of his labor had been laid, and thereafter he felt his toil on those half-completed twenty chapters of *The Unwise Virgins* must be that work which is done in cold blood, critical, calculating, dispassionate. But the thread of creation was snapped.

"I thought you were never coming," Cordelia lamented in her unconsciously soft contralto, as he stepped into the Spauldings' large, softly lighted library.

He laughed good-naturedly--he felt that a week of brain-work had burned out of him some excess of solemnity--and with boyish precipitancy thrust his twenty rough chapters of *The Unwise Virgins* into her arms.

"Behold my redemption!" he cried gaily, and felt that he should like to follow the twenty chapters and be held there as she held the crumpled leaves to her breast.

She had been waiting for him, and was dressed in a gown of old gold with yellow roses at her throat and in her hair. He threw his admiration of the picture she made into the glance he let linger abstractedly on her face. For the first time he noticed some touch of trouble about her quiet lips, a new tiredness about the pleading eyes.

"Why didn't you come?" she repeated, looking down as though half ashamed of a weakness she could not conceal.

"Upon my honor," he laughed back at her, "I don't believe I should have appeared within a month if it hadn't been for your message."

"How could you!" she said reprovingly.

"Well, a madness for work got hold of me, and I was up in the clouds. I always have to gallop through things--that's why I didn't want to break into the mood while it lasted."

"And it lasted?"

"Yes, until your wire came. Then I dropped down, I don't know how, with a bump. It confronted me with the fact that I was still a human being; it revitalized me, as it were, and reminded me that the softest voice in all the world had been calling for me, and the sweetest eyes in all the world had been looking for me."

Cordelia shrank back from him; he thought for a moment that he had wounded her. The widened pupils of her eyes had grown smaller again, and the shadow of something fugitive and far away flitted across her face. Was she, he wondered, still so afraid of love?

"Then, you didn't finish the story?" she asked diffidently. It seemed the first time that she had shown a desire to repel him.

He had stepped closer to her, warm with a feeling he tried neither to fathom nor withhold. At this change in her he stopped short, bewildered.

"No." He tried to explain to her. "You said that I *must* come."

"Oh!" said Cordelia coldly, vaguely; and all that evening Hartley wondered what unknown trouble was weighing upon her spirit. As at other times when similar inscrutable phases of her character had flashed before him, he let the teasing little mystery of the moment pass without attempting to probe more deeply into it. For he remembered that the real key to her inner and truer self lay between the covers of her first book, *The Silver Poppy*.



CHAPTER XII

EROS THE RELUCTANT

So many dreams must fail us, dear,
So many springs to autumn turn,
Let us, in one memorial year,
Learn all there is of love to learn.

JOHN HARTLEY, "Pale Souls."

A husband's jealousies, my dear, are the mushrooms on the beefsteak of matrimony.--"The Silver Poppy."

"My dear, are you falling in love?"

It was Mrs. Spaulding who suddenly asked this of Cordelia, tumbling a lump of sugar into the depths of her coffee-cup as a figure and symbol of some vaster emotional descent.

Cordelia looked across the breakfast table at her abstractedly.

"Why not?" she asked lazily.

Mrs. Spaulding looked up, about to speak. The right light, however, was not on Cordelia's brow, and there were certain bounds beyond which she had learned not to trespass. So she only sighed.

"Fall in love, my dear, a dozen times, if you like. But----"

And again Mrs. Spaulding sighed. Cordelia perhaps understood more than she pretended. Only that morning Mrs. Spaulding had read aloud to her a little note from Repellier--a most formal little note making excuses for being unable to join them in their box party at Wallack's.

From the first, almost, Cordelia had comprehended that silent unshifting drama, undreamed of by even its hero and central figure, the gentle, upright, honest old artist himself. At one time that patient but perverse adoration on the part of Mrs. Spaulding had impressed Cordelia as beautiful in its constancy, as ethereal in its very intangibility. But of late it was beginning to stand before her as the foolish caprice of a pertinacious and yet idle and dissatisfied woman.

But it was Mrs. Spaulding's one romance--wilful and unreasonable, yet none the less golden. Wealth had brought her many things, but out of the midst of her opulence she reached eagerly for the unattainable--seeking, without knowing it, for life's relieving burden of sorrow, for her woman's due heritage of tears.

"You ought to be happy," Cordelia one day had said to her; "*you* get everything you want." She had been trying to scold Cordelia out of a passing mood of discontent.

"I don't get anything I want," she had cried back at her bitterly. "We can't even have a Long Island place. We can't go to Aiken. We can't go abroad for a summer. Even if we did go, it would be on the wrong steamer, and we'd sit at the wrong table and meet the wrong people. And I can't *drag* Alfred to a Waldorf dance, and Horse Show week I've always had to sit up alone in a box like a bump on a log. And he insists on driving in the Park on Sundays--*Sundays*, mind you--and he always wants to go to Sherry's or Martin's for Saturday dinner, and wear a Tuxedo coat at a cotillon. Why we've even bought our house here on the wrong street, and to make it even worse we're on the wrong *side* of the street. We go and sit through those everlasting operas on the wrong night. When we leave town it's always at the wrong season. Then we come back wrong--about the time other people are leaving. Is it any wonder I feel like giving up? Why, Cordelia, my dear, you've met more people and got to be better known in five months than I have in five years!"

And she stirred her coffee with the vigor with which she had once dreamed to stir the social world.

"And you can hold people and make them like you," she went on. "And you aren't afraid to show people that you care for them."

It was Cordelia's turn to drive trouble from a softly rebellious breast.

"If he only guessed how sweet and good you are, some wise man I know would surely come and run off with you."

Mrs. Spaulding looked at her tragically and heaved a ponderous sigh. Then her American saving sense of humor came to her rescue and she clung to it, like the drowning to a raft.

"I'm a sentimental old fool, my dear," was all she said. And Cordelia was left to her own troubled thoughts.

More than once the author of *The Silver Poppy* had been heard to say that she was a greatly misjudged woman. The world accepted her as austere and impassive. The myriad readers of her book thought of her as clever but chilly, as talented but retiring. Yet "upon the stern and somber loom of passion and love," her publisher's announcement had read, "the girlish hand of this fair daughter of Dixie has wielded a shuttle wound with the odorous warmth of the Southland and dyed with the bright fancy of one who has loved and known and suffered. From the story of one woman's tenderest devotion and one man's deepest love this young hand has intuitively woven the magic woof of many-hued romance."

Precisely what it meant no one attempted to define, but it sounded very well, and what was more, it seemed to hint that the pale young authoress from the hills of Kentucky had once known her own romance of the heart, and that the gates of feeling had thereafter been closed to all supplicants. This was a deduction so natural that the elderly maiden lady who conducted a column of society chatter on one of the back pages of a daily newspaper had even ventured to print--this was after a very substantial dinner at Sherry's, where-at Cordelia herself was the gracious and generous hostess--that many a stout heart of Manhattan had reason to lament the fact that the feelings of a certain golden-haired daughter of Kentucky were impregnable to all assault. The lady, indeed, was so closely allied to literature that, unlike the philosopher of the *Rubaiyat*, she could never be divorced from barren reason and make a second marriage. This was all put with a slyness so adroit and yet with an application so undoubted that it had once more been whispered about that the beautiful young Kentucky genius preferred great dreams to Dan Cupid. Her studious maiden-hood seemed hedged about by a bulwark of half-written books. It was a sad example of beauty sacrificed on the altar of bookishness.

And yet, it was argued, this precocious child of letters at some time during her career must have learned to love, and love deeply; one critic declared her pen to have been dipped not in ink, but "in the ruddy flood of a warm and palpitating heart." If, in truth, she had never loved, how, then, had that fluent pen of hers ever learned to write so movingly and so masterfully of the divine passion?

How, indeed? That was the riddle which more than one puzzled mind had to leave unread. That was a thought, too, that had troubled Hartley not a little; there were times when he felt vaguely envious of that unknown, mysterious, shrouded past. He had read also that Cordelia had declared that she could never marry, that devotion to her art precluded any such worldly consummation. It had even crept into print that Iscaro, the Egyptian palmist, had sealed her girlhood decision by prophesying that she was to achieve immortality only through a life of celibacy.

Yet such are the cross-threads of fate. For Hartley, puzzling over these things as others before him had done, had built up in his consciousness an incongruous, self-contradictory, impossible character of a woman who seemed to him always warm to the eye and was yet destined to prove marble cold to the touch.

It was for Cordelia, perhaps, the penalty of eminence. For little as she had ever shown any sign of sacrificing her artistic aspirations in the rose-grown temple of matrimony, the hunger of the unmated and maturing animal, the wavering passion that arises at times involuntarily in the breast of the coldest priestess amid her coldest marbles, quiescent, but quiescent only as a tiger sleeping in its noonday cave, was now not unknown to the heart of Cordelia Vaughan. She wanted to be loved; but above all things, she wanted to love.

The cry of ripe womanhood for its mate awoke at times, but only of late, she knew, with an intensity that was sadly disturbing. Through her girlhood, she remembered, she had often said with a great air that she could never love. To love other than uprightly was even more impossible--yet she had secretly tired of the hollow part of an *Aspasia* without a *Pericles*. She had often tried to convince herself that she was too happily neutral, too indeterminate of temperament, to stray from the lonely heights to which she had so painfully climbed for the mere passing glint of a bubble. Now, for at least once in her life, half weary of all her comfortless basking at the too fierce fireside of her early fame she was beginning to ask more and more passionately for some touch of the mellow sun of actual affection, for some gentle warmth of disinterested tenderness.

For with all her activity and with all the attention she seemed to receive, Cordelia's life was still a desolately lonely one. An early girlish pose of protesting a fear of men had crystallized into a habit of evading them, except in not infrequent cases of late where they stepped before her as instruments of literary destiny. Good men, she had once said, are like good roads: made for walking over. As the belle of her little Kentucky town she had held herself proudly above each and all of her young suitors. As the successful author of a great book, as the woman of wit and reason, she had tended to repel that attention at the hand of the admiring male which such charm in woman as she might lay claim to invariably

called for. She had known many courtships, though, in her own way. Yet she asked herself if she had ever known one absolute and unselfish love.

It was Mrs. Spaulding's lightly put question that drove her into a dreary retrospect of a youth she seldom cared to look back on. But was this love now coming to her on belated wings?

She wondered where the difference lay, wherein John Hartley was not like all other men. Why had she looked out on him with awakened eyes? She remembered how, at the first, that grave considerateness with which he had treated her had caused an immediate muffled fluttering in the sleeping cotes of affection. There was an answering seriousness in his steady gray eyes that had appealed to her. He was manly, and honest, and strong. Yet she knew that explained nothing. Nor did the fact that he had continuously eluded her, that in some way he stood above her in a masterfulness that caused dormant femininity ever dumbly to bow to it. And still she probed herself for reasons, and still she stood unsatisfied. Was it true, even, that she could ever be in love with him?

When she leaned down and asked herself, in the mirror, that strange and disturbing question, one gray day late in September, she neither smiled nor sighed. For she tried to tell herself that it was not love, but loneliness. She, too, like Mrs. Spaulding, had never been given all that her heart desired.

It was not until Cordelia had read and reread Hartley's first twenty chapters of his reconstructed version of *The Unwise Virgins*--and what wondrous chapters, she saw, he had made them--that her plaintive and unconfessed longing for companionship, by some strange caprice of impression, deepened into a stronger and more compelling emotion. She felt then, of a sudden, that he held the reins of her destiny in his hands. She wanted him near her. Not only in her loneliness, but also in her weakness, she needed him to lean upon. The little that she had already asked of him she would repay a thousandfold.

And as the result of that day's silent questioning of herself she went in person from editor to editor, as she had never done before, with a bundle of his manuscripts. And before many days, after numerous disappointments and more than one humiliation, she succeeded in disposing of no less than five of his stories. If, as a distributor of his wares she had moments of suffering, she learned to take an incongruous joy out of them, and no word of what she passed through ever reached Hartley's ears.



CHAPTER XIII

THE FETTERED RELEASE

She, when all her maids were gone,
With her cheek upon her hand,
Gazed across a terraced lawn
Down a twilit valley-land
Where a white road twined and curled
Through the hills that barred the west,
Where some unknown outland world
Filled her with a strange unrest.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Valley Princess."

It is the under crust of motive that is the test of the moral pie.--"The Silver Poppy."

Cordelia turned the letter over and over in her hands. Something of late always depressed her when she received these letters from home, in her father's stiff, ungainly hand and his none too perfect spelling.

"Poor old dad, he won't come, after all!" Cordelia found it hard to look as miserable as she ought.

"I told you he wouldn't, my dear," said Mrs. Spaulding, with rigid retrospective conviction of mind.

"But I've leased the flat."

"And I told you not to do that, too."

"Yes; but he promised."

"Only because he thought you wanted him to."

"But I *did* want him to."

"Then you don't now?"

Cordelia looked up at her companion quickly.

"Yes, yes; I do. But for some reason, you see, he's changed his mind."

"My dear, that was all a big, soft-hearted, foolish idea of yours. What would your poor old father at his age do in New York? How could he be happy or contented in a four-roomed flat after forty acres of hills? How long would he leave his own country for a howling wilderness of brick and mortar like this?"

"He would be near me," said Cordelia valiantly.

"Which probably wouldn't be so pleasant, after all, for either of you. Do you ever stop to think, my dear, just how much you've changed in the last year or so?"

For a few moments Cordelia was thoughtfully silent. She felt and knew that she had changed.

"But what shall I do with it?" she asked.

"Has it never occurred to you?" Mrs. Spaulding at that precise moment sincerely wished that she possessed the psychic power of mind-reading. She half suspected that Cordelia might be concealing more than she had need to.

"Let John Hartley have it," the older woman said bluntly. And she had the inward satisfaction of seeing Cordelia color under her direct gaze. But she recovered herself at a stroke.

"He would never take it," Cordelia said.

"Then you should make him."

"That's something I couldn't do," murmured the other, shaking her head.

"Well, *somebody* ought to haul him out of that hole down in--in Chinatown, or the Bowery, or wherever it is."

"I know it," agreed Cordelia.

"Then we shall do it ourselves, my dear," said Mrs. Spaulding with a note of finality that was born of a touch of impatience. And Cordelia tried to see the futility of saying anything further.

In fact, before the day was over even her nominal hesitation had vanished, and the two women had decided on many of their plans for the redemption of Hartley. From the hour of that decision both Mrs. Spaulding and Cordelia made numerous excursions to the little apartment on lower Riverside Drive, and during the next few days the portly footman of the former enthusiastic lady was directed to carry up sundry parcels of hangings and knickknacks and small furniture.

It was a novel experience for both of them, in a way, and both of them were wringing out of it their own secret enjoyment--one retrospective, one anticipatory. Cordelia, once openly wedded to the idea, fluttered about the apartment as proudly as an April robin building a nest. The lighter touches were not overlooked; a desk was not forgotten, nor were prints and books and those many little things which were reputed to appeal to the student. Mrs. Spaulding, indeed, had given Cordelia an open order on her furniture dealer, and the fruits of her shopping tours had added much to the solid comfort of the place. She herself contributed a silver chafing-dish and a little set of Dresden china, matching her own, which had taken her fancy.

Then, when everything had been made comfortable and home-like, even to the addition of many clusters of carnations and roses about the rooms, a change suddenly came over Cordelia. An unaccountable mood of bashfulness took possession of her; a fear as to just how the intended and all unconscious guest would accept such boldly proffered hospitality, a haunting dread that perhaps he would refuse everything, and fail to understand the balm which she had so artfully made ready to take the sting from the gratuity--that he might leave her humiliated and misunderstood.

At the last moment she disappeared, and hid with a sort of bird-like timidity; and it was Mrs. Spaulding who had to take the somewhat astounded Hartley by the hand and lead him from one room to the other and introduce him to what she prettily called his new home.

Hartley took it all much more genially than they had expected. There was no scene, and but a moment's remonstrance and hesitation. It is true that at first he flushed hotly, and would have said something, but the eager light on Mrs. Spaulding's face kept him silent while he listened to her half-laughing explanation of how a useless flat had fallen into their hands.

"And it's so ridiculously cheap--only sixty dollars a month!"

Something in Hartley's face, a fleeting shadow of embarrassment, made her ask quickly: "That--that wouldn't be too much for you to pay?"

"Oh, no; of course not," he said, with ill-assumed indifference.

"Then you're not going to be stupid about it?" she demanded, with mock sternness. He was still standing ill at ease, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Oh, no, no; but still I don't quite understand why you should do this for me."

"There's nothing very puzzling about it. We both know very well it wasn't any too comfortable--was it?--down where you've been living. And artists have to have the right kind of place to work in. So we're simply going to chain you down, and *make* you stay."

She looked at him with a smile he had seldom seen on her lips. Her face that afternoon seemed sadly golden with the afterglow of an almost girlish tenderness that had long dropped beyond the horizon of the years, dignified with a light that seldom dwelt on it.

"And I want you to be happy and enjoy it," she added.

"How could you, Mrs. Spaulding! How could you!" he cried impetuously, taking her hand. It was not often that his Anglican coldness crept away from him, but when it did he was delightfully boyish.

"Is there anything so dreadful in it?"

"Only because it is all so dreadfully undeserved."

"Dear me, it's been the greatest fun for us. And then it's going to be so jolly to drop in every now and then and see

you. And poor, dear Cordelia has tried so hard to fix things to please you. So if you shatter our faith in you, sir," she added, going to the window and gazing out where the great silver bosom of the Hudson glimmered and shone in the autumnal sunlight, "or if you fail to write a great book here, then--well, we'll never forgive you, that's all."

He had no answer to make, for he too was looking out over the wide river and already thinking his own great thoughts of the future. Rung by rung he saw the ladder of success before him, and now that he had his foot on it--now he would show them. He would be, he told himself, none the less active; he would allow himself to lose none of his old aggressive discontent. Hereafter, though, he would do only that work which lay nearest his heart. There should be no yielding to transient interests, no bending to the voice of the moment. There was, of course, still his book to finish for Cordelia; that was but a matter of a few weeks. Then he would be free. Then the artist and his opportunity would be face to face.

One small cloud hovered over the clear horizon of his happiness. On the very threshold of his freedom he was finding the lightest of golden chains clinking thinly at his wrists. It was the disquieting sense of obligation toward Cordelia. His liberty had not come to him unqualified.

Hartley could not leave his humble East Side room without a pang or two of regret. One can never turn over such a page in life, he knew, without a touch of sorrow for the chapter that is closed. He felt that he was losing the companionship of those whom a common poverty had drawn closely about him. He felt, too, that it was the death of the democrat in him. He had grown to take an unworded pride in classing himself as one of the People. There could be no more of the "glad confident morning again." And if, at times, he had rebelled against the squalor and discomfort of that older life, yet now, when the hour for stepping out of and above it had arrived, he hesitated still again before taking the upper path into that new and untried world. The heat and dust and clangor of the busy streets, the cries and odors where men and women hived closely together, the wailing of young and neglected children, the sense of feverish movement and stir, the hum of the ceaseless machines--all these in the old days had entered into his life and had brought with them a riddle which he had not quite read, a lesson which he had not quite learned. And life there, too, had known its shreds and patches of color. With all its poverty there was a Southern air of gaiety and lightness about this New World East Side. It had none of the dismal and monotonous hideousness and the hopelessness of a Bethnal Green and a Whitechapel. He felt that he was stepping out to light and to liberty, yet taking with him a heavy heart--a heart that had almost grown to love its very cell. And after all, was it liberty? The softer side of life had not been unknown to him, and had not brought him happiness in the old days. A touch of the flagellant in him still turned his eyes toward the more buffeting existence, while at the same time the artist, the apostle for form, cried out in him for its leisured contemplation. Yet better to be the crystal and be broken, he felt, than the tile upon the housetop.

And John Hartley was not altogether and unrestrictedly happy during that first hour in his new apartment.

While these thoughts were running tumultuously through his mind Mrs. Spaulding, the embodiment, he felt, of the spirit of his newer existence, looked wonderingly out over her pearl-gray boa at him and waited for him to speak. He had taken it all very quietly. She did not know whether to be pleased or annoyed; Cordelia had accustomed her to gratitude in its more demonstrative form. She had expected, perhaps, a little more effusion on the part of her new *protege*. He, on his part, did not see that more remained to be said.

Mrs. Spaulding continued to look at him with musing eyes. He had always seemed to her to have the manners of another century. There were times when his stiffness irritated her.

"Are all Englishmen alike?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Because sometimes I feel that I'd like to give you a good shaking, just to joggle you out of your shell for a few minutes."

He laughed. "I only wish you would."

"Really? Then why do you let so many good times crawl under your Juggernaut of solemnity?"

"Because the Vishnu of the land of the glassy stare demands it, I suppose. I'm not altogether Americanized yet." And again he laughed.

"Does that mean you're saying anything against my country?" demanded Mrs. Spaulding.

"On the contrary, that I am looking to your country for my reformation. I'd really like to be shaken out of that shell you speak of."

"Well, New York ought to do that for you."

"I think it is doing it."

"But it's like your accent; it goes slowly." Mrs. Spaulding had seated herself, and was looking at him with her elbows on the table and a meditative chin buried in her thick boa.

"I think you ought to fall in love."

She repeated it, with conviction, and then suddenly, asked him: "Haven't you ever been that way?"

He looked at her with a face both serious and, she thought, unnecessarily chilling.

"There, I told you--the shell!" she cried warningly. "Tell me, now, weren't you ever in love?"

A barrier, impregnable as steel, a barrier beaten out by all the years of an existence uncomprehended and a secrecy unrespected, fell between them. A sense of his isolation, a touch of the sorrow of the alien, crept over him. And as he looked at the woman who thus questioned him it seemed very long ago, and very far away, that old life, and those old days amid the soft Oxfordshire hills.

Mrs. Spaulding put out her hand to him, unexpectedly.

"I'm afraid you're going to be very lonely here at first," she said.

"I have my work," he answered wearily--though the thought of it came almost with joy.

"But you can't live by work alone. And if you'll let us, I thought we might give you a little house-warming. Won't you let Cordelia and me join you in your first dinner here?"

Mrs. Spaulding had made a discovery. She had found that her scholar responded only to sincerity, but then, inevitably; and here she had been assailing him with her levity. She mentioned the many little details of how they should have their dinner prepared. Then she turned to him, and added, as an after-thought:

"Cordelia is a beautiful character, isn't she?" Whereupon, as though fearing his reply, she suddenly looked at her little jeweled watch, and cried with horror: "Good heavens, I'm late for my sitting!" and rustled out to her waiting carriage, not altogether unhappy to get away.



CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRE IN THE CLEARING

She in twined gold all helmeted,
Cuirassed in yielding rose,
Let fall from lips of wanton red
Three little words, like blows;

And laughed where swayed his spear aloft,
For she no arms did wear,
And her slim body white and soft
Of steel and mail was bare!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

We prefer our pessimists young and tender, like asparagus; ten years older and what a bore even Hamlet might have been!--"The Silver Poppy."

Repellier had been prevailed upon to attempt a portrait of Mrs. Alfred Spaulding, and three times a week he came to her house to drink a cup of tea and to work, relaxingly, it is true, on a canvas which was progressing neither fast nor altogether favorably. He had undertaken the task only under gentle protest, for, since that day of mingled alarm and disgust when he beheld two pages of an illustrated weekly given over to what its editor had dared to call The Repellier Girl, the old artist had gone back to his *genre* work, declaring that he was tired of the American gigantic miniature. So, profitable as he might have found the painting of beautiful gowns and faces in Bishop's whole lengths, he preferred thereafter to regard all labor like that which he was now performing for Mrs. Spaulding as the avocation of a busy life, and not the vocation of an idle one. And in this instance, too, his fair sitter had confided to him that she would like the portrait to be done in secret. It was to be a Christmas present for her husband, and, as she added with an ambiguity that somewhat ruffled the usual equanimity of Repellier, "Alfred is such a jealous-minded creature, besides."

It was Cordelia who had finally persuaded him to undertake the picture, laughing all seriousness out of its rigid secrecy and holding it up to him as merely the passing whim of a very wealthy and very idle woman. It was she, too, who suggested a plan which he ultimately carried out--that the check he received in payment for his work be handed over to the chronically depleted funds of that East Side Convalescent Home of which he was a trustee.

Mrs. Spaulding, in turn, was not ungrateful for what she considered Cordelia's good offices in this case. She even confessed to her young ward the timid fear that a great artist like Repellier, reproducing on his canvas feature by feature the very face in which a vast but heroically hidden passion burned, might some day read the soul of the picture, where the soul of the woman had passed unnoticed. Cordelia agreed that such cases were not unknown, but honorably kept her own counsel in the matter and even bravely fought down within herself the last inner voice of flippancy.

When Repellier called that afternoon he found Cordelia down in the Spauldings' commodious kitchen, a cook and two busy maids about her.

"I had to call you down, it smells so fine," she cried happily, thrusting before his astonished nose a pan of sizzling English pheasant, which, after a long and tiring hunt throughout the city, she confided to him, she had found somewhere in cold storage.

"How domestic we are, and how charming we look!" said Repellier in reply, noting her bright eyes and flushed face.

"Yes, isn't it fine?"

"But," he asked, "what does it all mean?"

She told him of Hartley's change of apartments--it was the thought of relating these circumstances to Repellier more than to any one else that had troubled her for days--and how Mrs. Spaulding and she had promised to give him a little house-warming.

"And so we're going to give him a dinner, a most wonderful dinner!" she cried. "And I'm doing it all by myself!"

Repellier glanced interrogatively at the three busy servants.

"Of course I have to have a little help, but that's a secret. Our women at home--in the South--aren't taught to do this sort of thing, you know. Help, with us, is so easy to get, most of us never learn things. When I was a girl in Kentucky, I don't believe I ever went into a kitchen more than once a month. And now I've just discovered the fascination of the fryingpan."

Cordelia had what Repellier called "the dangerous gift of familiarity." As he looked at her he remembered how apt Miss Short's description of her had been: "the girl with the semaphore eyes." She could be as open and ingenuous as a child at times, and when caring to, could guilelessly brush aside all the restraining conventionalities with one airy sweep of the hand.

"I suppose you realize it's the oldest weapon you have in that eternal warfare of the elemental woman against the elemental man," half laughed Repellier.

"Feed the brutes," she laughed. Then she looked up quickly. "But I'm not arming for any particular engagement with the enemy." He had a way of giving generalities a specific application which she did not like.

"I suppose a few thousand years ago some shock-headed, hairy-bodied creature with a stone hatchet crawled on all fours into a cave and beheld a rat-browed, matted-haired she-thing stooping over a gory piece of toasting bear meat, and his heart went out to her at once."

"Or his hatchet," broke in Cordelia.

"And I suppose out of the mumbling delight of that hairy savage has come what we moderns call family love, and out of the way in which the she-thing groveled and thrust the hot meat on a slab of stone and crawled with it to her lord and master-to-be has flowered what we call courtship."

"And just as her happy yelping," went on Cordelia satirically, "was the root of our speech, I suppose that hunk of half-cooked flesh was the root of this *terriner de foie gras*."

She sniffed at her delicacy appreciatively.

"How much nicer the modern way is," she added, dreamily, "marriage by capture transformed into marriage by chef."

"But *has* it changed so much, after all?" asked Repellier, looking about at the half-filled hampers.

Cordelia thought it over before her mirror that evening as she dressed, and she rediscovered two truths. One was that it really hadn't changed so much, and the other was that Mr. Repellier often said things with a sort of double meaning, which, she knew, was always going to fill her with a hazy distrust of him.

Her toilet was an exceptionally elaborate one, and it was almost seven before she tapped lightly on Mrs. Spaulding's door.

Dismay crept through her as she entered; she immediately recognized all the familiar symptoms.

"I've got one of my heads again, my dear. I'm sorry, but I *can't* go."

Cordelia looked at her with compressed lips.

"You'll *have* to run along by yourself, my dear. It'll be all right, and I'll send Thomas with the brougham at nine."

Hartley was deep in a pile of disordered notes and manuscripts, trying to arrange them with some sort of method, when her tiny knock sounded on his apartment door. He did not hear it; it might never have been intended for his hearing, it was so light and timorous. Before he was even aware of her presence everything had been slipped in through the softly opened door. And when he suddenly looked up he saw her standing there laughing, expectant, radiant, a Lady Bountiful surrounded by her riches.

He started up and came quickly toward her. He had scarcely looked for them so soon. But she stopped him with a gesture.

"I've come alone," she warned him. And she told him how she had been deserted at the last moment. She was glad, and yet sorry--as she saw how his face lighted up--that he should look at it so joyously innocent.

"I have come to feed the lion," she cried. "Roar if you dare, sir!" She slipped off her wrap, and laying her hat and gloves aside, deftly placed a couple of Hartley's carnations in her hair. Noticing over her shoulder that he was watching her, she laughingly told him the different names the newspapers had given that poor head of hers--everything from "flame-washed" and "tawny russet" to "beaten bronze." Then she laughed again softly, and produced a mysterious parcel.

"Roll up my sleeves, sir!" she demanded prettily, standing before him. When this was done, and he had noticed how small but perfectly rounded her white arm was, she opened her parcel and shook out the whitest of white aprons.

"Dear, dear, isn't it fine?" she cried, jubilantly tiptoeing so that she could see herself in the mirror.

Hartley looked at her in wonder. The last little complaining voice of a disturbed conscience went scurrying back to its kennel. Any constraint that had hung over him disappeared. With one whisk of her silk skirt Cordelia seemed to have driven the quietness and loneliness from the little rooms.

It was the pale and fragile priestess of letters in a new and altogether unexpected light. He even had to confess to himself that he had never seen her make a more perfect picture. She seemed more softly womanly, more wistfully happy, than ever before. The missing note had been found. She herself was not unconscious of this, and it deepened the rose-tint on her usually pallid cheeks. And she took a strange joy in her novel tasks, as she bustled about laying out the things in a most housewifely manner.

She made a few blunders about it, for it was work that was new to her, but they laughed them off together. It all seemed to appeal to something dormant and primitive in her, and she was happy. It was the blossoming, in her, of the belated flower of domesticity. Gazing down at the white linen and the dishes, in a moment of abstraction, she resolved within herself thereafter to give more time and attention to such things, she even inwardly decided, some day, to take a course in cooking. It was, she felt, like finding a quaint old jewel in the folds of some neglected and long-forgotten gown, a flower in some forsaken garden.

"I suppose," said Cordelia dreamily, as she contemplated the results of her labors, "that the fryingpan is the oldest weapon we women have in that perpetual warfare of the elemental she against the elemental he. Did you ever think of it in that light? Can't you imagine a shock-headed creature with a stone hatchet in his hand crawling into a cave and finding a lady in a bearskin roasting a piece of bear meat, or something like that? And can't you imagine how his pagan heart went out to her at the sight?"

Hartley growled, savage-like; and they both laughed.

"But I suppose," she went on thoughtfully, "that out of his mumblings of delight has come what we call family love. And then do you realize, sir, that out of the way that female savage groveled and thrust that hot meat on a slab of stone before him came that beautiful thing we call courtship?"

"Fine!" cried Hartley; "and evolution in a nutshell."

"Yes," said Cordelia happily. "I think I'll have to use that in a book sometime."

And so, from the oysters that came carefully packed in chopped ice to the French coffee which Cordelia made on Hartley's little gas-range--from a recipe which she had carefully penciled on a slip of paper--the dinner proved the daintiest and most delectable of repasts. In a burst of confidence Cordelia even admitted that it was the happiest one she had ever eaten. Then a silence fell over them, and through the drifting smoke of the cigar which she had so carefully lighted for him he noticed how unusually luminous were the widened pupils of her "semaphore eyes," and how shell-like the soft tinting of her oval and finely chiseled face.

But still neither spoke, and neither seemed oppressed by the silence. It seemed so eloquent of quiet content.

"What good chums we make," she said at last, musingly. They had both begun to feel during that long silence the stir of something new and momentous in the air about them.

"And always shall make," he said, taking her hand across the table and holding it firmly and warmly in his own. She looked at him out of wistful and appealing eyes; she felt herself strangely touched into a new vitality--the vitality of the emerging elemental woman. A hand-clasp was the thing she had not asked for; it was the one inadequate touch she had not called for.

"How cold you are!" she murmured plaintively. He looked up at her, half-enlightened, disturbed. He always had felt that she was something to be guarded and cherished. He wondered if it was her misleading air of fragility that had made her always appeal to his nurturing instinct, and had let the eternal he--as she had put it--in him go unchallenged.

"Would you like to see me--the other way?" he suddenly asked her, in a changed voice. He would have recalled that question, even as he would have held back the quick wave of recklessness that swept over him, if it had been in his power. Her words had sent the blood bounding back to his heart. For the first time she sat before him a living, breathing, alluring woman, and not the embodiment of all that was coldly intellectual. She seemed no longer the pale apostle of letters, but herself a woman throbbing and pulsing with mature life, eager, significant, almost challenging. And he, too, was a man, vigorous, full-blooded, not without his wayward impulses of the heart. The scholar in him, the dormant sense of propriety which rebelled against any disregard of the laws of the strong to the weak, of the host to his guest, had hitherto held a coldly restraining hand on him. She, like himself, was a being surging with desires and emotions, warm with forgotten moods and passions. And again he felt a flushing wave of irresponsibility sweep through him.

"Yes," she answered deliberately, pouring the last of the wine into his glass and sipping languidly at her own with her thin, gently curved, crimson lips. She waited for him to speak, but he was silent.

"I believe I'd love to shock you," she murmured in her fluty contralto. She was looking at him warmly now, with eyes that seemed golden green under the soft glow of the heavily shaded chandelier above their heads. Her hair was a crown of tangled gold. Her face seemed heavy, like a flower in the heat that comes before rain. A sudden tingling swept through all his nerves, and he looked at her with new eyes. At last he had awakened.

"Yes, what good chums we could have been," he said, it seemed to her almost regretfully.

"But how interesting one man and one woman can make life," she answered slowly.

The sentence was a quotation from the second chapter of *The Unwise Virgins* as Cordelia had first written it. He remembered the line and the context, and it left him no room for doubt.

"There--there could be no going back," he said, feeling the old ground sinking abysmally from under his feet, and groping out in that last tumultuous moment for something substantial to which to cling. O doubting and pouting Adonis, how could you!

The flags and pennons of victory flamed softly in her triumphant eyes. In some way, she felt, she had at last drawn him down from his towers. Once she had been half afraid of him; that hour was gone for all time.

Cordelia slipped out of her chair and came over and stood close beside him. She thrust her pale fingers into his hair and gazed with mild but unhesitatingly candid eyes down into his own. His face looked up to hers, passionate, yet with a touch of pain. A sudden pallor swept over him, and before she knew it he had flung up his arms and drawn her down to him.

Some sudden enchaining fragrance and warmth about her overmastered him. For an intoxicating moment he could feel her very heart, in its wild beating. Then she writhed and twisted away from him, and shrank panting and frightened out of his reach. He went to her once, but she eluded him. And at last he remembered.

"Oh, I forgot, I forgot," she half cried and half sobbed. And then she seemed to grow frightened, both of him and of herself.

"No, no!" she cried as he returned to her, with outstretched arms. "No, we--we must go back and be as we were--before." And he could see that some subtle change had come over her. Until that moment she had, perhaps, been the pursuer. Now, and hereafter--well, she had become the child of uncounted ages of femininity.

She told him, again and again, that it would make no difference, that they should both forget that little blot on what had been their perfect happiness. And for the rest of her visit she busied herself about the apartment, fluttering from room to room with her bird-like activity. There was a strange smile in the corners of her mouth, a humanizing, maddening sort of smile, Hartley thought it, as he followed her gloomily about while she readjusted his furniture where it displeased her and here and there rearranged his flowers and prints and dishes with her deft fingers. From time to time, in hanging his pictures and curios about the walls, she called on him to help her. This he seemed to do submissively, almost repentantly.

Scarcely a word had passed between them until Cordelia had come to the draping of what Mrs. Spaulding had called the Turkish corner. Above a broad, low divan two heavy pistoleted Arabian spear-heads had been hung crosswise from the ceiling. Over these a pair of Bagdad *portieres* were to be draped.

Standing on a chair, Cordelia tried twice to reach over the spear-heads, but they were too high for her.

"Let me try," said Hartley. He hung them, but they were badly draped, and had to be taken down again. Cordelia pointed out to him for the second time that there was one particular way in which they had to be swung. She herself

made a last effort to reach the horizontal spear-bar. In doing so her hair tumbled down over her face. She tossed it back with her free hand, and looked down at him for a moment, questioningly.

"Oh, I know!" she cried, with a sudden illuminating thought. "I know! *You* lift me up."

She laughed with childish *abandon*. He took her fragile, sinuous, pulsing body in his arms--she was very light--and lifted her till she was high above his head. She was laughing, and found it hard to balance her body with his arms so tightly about her knees. The *portiere* fell from her hands, and lay in a huddled mass at their feet.

She fought bitterly with herself, in the space of that one short gasp, but something--she scarcely knew what--confounded her better judgment. She looked one second down into his white face and their eyes met. Then her body drooped limply down to him, deeper and deeper, into his arms; and her head, with all its wealth of tumbled gold, fell just over his shoulder, against his face.

The next moment *portiere* and the world were forgotten, and without knowing it she was offering him her mouth, and he was holding her limp and sobbing body close in his arms and kissing her warm lips again and again.

She struggled feebly against him at first, and tried to say that she must go. But the speech died down into a murmur, and she could only sob weakly:

"I can't help it! I can't help it!" For one last moment she panted to be free, and then the violet eyelids sank wearily over the happy eyes, and she lay even closer, and very still, in his arms.

A sudden knock on the outer door startled them both back to a forgotten world. She caught at her hair, and tried to twist it decently about her head once more. He went to the door and opened it.

It was Thomas, the coachman, come for Miss Cordelia.

CHAPTER XV

THE MILL AND ITS GRIST

She dreamed not of the fight he fought
Till lo, he crept again
To her, with all his vows forgot----
Then, then she knew his pain.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

Humor is the tail to the kite of affection.--"The Silver Poppy."

"Oh, I'm disgusted with myself, with everything," said Hartley, impatiently going to his window, where through the drifting rain he could see the misty gray Palisades of the Hudson and a little scattered fleet of sailing craft dropping down with the tide. Then he went as impatiently back to his chair again.

"What's gone wrong?" asked Repellier, who had run up for a few minutes when the darkness of the day had put a stop to his work to see how Hartley was taking to his new quarters. "Is it the engine itself out of order? Are you feeling fit, and all that?"

"Confound it, I don't know *what* it is!"

"You're comfortable enough here?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"No disquieting neighbors?" asked the other, casually glancing at a new photograph of the author of *The Silver Poppy* in a heavy silver frame that stood on Hartley's mantelpiece. "You know you're too young to indulge in the luxuries--just yet."

"How do you mean?" asked Hartley, pulling himself together.

"I thought you might be falling in love. Young men have a habit of doing that, you know."

"No, no; it's not that."

He glanced up and caught the quizzical look in his friend's eyes. "In love, Repellier? I--in love! I couldn't be if I wanted to. I--without a farthing, with a name to make, and a living to make first."

"The living doesn't count; that's a mere accident--with the artist, I mean."

"Oh, yes; you successful fellows, who have covered yourself with glory--you find it easy enough to cover yourself with--with flannel and fine linen."

"But work only for the glory, the flannel and fine linen will take care of itself."

"It sounds very pretty, but it keeps one--well, rather lonely and hungry."

"Yes, but those things are all grist to your mill in the end. Disappointment, loneliness, sorrow, every shred of experience, if you only look at it in the right way, it's all your grist--if you're the bigger and truer artist." Repellier himself went to the window and looked out for a moment before he turned and spoke again. "And, by the way, do you know the receipt for preserving a poet? It's very simple; an empty stomach, an empty pocketbook, and an empty bed."

"It doesn't always hold," demurred Hartley.

"No, but as a rule the less Laura and the more sonnets, my young Petrarch."

Before Repellier's musing and kindly old eyes at that moment drifted a hazy memory--the memory of a pale, fragile girl in a Bath chair, listening to the English skylarks on a terraced lawn. She had been speaking to him, tremulously yet passionately, of her young Oxford scholar, her hero; she had been telling of her great hope in him, of her woman's fears for him, winning a friend for him there while she already saw before her the valley of the shadow. "Oh, be kind to him! Be kind to him!" she had cried impulsively, with her hand on her heart and the tears welling to her mournful eyes.

Hartley remained moodily silent, and Repellier at last went over to him.

"Now before an old David leaves this tent of Saul, my boy, let me give you a little advice. Try hard work. It's God's own anodyne. When the heart gets down--and it will, you know--or the head goes wrong, work. Work, man, work; that's my doctrine. You'll do your best when you are either very happy or very miserable. But when in doubt, work; work like a soldier, yet remember that the artist, like the soldier, can stand for the worst as well as the best in man."

Hartley, pacing his room alone when Repellier had taken his departure, knew all this to be true enough. But it could not do away with the canker of unrest and self-disgust that seemed gnawing at the core of his brain.

A dozen times that day he sat down at his desk, ready for work; and a dozen times he got up in despair. The mood of impotence, of dissatisfaction, was on him, and was not to be shaken off. He tried to tell himself that it was not of the heart, that it was not love. The very doubt brought its own answer. Eros, he felt, had a way of always claiming his own.

As the disturbing scenes of the night before kept crowding mockingly up into the foreground of his consciousness, he tried to hug to his remembrance some alleviating happier sense of escape that had flashed through him at the bathetic ending of it all. He persuaded himself that he was still heart-free; if there had been a time when he had ever questioned his attitude toward Cordelia, that time, he insisted, was now past. If ever he should wander again, vehemently he told himself, it must be with his eyes open, and with no extenuating madness of romance to break his fall.

Those hours of cold reaction chilled him into something like his old-time austerity. He decided to write to Cordelia and make everything plain to her. It was a wandering and incoherent little note of contrition, the cry of a troubled Hamlet to a still trusting Ophelia. He had been entirely to blame. He had been thoughtless. He had been, too, ungenerous and unkind to her. He wanted only to be reinstated as her most loyal and truest friend. He did not deserve her trust, but he intended to show her the depths of his remorse--O repentant and heartless Adonis, how could you!--in the only way that lay open to him, by striving to the last for her success, by helping her in every way that he could, by laboring as he had never labored before on what should be her great book.

It may have been only that last sentence which saved the lady so sorrowfully addressed from tearing his letter into shreds. And the word "friend" had hurt her above all things. But hereafter he should be the supplicant.

Cordelia decided not to reply to his note. Restlessly and aimlessly all that day and all the next he waited, one moment even half hoping some impending estrangement would shake loose those ever-tightening shackles, which he had begun to feel weighing heavily upon him, and the next moment half dreading that any such freedom should come to him, cast down miserably by the thought that she had in any way passed out of his life.

While this humor of unrest still hung over him he took down his brightly bound copy of *The Silver Poppy* and read it through studiously, from first to last. The sense of its exceptional power came to him once more, as a revelation reiterated. He found it a book where the gleaner caught at much which the more hurried harvester must miss, a book yielding, as he felt all good books should yield, a new and unexpected delight in its second reading. Outside the manifest strength and movement of the story there was the secondary charm of a quiet and masterly touch. Its satire was delightful and insidious, and through its merriest pages he found the Touchstone-like pensiveness of one who knew and understood a sad old wag of a world. He found in it, too--and this puzzled him most--still that sense of eternally saving humor of which he had seen so little in Cordelia herself. From page to page it flashed out at him, it tripped him up, and danced about him. He began to understand the better why *The Silver Poppy* had been called one of the novels of the year, even of the century. He thought he saw now just what Cordelia had meant when she had timorously asked him if he thought it possible that she had written herself out in one book. That early, crocus-like flowering of the spirit was no less beautiful because it was already over and gone with the April of life.

Where in that little body had such wisdom and power once been packed away? She had always seemed such a fragile, shell-tinted thing to him, the wonder was that she had written a book at all, that in one eloquent interval she had found a voice, and delivered her message. But was that one work alone to stand the key to that strangely reticent soul of hers? Had she, as with those little East Side fruit-shops he knew so well, ranged all her stock in trade out on the public sidewalk, and left empty the store itself?

The thought of a bewildered but aspiring artist, caged in a body so incongruously frail and girlish, filled him with a pity for the sorrowing laborer struck helpless in the midst of her work--for the writing hand fallen helpless in the midst of its dreams. He suddenly felt that he should be willing to go through fire and water to bring one laurel leaf to that small, proudly poised head with its profusion of yellowish golden hair. And with this mood the grayness seemed to go out of the world. And still again he asked himself if this could be love.

"With a snub-nosed Helen, my boy," Repellier had once said, "there would never have been a Trojan war." Hartley, valiant with the wine of his new resolve, straightway began to wonder how or why he had so recently posed as a

second Schopenhauer to this same Repellier, and cried in disgust that everything had already been sufficiently cursed or sufficiently sung. His passion for work came back to him with a bound. The Cyrus of unrest that had diverted his better thoughts from their natural channel seemed to have marched on and left the Euphrates of his heart in full flood once more. He knew that his vague mental acrisia had at last come to a turn, and was to be followed by its violent fever to create, to build.

In one illuminating moment he saw that the modern life about which it was now his task to write was no less strenuous and no less varied than the life of those earlier days toward which he had fallen into the habit of looking back so regretfully. But it was in the inner rather than in the outer life, he felt, that the greater intensity and interest were now to be found. It was the mental career of men and women that was becoming more complex and more varied; and it was in this, he saw, that the broader and more enduring field of the novelist lay. At times, indeed, the alluring complexity and bewildering activity of this inner subjective world spread before him like an endless valley of untrodden twilight, shot through with some emotional golden glory of retrospection. And he longed for some fuller power to pierce into it, and grasp it, and interpret it.

With this elemental touch of rapture still clinging about him he went back to his manuscript of *The Unwise Virgins*. The spell of *The Silver Poppy* too seemed, in some way, still pregnantly close to him, and through some little trick of the hand or mind he found himself from time to time dropping into the touch of that earlier effort.

He began at the first and rewrote the entire book. Whipping his earlier erratic chapters into line, he quirted and corralled the herd of them into one unified, crowded whole. He went at his manuscript with a trace, almost, of the madman in him as he worked. Sometimes he ate, and sometimes he forgot to, or refused to spare time for it. He worked late into the night; sometimes all night long. He worked as he had seen Oxfordshire farmers working at raising bees, under stress and the cry of excitement, lifting and heaving beyond his natural strength, with an ardor that was to leave him stiff and sore, yet with the balm of knowing that one hour of exhilaration, to the artist, was worth its day of depression.

When his brain balked he lashed it on with strong coffee and stimulants, living, most of the time, on tobacco and innumerable milk-punches. He saw no one, and he wanted to see no one. It lasted two, almost three weeks; he was not sure, for toward the end he lost count of the days.

But the end came at last, and he awoke one evening and discovered that his face had been unshaved for days, that his eyes were bloodshot and sunken, that he was hollow of cheek and shaken of nerve, and that he was unspeakably hungry. His brain seemed a sponge that had been squeezed dry, to the last bitter drop, and he felt old, listless, worn out. But even through that dull pain of fatigue he felt the mysterious and inextinguishable flame of happiness, of triumph in accomplishment.

All his work, he knew, was not yet done, but the pill was there, as he put it, and the sugar coating could be applied later, and at his leisure. The structure was there; he could take his own time and go in his own way about the removal of the scaffolding. But the days of sweat and noise were done.

That was the way, he felt, that he would always have to write, racing on to the end, with the wind in his ears while it lasted. It was a costly way, perhaps, and an unsafe one; but with him it would always have to be the only way. A sense of the mystery of creation had seized him at times, the thought that the thing born of the travail of the mind came not from within, but from some unknown source without; that it was inspirational; that it was the cry of a voice not always his own.

With the hand of this mystery Hartley tried to brush away the incongruity that existed between *The Silver Poppy* and the character of the woman who had written it. Cordelia herself, he argued, might have known her moments of spiritual metamorphosis. Into her fingers, too, might have been thrust a tool more potent than the hand that held it. Yet he felt that his work was his own, and as his own he took an indefinable, jealous pride of ownership in it. But it had been done for another; and if in this case the tool had fallen to him and had been denied her, how little less hers than his, he tried to tell himself, were the pages before him.

Some busy little spider of delusion seemed to have woven its web across a corner of his mind, and he could not think the problem out as he wished to.

Then the reaction set in. He went out into the freshness of the night air, hoping to brush away that tenuous film of doubt and bewilderment that still teased his thoughts. His face was flushed and hot, but a chill, beginning in his limbs, had seized his body, and tingling little feet of ice seemed running up and down his back. He sniffed at the fresh river air, and remembered that he had taken no exercise of late, that the engine, as Repellier called it, had been overdriven and neglected. He had a sudden desire to get away from the quietness and loneliness that hung about him. He wanted to get down into the thick of the city and feel life pressing against his sides.

The wind chilled him, so he turned southward and walked aimlessly down through what had ever seemed to him the veritable backyard of all New York. The desolation of those quiet streets drove him Eastward, and dragging his way down the light-spangled, wave-like rise and fall of Amsterdam Avenue, he plodded onward until the flaring sign of a restaurant caught his eye. He went inside and sat down at a little table, and there he ate ravenously--he scarcely remembered what.

Then his spirit of unrest came over him again, and as he wore his way southward he felt that he should like to see Chatham Square once more; a caprice to smell the air of the slums came over him. But his old quarters, he remembered, were too far away to be seen that night. So he turned down into lower Fifth Avenue, and wandered idly on, gazing at times up at the quiet stars, and the great white cross of light that shone from the Mission House, over the Arch and tangled tree tops of Washington Square. Then the lure of lights to the south caught his eye, and he drifted into Thompson Street, turning once more erratically eastward, while for a moment a sudden dizziness came over him and he had to lean against an iron railing for support. Before him the clustered globes of an Italian music-hall chanced to flare its invitation to all passers-by, and he stumbled in, glad of an opportunity to rest. He groped his way to the half-underground ill-smelling bar and asked for wine. There he drank three glasses of acid and biting Chianti, and felt better. He was still weak and dazed, however, so he stepped into the crowded music-hall at the rear, and sank limply into one of the vacant chairs.

The odor of tobacco and garlic reeked in the air, and an orchestra of a half-dozen pieces was crashing out a medley of operatic selections. Olive-skinned venders of fruit, stoop-shouldered ragpickers, hard-handed organ-grinders, all sat and looked with rapt faces toward the diminutive proscenium-arch at the end of the hall, beyond which was a lurid painting of the Bay of Naples. When Signorina Elisa Venezia came to the footlights and sang a Venetian boat-song--it took Hartley back to the night of Repellier's birthday party--a low-browed Neapolitan sitting next to him pounded on the table with his beer-glass, and the sudden applause and shouting was deafening, volcanic. He wondered at the fire of their Latin enthusiasm. An ape-like old man tottered and mumbled through the gesticulating crowd, selling meal-cakes. When a corpulent woman in a tawdry yellow costume, swaying her huge body to the throb of the music, sang an Italian love-song that seemed familiar to the crowd, the ape-like old man crouched down on the edge of his blackened basket and listened to the end, with fixed, filmy, eager eyes.

The scene of a sordid and toil-hardened people finding solace in music brought home to Hartley how much he himself had been missing from life; how narrow, of late, his days had grown to be. The chance to wring out of existence its richest wine was before him, had been thrust upon him, and he had neglected it.

As he walked wearily home through the cold night air he determined, with a sudden passionate clutching of his hands, to take what was his due, to grasp at what lay before him in life. He was tired of all empty and enslaving work; the tide had met its turn. A Nietzsche-like madness to throw open his man's arsenal of instinct, a longing to fling his weight against every iron law that seemed, at the moment, to choke and overrun and stultify life, filled him with a sense of tingling opposition. To battle Byronic-like against convention, to ride the whirlwind like the old gods of life, but to fight always, and for all things--that seemed to him life, and the best of life.

And in something that was almost delirium, in one white flash of inspirational, subliminal clearness, came to him the first ideas of his poem on War--a poem which he worked out feverishly, yet not unhappily, during the next few days of culminating weariness and illness, little dreaming of the part it was soon to play in lives other than his own.

CHAPTER XVI

REINFORCEMENTS

And though idle as scholars we stand,
Where they pilfer and swarm in our home,
The honey of power waits the hand
But daring to pilfer the comb.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Siren City."

A cynic, is he? Then take all he says with an ounce of civet and a grain of salt.--"The Silver Poppy."

To Cordelia over her coffee-cup Mrs. Spaulding confided a remarkable example of her husband's perversity.

Their talk had drifted round to this point because of a scene, of which Cordelia had been an unfortunate witness, the night before. A flurry of unexpected bills had come in at the first of the month. After looking them over, the alert and ever-keen business instinct of Alfred Spaulding had at first gently and then quite vigorously rebelled against what seemed to him nothing but wanton extravagance. A florist's bill in particular--it was for eight hundred dollars--had startled him into indignation, though Mrs. Spaulding remained heroically silent as to the fact that the great bulk of that bill had been due to the unconsidered visits of Cordelia, and had been quite as much a surprise to her as it now was to her husband.

It was not often that his equable temper showed the effect of the storm and stress through which his tired nerves went day by day. Nor was it often that to his wife he spoke in anything stronger than an accent of mild protest. But on rare occasions his patience became exhausted, and at such times she was given to understand--with a display of great anger, always ultimately atoned for by the arrival of significant little boxes from the Spauldings' jeweler--that her husband was not altogether the pliant and passive man which more than one of her friends, and even she herself at times, had been led to believe him.

Mrs. Spaulding sighed heavily.

"And Alfred *makes* his money so easily!" she said.

"Why does he work so hard, anyway?" asked Cordelia.

"Oh, he says he's got the working habit, and can't shake it off. He gets lonely and restless when he's not busy. He always says it's too late for him to try to change now. But I can't see why he is always fussing about things this way," she went on fretfully, pushing back the little cluster of tradesmen's bills with a dimpled but disdainfully indignant hand, on which glittered not a few heavily jeweled rings. "He understands the market, and all he has to do is invest, and then just watch things, and--er--all that; and then take his money out again. That oughtn't to be such hard work, ought it?"

"And doesn't he ever lose?" Cordelia asked.

"Of course, my dear, sometimes. But Mrs. Herrington--her husband is in Wall Street, too--told me they never *have* to lose unless they like; unless they want to lead the others on, and that sort of thing, you see. But I never bother about business. Alfred doesn't seem to like it."

"It must take years to understand it all," Cordelia ventured, toying absent-mindedly with the sugar-tongs.

"I think some men are born businesslike, my dear, the same as they're born bow-legged, or with big feet."

She wondered why Cordelia smiled, and then went on: "Why, only a little over a month ago Alfred's brother Louis, you know, sent him three thousand dollars from Milwaukee, to invest. Alfred was going to send it back, but I just *made* him do it. He put it in some kind of steel. Then he worried so much about it that he took it all out again in less than a week. Even then he made over eight hundred dollars for poor Louis. Just think what it might have been if he'd only left it in right along."

It was this innocent and quite accidental piece of information which gave a new turn to the tide of Cordelia's thoughts.

In her own little yellow-covered bank-book she had a balance of some nineteen hundred dollars. Why should not this,

she asked herself, be sent to that mysterious land of magic, Wall Street, and in time come back to her doubled, perhaps trebled? For many months of late she had indefinitely felt the need of more substantial resource than that already at her command.

Why, indeed, could not Mr. Spaulding do for her what he had already done for his brother out in Milwaukee?

She said nothing of her plans, but little by little resumed her regular morning drives with Mr. Alfred Spaulding down to his office, a matter in which she had been more or less remiss of late. Alfred Spaulding, in fact, objected to taking his carriages into Wall Street at all, and had forsworn the elevated railway only because his more practical wife--more practical in this thing, at any rate--insisted that he should get at least half an hour's open air each day.

Cordelia greatly surprised that absent-minded gentleman one morning by timidly putting a little cut-glass vase on his desk, into which she slipped an American Beauty rose. Although she had talked to him a great deal, and about many things, it was nearly a week before she approached the matter that lay nearest her heart.

"Women sometimes--er--put their money into stocks, don't they?" Cordelia asked tentatively, as they bowled briskly down Fifth Avenue one bright morning.

"Yes, and nearly always lose it, too," was Mr. Spaulding's discouraging and somewhat curt reply.

"But if they are certain about the right thing?"

"They never are. No one is."

"But if they have a friend in Wall Street, a friend who knows--" ventured Cordelia.

"Then the friend never knows. My advice is for women to keep out of Wall Street."

"But aren't there any stocks that are safe? I mean, aren't there any good ones *you* feel certain about, for instance?"

"Of course; but those are the kind you never make your money out of--at least not at the rate women want to make it. They're slow and steady."

"But you've been in Wall Street so long! Surely there's something you feel to be safe and yet going to go up, too?"

The ghost of a smile crept over his worn face.

"Miss Vaughan, if I had that delightful power, I'd make a million before I came home for dinner to-night."

"But didn't you make nearly a thousand dollars for your brother Louis?" she asked, after a pause.

"Yes, I did; and it caused me more bother and worry than making eighty times that much out of my own money. Louis is a pretty poor man, you know."

"Yes?" said Cordelia.

"It meant a good deal to him. If I hadn't carried him over on my own shoulders he'd have been hard hit."

"I don't think I should mind the risk."

"One never does, till one tries it."

"I *want* to try." Then after a moment's pause she said: "Mr. Spaulding."

"Well?"

"Mr. Spaulding, I've two thousand dollars," she had not quite that sum, but she knew that she could easily make it up by means of a loan from his wife--"and I intend to speculate with it. Won't you invest it for me?"

"Miss Vaughan, I've made it a rule, an inexorable rule, never to take a woman's money in the Street."

"Please!"

"You know lessons there usually cost about a thousand dollars a second."

"I'd be sorry to go to some one I didn't know," she pouted girlishly, and then she added, "or didn't trust."

"Yes, I think probably you would, afterward."

"But I shall," she said determinedly. As to this the man of business made no reply.

The next morning she slipped a bunch of English violets into his little cut-glass vase.

"Won't you?" she pleaded again in her softest voice.

He looked at the flowers, at his waiting mail, and then at the girl--or was she not a woman?--herself.

"Yes, yes," he said wearily. She took his hand and fondled it as a child might. With all his business he was a somewhat lonely man.

"We'll see what we can do with it," he added more cheerily, in a little glow of latent gallantry that left him feeling uncomfortable and hot. Then he touched an electric button and his private secretary appeared with a bundle of notes and documents in his hand, and Cordelia slipped away triumphant.

It was her one and only financial plunge. Although Alfred Spaulding never confessed to her that the precariousness of his venture on her behalf cost him two long nights of sleeplessness, it was more successful than he or even she herself had hoped for. Out of it she made twenty-two hundred dollars.

The man of Wall Street, not unnaturally, silently braced himself for another scene with her, determined that this time she should not prevail. Perhaps she saw this, or perhaps she realized that for once sheer luck had gone with her. At any rate, to her host's surprise, and not a little to his inner satisfaction, she placed the money in her own bank and said nothing more of the matter.



CHAPTER XVII

INEFFECTUAL FLUTTERS

She prayed that night for his pure soul,
And thanked her new-found God
That he returned unscathed and whole
To that white world he trod.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

A woman's last love is always a *rechauffe* of her first.--"The Silver Poppy."

Hartley had to wait in the library for some time; he sat in the dusky, massive room wondering why he should listen so eagerly for Cordelia's step. When she did come down--she had finally surrendered and written him a pitiful, urgent little note complaining of his neglect and her loneliness, and declaring that she must see him at once--she stepped before him resplendent in a shimmering gown of salmon-colored liberty satin, which looked almost yellow in the softened lamplight, subdued by her own careful hand. She was more nervous than she appeared, and she was glad of the half-lights. She had long since discovered that the library was the one room in the Spaulding household where one could sit in assured solitude. The Spauldings, indeed, were not a bookish family, Alfred Spaulding always briskly protesting that he preferred living life to reading it. And when it came to a matter of recreation, he used to say, sixty miles in an automobile knocked the daylights out of sixty chapters of romantic philanderings.

Cordelia came over to Hartley almost timidly, and looked up at him out of her eyes after the manner of a child who had done wrong and had been punished, and was repentant once more.

She was startled to notice the change in him, to see how attenuated and drawn his face was, how worn he looked about the eyes.

"My poor boy!" There was much of the maternal in that little cry. "My poor boy, what is it?" she asked with trembling lip, in her earnestness taking his hand once more.

"Oh, it's nothing. I've been working jolly hard and got a little under the weather," he explained. He could never endure sympathy.

"And you never told me!" There was a touch of more than kindness, of more than melancholy reproof, in the unconsciously softened voice. It seemed to rend all the fogs that had muffled and darkened life.

"And now, heigho, I feel like a holiday!" he cried as he told her, half ashamed of the softer mood that stole over him, how much had been accomplished with The Unwise Virgins.

"Why, surely you haven't finished it--so soon?"

"Not finished, altogether, but the bulk of the work is done."

"The bulk done!" She was thinking of her months of silent and agonized labor--her labor that had been lost.

"Yes, now the work of the file remains--and that's easy."

Was it so easy? she was wondering.

Cordelia, he thought, did not appear able to share in his enthusiasm. She seemed to take no delight in what he had called their common accomplishment. She accepted it all very quietly, and did not even ask when she might see the manuscript. He had expected her to be more openly interested, at any rate, and was momentarily chilled and puzzled at her unlooked-for indifference. Then some gleam of light seemed to come to him, for looking at her again, she smiled up at him through her still gentle glance of reproach.

"Did you forget? This is my first night."

"Your first night?" He felt that their lives had been strangely divided of late, that he was looking out on her existence as through a floating veil, or as one looks from a tower on a windy world.

"Yes, to-night The Silver Poppy has its first performance--it's first performance in town, I mean."

He had forgotten it completely, shamefully. But it brought him a relieving touch of happiness; he understood now why she had elbowed into the background the thing that had stood out so important to him. He was trying to explain away his stupidity and to laugh away his absent-mindedness when Mrs. Spaulding's voice sounded in the hall.

Cordelia suddenly turned to him.

"You'll come with us to-night, of course?"

He tried to draw back.

"Do!" she pleaded. "I've been--been depending on you. I'd feel more confident if you were along with me. We have a lower box, and there'll be just the four of us. Do come."

"But are you sure you want an outsider along?" he asked dubiously, annoyed at his own pettishness.

"Quite sure," she said, and though his eyes avoided her own as she spoke those two monosyllables, he could guess from the vibrant tone of her voice just what expression she wore.

He agreed to go, then, gladly enough.

"And you deserve some fun, anyway," she said happily, "after being penned up this way."

"Yes, I'd like to drink in a little of the fulness and color of existence now, for a change. I feel like taking life down in gulps."

"Of course you do--then let's begin to-night. Is it a pledge?"

"It is. And here's to the fulness of life."

"The fulness of life--shake on it, as they say down in my country."

From that first-night performance of Cordelia's much-talked-of drama Hartley carried away many mixed feelings.

It was when the perfunctory applause that came at the end of the first act had died dishearteningly away that Cordelia had turned to him and confessed, as though acting under some sudden impulse, that the work of making the play from her book had not been performed by her alone.

"They insisted on having their own men do it," she explained. "They keep men under salary for just that sort of thing."

"But your name's on every spare fence-board in the city," almost gasped Hartley.

"Yes, I know; they *insisted* that I should stand as both author and playwright. I fought against it from the first, but it was useless. They said it would be worth so much more to them that way."

She looked at him questioningly. "But it makes me feel like a thief," she sighed. She was hidden out of sight in a dusky corner of the box, and he could not see her face. He looked out at the audience and said nothing.

It was at the end of the third act that the first touch of enthusiasm fell on the house. Cordelia, bending forward with newly awakened interest, was listening to the continued applause abstractedly but eagerly, almost hungrily, Hartley thought.

It was then that Zillinger, the manager of the house, all but burst into the box, excited, hot, perspiring.

"They're calling for you, Miss Vaughan," he cried under his breath, holding the door for her. And listening, she could hear the distant insistent cry of "Author! Author!"

Cordelia hesitated a moment. Zillinger was motioning energetically toward the narrow little aperture that led back of the boxes into the stage. They were shaking the curtain to sustain the hand. Cordelia looked at Hartley with a mute question in her eyes.

"For God's sake, quick--they're *calling* you!" cried Zillinger again, mopping his brow. Cordelia noticed Hartley's face--it stood out in the stronger glare from the footlights--and in it at that moment she seemed to read something for which she had been searching. She settled back in her chair.

"I can't come," she said simply.

Zillinger advanced as though to seize her bodily--he knew the pattering multitudinous voice of that vast stippled

dragon and feared its caprices.

"They're keepin' it up for *you*--*you got to!*" he cried in desperation.

"They can keep it up till morning for all I care--I shall not come!"

Zillinger threw up his hands and rushed away, mopping his face and muffling his oaths with the same handkerchief.

Cordelia's hand sought Hartley's in the dusk of the half-lighted box.

"Bully!" was the only word he said, but she understood how much it meant, and it made her inordinately happy for all the rest of that night. She felt, in some way, that her life had approached its Great Divide.



CHAPTER XVIII

THE FULNESS OF LIFE

He, with his blithe young bosom warm,
Quite mad as any hatter,
Just pipes and jigs through every storm,
So *what* can winter matter!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Robin in Winter."

A great man? Impossible; he hasn't a dozen enemies!--"The Silver Poppy."

Those should have been happy days for Hartley, yet they were not. As to just why they were not he had decided to hold question with himself no longer. He was persuading himself to pick the flower, distrustful of his to-morrow.

He and Cordelia saw a great deal of each other, though he was puzzled often by the Indian Summer mood of tranquillity which seemed to have settled down upon her. Though no lightest word of love passed between them, she seemed to cling to him with a broken autumnal forlornness that touched him more than once as time went on.

Several days out of the week he dined with the Spauldings, and as the season advanced and the play-houses opened he saw himself more and more often a member of their merry little theater parties. They went once or twice to Cordelia's play, but her novel in its dramatized form was only a lukewarm success at its best, and was soon withdrawn. Yet going out "on the road" as "a New York triumph," it mysteriously took unto itself new life and prospered with sedate but substantial vigor.

Day by day Hartley's circle of acquaintances had enlarged--he became, in fact, a more or less popular young man--and he found it distinctly agreeable to catch an occasional smile from a carriage passing in the Park or on Riverside Drive, and to bow now and then to a familiar face on the crowded Avenue--there is only one. It was pleasant, too, to hold the reins and have Cordelia at his side in the Spauldings' spider phaeton, driving quietly home through the waning autumnal evenings after happy afternoons in the sun and open air.

What pleased him most, though, were their early morning rides in Central Park. Mrs. Spaulding had gladly enough placed her horses at his disposal--it was only too good of him to exercise the overfed beasts--and many were his merry canters along the bridle-paths, from which now and then he could catch glimpses of the crowded city that elbowed in on his solitude and gave him a thin, fragmentary feeling of truancy, like a summer runaway who had wandered into sound of the familiar old admonitory school-bell. Cordelia soon formed the habit of joining him in these rides, though for a girl from Kentucky and one who had always made much of her love of horseflesh, she was not a good rider. She explained this by the fact that she had fallen out of practise, for one thing, and for another, that since Firefly, her old Kentucky thoroughbred, had run away with her at home she always felt more or less nervous in the saddle. Hartley took her in hand, accordingly, and coached her at great pains and with much patience, and as she learned to sit more comfortably on her mount her strange fear melted away. As she discovered, too, that the daily gallop in the morning air was bringing more vigor to her limbs and a fresher color to her cheeks, her Southern dislike for all such active exercise soon passed away.

Under Hartley's influence she even took to walking, though her first lesson with that somewhat thoughtless instructor left her so fatigued in body and nerve, and with such sadly blistered feet, that she had to keep to her bed for the day following their tramp up and down the entire length of Riverside Drive. But of this Hartley knew nothing.

Besides these many hours in the open air together there was an occasional luncheon at Sherry's, and rustling, odorous, subdued *musicales* and recitals at Mendelssohn Hall, and now and then a supper at the Waldorf after the theater, and a merry four-in-hand load or two during the month to Ardsley, and suburban automobile jaunts, and sufficient things of a like nature to cause Hartley to keep a judicious eye on his engagement list and to question himself no longer as to whether or not he was wringing the color out of life.

"Cordelia and you seem to be made for each other," said Mrs. Spaulding at supper one evening in her own dining-room, after a charity dance at the Waldorf. "At one time I actually thought the child would never care for anything but books or what the newspapers were saying about her."

Mrs. Spaulding had drunk of her third bottle of champagne, and her voice was not so carefully modulated as it might have been. Cordelia heard the speech with painfully flushing face.

"And some day she'll go back to her books again," she said as she swept from the room in a rage. Hartley was giving all his attention to his Madeira jelly. Mrs. Spaulding looked after her with blank and uncomprehending eyes.

"Poor dear!" she murmured. "She's such a silly, frail little thing. When I see her in the hands of you men I feel exactly the same as I do when Alfred gets handling my chinaware. And she's such a trustful child, too! If it wasn't for her faith in you, really I'd tremble for her future."

Then Mrs. Spaulding filled Hartley's glass and light-headedly declared that she had got hold of him just in time to save him from being a monk.

Yet Hartley was not altogether idle during these weeks. Each day he threw a little sop of work to the Cerberus of conscience, adding from time to time the finer touches to the manuscript of *The Unwise Virgins* while it still lay before him in the rough. This treatment resulted in an unexpected expansion of the story itself and left his pages in a sadly undecipherable condition. Even he himself, however, could see how those touches of after-thought were altering his earlier effort and rounding out his severer structure into a work of more Gothic richness.

One Sunday afternoon late in October he carried the completed manuscript over to Cordelia. A recent rain had washed the streets from curb to curb, and under foot flagstone and asphalt lay clean as steel. There was a cool freshness in the air, and the vigorous exercise as he went swinging down the river front sent the blood bounding through his veins once more. He stopped to watch the sea-gulls wheeling and dipping above the gray waters of the Hudson--the sight of them filled him with a sudden restless passion for a freedom that still seemed to have eluded him. Then he turned to the Drive itself, and let his eyes rest on the stream of flashing horses and hurrying carriages. He remembered what the Spauldings' coachman had confided to him only a few days before: "They don't last long in the city, sir, them horses; it shakes the shoulders off'n them."

He found Cordelia, excepting the servants, alone in the house. The Spauldings had left the day before for Canada, she told him. Mrs. Spaulding was to stay in Quebec City, while her husband--who had always been fond of shooting--went north for moose. He had found it possible to snatch a three weeks' belated vacation before the winter set in, Cordelia explained, and described with not a little wit the sternness with which he had arisen and dragged away a complaining and none too willing wife.

"Our American husbands, you know, usually show more velvet than claws," she added.

She was gowned in a tightly fitting tailor-made dress of bottle green, trimmed with gold. It seemed to deepen the color of her hair and at the same time to give a touch of girlishness to her figure. She guessed at once what Hartley held in his hand.

"I wonder if it could ever be a Silver Poppy the second?" he asked, as he handed the manuscript over to her. Her mind flashed back to the birth of that earlier book, and for a moment she looked hesitatingly up at him.

"I'd rather read it alone," she said. "Do you mind?"

"I'd rather you did," he answered, wondering at the sudden little sternness that had come over her. It seemed like the shadow on quiet water of a taloned bird he could not see.

"Then I'll leave you in the library to smoke. You said you wanted to see the press notices of the play--I think they'll keep you enough amused," she held the heavy *portieres* aside for him. Then she brought him her huge, heavy scrap-book, and lingered a moment before the mantelpiece mirror while he turned over a few of its first pages.

"May I look over all of it?" he asked, with his head bent over the closely pasted pages of clippings.

"Yes, do; some day I'm going to call that book *The Price of Fame*."

He looked up from a page he had been glancing over, where a paragraph, more faded than the others about it, caught his eye.

"Who is Fanny Rice?" he asked.

She was fixing her hair before the mirror and did not turn away from it as she answered, after a moment's pause:

"She's my cousin--in Kentucky."

And as he dipped from page to page into notices from newspapers and illustrated interviews from weeklies and studies

from critical reviews, frowning over some, laughing over others, she slipped away and left him.

An hour glided past and Cordelia did not return. Hartley took up a novel from the table, and when another long hour dragged on he became uneasy. He went to the foot of the stairs and called her. Then he rang for the servants, but could get no response to his summons; they were all either out at the moment or beyond sound of the bells.

He went to her study and tapped on the door. Hearing no sound, he opened it and glanced in, but she was not there. He hesitated a moment, then went from silent room to room through the great, quiet house in search of her.

He found her at last in a nook of the upper west hall, which he had heard Mrs. Spaulding speak of as the Quietude. She was bending over the last pages of his manuscript in the paling evening light at the window, curled up, cat-like, in a huge armchair. Her lips were slightly parted, and as her white face bent over those last pages of his story some eager, luminous hunger that dwelt in her eyes held Hartley spellbound. He watched her without speaking.

When the last page was read she looked up slowly and let her absent eyes dwell on him as her lips murmured something he could not catch. Then he laughed a little and stepped toward her through the twilight.

At his first step he saw that he had been mistaken. She had neither heard nor seen him. But she did not cry out, only a deadly whiteness swept over her already pale face, and she put her hand up to her heart with a quick little motion.

In a moment her fright had passed and she could breathe naturally once more. The pale color crept slowly back into her face.

"I thought something might have happened," he said weakly.

"How you startled me!" she gasped, growing calmer as she spoke. Then she shook her white skirts out and sat up more decorously in the chair. "You must promise me never to do it again," she said softly. "It's heredity with me, I think, for my old mammy nurse once told me it was a fright that really killed my mother. You'll promise, won't you?"

She looked at him with solemn eyes. The gray twilight fell across her face and melted into the gold of her hair. Her bottle-green gown seemed black in the dusk, and her pale features, freighted with an elusive and wistful pathos, seemed to Hartley, in that minute of fleeting but vivid impression, like the face of some sweet lady of forgotten centuries gazing out of the gloom of an old canvas. It was a face that held him musingly spellbound, in which he could see and dream of things that were not there, as in a fire by night or in a fountain by day.

He dropped on his knees beside her and caught her hands. She could see the sudden flame of tumultuous love and of desire that burned through him, and she drew away, strangely, almost in terror.

"No, no!" she cried in a low voice. "Not now! Not here!"

She pressed away from him, as from a danger, though on his face was nothing but tenderness and pleading. She shrank from him hesitatingly, as though the cup of devotion that he held up to her was something too costly for her to taste.

A hurrying and startled chambermaid turning on the light brought them back from that garden of enchantment into which youth can wander but seldom. There was nothing left for them to do but walk soberly down through the long halls of the quiet house to the library once more. Yet all the while Cordelia seemed to be fighting some silent and inward battle, to be swayed by some great conflict of emotion that trampled from her the many long-thought-of things she had to say, as cavalry tramples a field once golden with wheat.

She was silent and restless and nervous until Hartley gathered up the scattered pages of *The Unwise Virgins* and put them in order on the library table. Then she looked into his eyes and murmured tenderly, and under the stress of a sudden impulse:

"I'm proud of you, so proud of you, my big boy!"

He looked down into her face--into her face, that he felt could change like water. It was dignified, glorified by a light that he had seldom seen on a woman's countenance, and it left him happy once more. The artist in him, receiving its dole, elbowed the man in him slowly aside.

"Then it *will* do?" he asked.

"It is all strength and all beauty," she said simply. Then she added in another voice, "You have made me very humble."

She sighed pitifully as she looked at the pile of written pages.

"I have only imitated you," he declared.

"Imitated me?" she echoed.

"Yes. All along it was The Silver Poppy that was my model--that I tried to follow from first to last."

"I feel as though you had given me a mental flogging," she broke in. "None of this is mine! *None* of it," she cried passionately. "None of it, by right," she added as she gazed at the topmost sheet. "I was only the mouse who pulled the thorn out of the lion's paw, and look what he has done for me."

"But see what you have done, what you are doing for *me!*" he cried impetuously. "And see what you can do, what some day you must do."

She held up a hand as though to bar it back, as though it were something that still confounded her better judgment and might lead to lifelong mistakes and sorrows.

Then he added, more gently: "Every page of this, Cordelia, is quite as much yours as mine. You suggested it, you inspired it. If it were not for you, dear, it should never have been written."

His hand was on the throttle of sacrifice, and he seemed bent on racing the engine of self-abnegation to its last wheel-turn. Her face lighted up with a new and fierce fire as he spoke. He wondered if that happy smile was born of his first more intimate use of her Christian name.

"But *you* have done it all!" she reiterated.

"Two authors always have to drive tandem in a case like this."

"How it will succeed!" she said dreamily. "You would hardly believe me if I should tell you how much we shall make out of this."

He turned and resolutely tied up the loose pages. The flush of a new energy was on him.

"What are you going to do?" she asked quickly.

"I'm going at it again--I've had a dozen ideas while you've been talking to me--I feel that I've *got* to go at it tooth and nail again."

"And it's agreed that you take one-half the royalties?" she broke in.

"No, no; the name, the start--that's quite all I ask."

She did not understand. "The start?"

"Yes, I can wait until I write my own book for dollars and royalties, and all that sort of thing. *Now* I'm glad enough to stand humbly beside you."

Still she did not seem to understand. He felt that she was tired and shaken.

"Why, I'm unknown, Cordelia, and you're famous. Think what it will mean for me--The Unwise Virgins, by Cordelia Vaughan and John Hartley!"

She turned toward him quickly. He caught the startled look in her eyes, and wondered at it. She tried to call up a smile; he could see her lips twitch uselessly, like a desperate pilot tugging at a broken signal-wire.

"Oh-h-h," she said softly, at last, "I hadn't thought of that!"

As he passed under her window he looked back at her through the gathering darkness. She stood in the half-lighted window-square vacantly, wide-eyed, wondering. He waved his hand back at her, lightly, but she did not seem to see him. And he wondered what element in the picture which that half-lighted window framed made him think of Perseis as she watched the trireme of Ulysses swing up the sands of AEaea. He knew but one thing, and that he knew assuredly. He loved her with all the strength of his heart.

CHAPTER XIX

WAS EVER POETESS THUS MADE?

My astral messenger then turned her eyes
In sad tranquillity unto that night
Wherein the temple of the summit lies,
And spake unto my ear:
 "'Tis more the fight
Than all the idle guerdons to be won;
It is the worship though the gods be mute;
So keep thou still thy face unto the sun,
Since art is not the goal, but the pursuit."

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Goddess Speaks."

Art is the china of sentiment packed in the sawdust of sense.--"The Silver Poppy."

"How would you like to make two hundred and fifty dollars this afternoon?" asked Cordelia calmly, as she stood before Hartley, comfortably muffled in her new chinchilla hat and coat.

"Oh, don't tempt me," he laughed, as he deferentially enthroned her in that great green-backed library chair, which by perhaps its mere voluminous somberness always seemed to touch her strangely into a new youth.

"But what would you do for it?" she asked teasingly, yet with a tacit seriousness of mind, for she felt that his new manner of life was more and more bringing about the necessity for a larger income.

"Do for it? I should be ashamed to say," he laughingly confessed, wondering at the troubled brow and the cold, judicial sobriety of her eyes.

She handed him a typewritten note, waiting in silence until he had finished reading it, and had looked up at her with an inquiring glance.

The letter was a hastily written request from the editorial office of one of New York's most variedly sensational newspapers, urgently asking for a few hundred words from the author of *The Silver Poppy* on the Influence of War. The newspaper in question had of late essayed to carry on what had become a somewhat heated controversy as to the relation between war and religion, while its eloquent young editor daily expounded his conviction that in the present corrupt condition of mankind war was not only quite reconcilable with true Christianity, but was actually a remedial agent, tending toward progress and civilization. He conceded that it might be an evil, yet was not evil.

"Now let me explain," broke in Cordelia. "This afternoon I suddenly remembered that you had just the thing they wanted--you brought it up and read it to me the other Sunday after we'd had dinner at the Casino."

He winced at the little irony of accident, yet remembering consolingly that even a Horace had framed his bucolic idyls sipping Falernian in citted ease within a stone's throw from the Palatine, he waited in silence for her to continue.

"I mean those lines, of course--I think you called them *The Need of War*--where you say collision is a law of progress and all life is warfare and that we're perpetually fighting, although we never dream it, and even our bodies themselves are eternal battle-grounds."

"But that thing would never do," he cried in astonishment.

"Oh, yes, it would," she answered easily. "All it needs is a change or two at the beginning, and perhaps a line here and there to make it more specifically local, or rather, American, in application."

"But it's not what newspapers print or care to print."

"It's a beautiful thing," she cried. "They'd jump at it." And then she added, as an after-thought, "If it had been written by any one with a name."

"That's just it," he explained. "The offer hasn't been made to me, you see."

"Yes, I know," she began. "And that's why I hesitated about suggesting the thing."

He seemed to be weighing the matter, and she waited for him to speak.

"Of course it's awfully good of you to extend the offer to me at the last moment, and all that sort of thing. But I know well enough this paper would never think of offering *me* any such sum for the lines."

She looked at him steadily.

"They would if it appeared over my name."

"But I couldn't ask you to do that--and for a mere matter of money," he cried.

"I would gladly, for you."

"But it would scarcely be fair, either to you or to me."

She almost hated him, she felt, when he stood so proudly behind that old-time integrity of character of his. Even as she argued, though, she secretly hoped against hope that he would hold out, that he would defeat her where she stood. Then remembering again more than one scene of inward humiliation over what he seemed to have accepted as her womanly proneness to tangle the devious skeins of ethics and expediency, a touch of the tyrant came to her once more.

"I *want* you to have this money," she pleaded. "It's only right that you should. You need it--I have made you need it."

He turned to her suddenly as he paced up and down the room.

"Isn't there any possible way of obviating the--the deception?" he asked.

The mere utterance of that question told her that the problem had been solved. Perhaps the quiet and businesslike manner in which it had been presented to him had robbed it of its more abstract significance, had enabled it to be smuggled into him in the sheep's clothing of a commercial commonplace. Perhaps he was more embarrassed--in a financial way--than she had dreamed, and now that he had sunned himself on the warm sands of respectability, dreaded another plunge into the chilly depths of a second poverty.

"I don't see any way out of it," she answered. "I suppose, unless you have an inkling of newspaper ways, such things have a tendency to shock you?"

"I know a *little* of their ways that are dark," he interpolated, thinking at the moment of the United News Bureau.

"But this is only one of the thousand and one tricks of a very tricky trade. And it really amounts to about the same thing as the signed article young reporters write for an illiterate prize-fighter or a rather stupid prima donna. At any rate, is it any worse?"

"But would there be any means of finally correcting the--the error of authorship?" he asked.

"Is it the loss of the poem?" she began.

"In one way it is, perhaps, and in another way it isn't."

But was this ethical Caesarean section, he wondered, the only means of bringing his belated offspring to light?

"I can understand that; it's a beautiful thing."

"But if I have written one I still have the power to write another." It was the master losing himself in the message, the parent dying for the child.

"Of course, but you mustn't--*please* don't think for one moment that I want to lay claim to it, now or at any time. I'm not a poetess, as you know, and never could be one."

He fell to pacing the room once more.

"I was only thinking," she went on with slightly compressed lips, "of you when I came to suggest the thing."

"I know, and it was very generous of you," he answered, as he began rummaging through his manuscripts for the lines.

"You've written this thing, and, as you say, it lies in your power to write something as good, or better. You've confessed you see no way of getting rid of it, so, after all," she said wearily, "it's only a matter of two hundred and fifty dollars."

Hartley looked up at her coldly.

"No, it's a great deal more than that," he said gravely, turning away from her again. "Much more. But to be candid, just at the present moment I am painfully in need of--of money. And I don't feel like arguing the ethics of it all out to-day as I ought to do." Then he sighed heavily, and added, "But I wish I were free."

So the offer was accepted and Cordelia carried away with her the manuscript of *The Need of War*, troubled and weighed down with an indeterminate sense of humiliation, yet feeling that out of the ashes of that humiliation might ultimately rise the towers of a new strength.

As for the poem itself, she thought little about it; she was no lover of blank verse. Her one consolation seemed to be a feelings--tragically feminine--that she had drawn down to her a figure that before had always seemed to shadow and chill her with its shadowy immaculacy.



CHAPTER XX

A POWER NOT HERSELF

Yet life's long silence, after song,
Can do thy lyric heart no wrong.
Once broken music fell from thee,
While now--now thou art harmony.
Those notes that soared from thee of old,
Wrapt in dusk wings they ne'er unfold,
Brood vocal in thy clouded eyes;
And in thy bosom's fall and rise--
O poor, sad, sea-like surging breast--
Is song itself made manifest!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Lost Voice."

A song in the heart is worth two in the book.--"The Silver Poppy."

An astonished city awoke one morning to find that Cordelia Vaughan was a poetess. For some time it had been rumored persistently about that the beautiful young authoress from Kentucky was soon to place a new and wonderful novel of modern life and manners before the reading world. At a time, too, when the talk of her play was on every tongue, the public press was seldom without an anticipatory note or two about Cordelia's next effort. But when, instead of either novel or study, the Sunday issue of a commendably enterprising New York newspaper came out with her now well-known *The Need of War*, those admiring followers--and they were, indeed, no small army--whom she had won over by the strength and charm of her first book, turned to one another bewildered and asked what new token of versatility and genius this wonderful girl writer from the South would next fling before them.

The Need of War, with a striking portrait of its author in a black velvet and Irish point gown, a loose Russian coat of pale gray Venetian cloth, surmounted by an immense plumed hat of beaver, occupied, with a luridly symbolic figure of "War" in the background, an entire page of the newspaper in which it first appeared.

While *The Need of War* was, perhaps, slightly above the heads of the audience to which that particular journal appealed, the more discerning critics and paragraphers soon saw that the poem was in reality an emotional and vitalized appreciation of the divinity of struggle, and, seeming to strike, as it did, the key-note of our American strenuous life, the lines crept from city to city, appeared by special arrangement in one of the popular magazines, and eventually percolated throughout the country. The power and vigor of the flowing blank verse could not be denied--in fact, there were those who regarded it as remarkable that such metrical skill could be shown by a hand unknown to years of patient and laborious exercise. The beauty of the poem, however, continued to evoke comment from the press, and even those more academic periodicals which had not deigned to take notice of her earlier work in the field of prose now opened their pages to an occasional discussion of Cordelia Vaughan's new treatment of an old problem.

It all resulted in a very unlooked-for shower of newspaper articles from Cordelia's clipping agency. These told in many incongruously different ways just how the poem came to be written, just what its author had planned it should mean, and just how remarkable it was that the thundering forth of such a sermon should fall to the lot of a young and fragile American girl.

Cordelia, remembering the source of all this unlooked-for publicity, sat in melancholy apprehension amid these notices, frightened a little at the stir she had made, and made so unwittingly, in the world of letters. Hartley, too, she soon found, fully shared in her own depression of spirits over the episode. So she decided it was best not even to speak of it, when it could be avoided, before him. While alone with her own thoughts she vainly attempted to school herself to regard it all in the words of one of her critics, "as only the musical *entr'acte* in the drama of a busy literary life."

When Repellier looked searchingly at Cordelia, and asked her, while speaking of *The Need of War*, how she had ever come by a touch so decisive and so powerful, she smiled quietly and said:

"Did you ever hear of A Egles?"

Repellier had not.

"Well, according to that old Greek myth, Mr. Repellier, A Egles was a wrestler. He was born dumb, they say, and hadn't ever uttered a word in all his life. But one day in the arena he saw an athlete resort to some piece of dishonest trickery-- I can't remember just what it was. Then, in his passion to denounce that trickery, he broke the strings of his tongue, and suddenly spoke."



CHAPTER XXI

THE SIGNS OF BLIGHT

Some love your songs, but I who know
The happier touch of lips whence flow
These notes that all men turn to praise
Loved you, the singer, all my days;
And longing, listening, loving, I
Have waited till the song should die--
Till you, the singer, came to bless
My lips with your own lips' caress.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Silent Hour."

Amid all his chaff were phrases that got down the neck of one's memory and tickled like barley-beards.--"The Silver Poppy."

"Oh, my poet, my poet, what have they been doing to you?"

It was Miss Short who spoke, looking up at Hartley with surprised and honestly reproving eyes. They had met by accident on upper Broadway, as he was on his way to the tea-room of a Fifth Avenue hotel. Both her tone and manner nettled him.

"Am I so changed?" And he laughed uneasily.

"Why, yes, my poor lost hero, and you're getting fat--no, not exactly fat, but prosperous looking. But a fat poet--it is awful! It sounds worse than a Hercules with French heels. It's as incongruous as an angel eating corn-mush. And who wants a fat poet? His corpulency would always be hinting to you that he was too trimly built, too well ballasted, to be in danger. He's too contented to be interesting. Who's going to thrill with anxiety over a mud-scow swinging in three feet of oily water?"

"Thank you," said Hartley coldly.

"But seriously, you haven't given up the--the open sea?" Miss Short asked him in a softer voice. This grandiloquence of metaphor wearied him.

"Yes, I think I have. It's all very fine out there, but it doesn't pay for the wear and tear on the hawsers. And then there's one's bread and butter; and in New York they can give you so many nice jams to go with it."

"I knew it, I knew it! I never saw a boy come to this city yet who didn't have the rose-tint taken out of his dreams about the same time the rose-tint was taken out of his cheeks. I *said* your accent wouldn't be as broad when you'd finished with us--nor your views, either."

"No man can live by verse alone."

"It's not that; it's what the verse and all that stands for. You know what The Silver Poppy says, 'A song in the heart is worth two in the book.'"

She looked up at him with almost a kindly light on her rough, mannish face as she said good-by.

"My poet, don't, don't let them break you on the golden wheel of their happiness!"

Hartley did not enjoy his cup of Golden Tip that afternoon with Cordelia and two voluminously over-dressed young ladies whom she spoke of as "the Slater girls." Their chatter irritated him, and for once there seemed something sickly, unnatural, exotic, about the overheated air of an overfurnished hotel which existed, as he remembered a compatriot of his had exclaimed, "to provide exclusiveness for the masses."

He knew that it, and all it held, stood for those very conditions of life against which he had once rebelled so vigorously. With its glitter and gliding, did it, he asked himself bitterly--after all, did it represent the fulness of life?

"Why are you so quiet to-day?" Cordelia asked him, reprovingly, under her breath. He had noticed of late a certain outward hardening about her at times--she seemed to him like a judge steeling herself for some impending sentence that must be passed.

"It's the ghost of a dead radical rising up against gold-leaf and cut glass," he laughed.

"Oh, yes, you used to be an anarchist, or something like that, didn't you?" she said wearily.

"Not *quite* that."

"I wanted you to be nice to these two girls. I thought I told you they were my publisher's daughters?"

She noticed his half-sinister smile.

"Some day," she said almost angrily, "you'll learn that nothing succeeds like success, my moody young Hamlet." And for the rest of the afternoon she avoided him.

He was not sorry when a chance came for his escape. The very stale, dull flatness of the trite and contemptible spiritual drama in which he was playing an involuntary leading part depressed and sickened him of it all. It brought with it not even the consolation of largeness--it was all flaccid, neutral, outwardly insignificant. But he felt that unseen hands were building a wall between him and his freedom, even while, at the core of things, some miserably minute germ seemed tainting his life. And if he could not still have health and liberty, he would at least have elbow-room. The startled question of Miss Short still rang in his ears: "My poet, my poet, what have they been doing to you?"

What, indeed, had they done to him?

Once out in the fresh air and alone, he felt more satisfied. Facing the rough wind, guiding his own course through the crowds--this gave him a flattering sense of momentary independence, a passing taste of some liberty long proscribed. He turned up Fifth Avenue and made his way toward the Scholar's Gate, determined to walk off the last little demon of moroseness that hung at his heels.

It was a clear, sunny afternoon, yet with a touch of chilliness in the air, a premonition of winter in the wind. It made people step more briskly, and Hartley noticed that many of the women in the street, and also those in the passing carriages that drifted up and down the Avenue in alternate tides, were already warmly wrapped in furs. The wind was westerly and biting, and its sudden blasts at the different cross-town street corners sent the dust eddying up and down the crowded sidewalks. Beyond the comparative quietness and gloom of the regular brown-stone canons of the upper Forties, so uniform in aspect it seemed some mysterious fluvial erosion might have gorged them out of the one gigantic rock-bed, Hartley could see the familiar dim blue line of the Palisades, with the late afternoon sun dropping down crimson and big behind them, touching softly and into a golden mist the flying dust that hung over the city. And it could be a beautiful city, he thought, at times, as he gazed before him at the long line of airier, lighter, crowded architecture that overlooked the waning greenness of Central Park.

He threw himself with delight against the buffets of the wind and the sting of the cold. It seemed almost like an escape to that simpler and more strenuous life for which he had looked in his earlier years--those lost years of youth and liberalism. It brought back to his mind his many tramps over the Oxfordshire hills, memories of journeys to Bagley Wood, to Cumnor village and Abingdon, to Iffley, and above all to Woodstock village, and the warmth and lights of the great hall after the hours of mist and coldness. A momentary pang of homesickness and longing for his beloved Oxford shot through him. The old gray city of bells and ivy seemed calling him through the alien twilight. Some day, he thought, should the worst come to the worst, he could creep back to the quietness of that old college town on the Isis, where it seemed always evening, and everything seemed always in the evening of life.

But could he ever go back? he suddenly asked himself. Could he creep back to the gray corridors and the quiet shadows and the little gardens? Could he, indeed, after knowing that taste of the wider and more challenging life, after touching to his lips the intoxicating cup of the outer world?

He walked home through the gathering dusk still unhappy, but more quiet of mind and more resolute of spirit.

"When in doubt--work." That was what Repellier had said to him, and that was what he did. For all the next day the quietness and loneliness of his rooms weighed heavily upon him, but burying himself in his last revision of Cordelia's book, he remained at his desk, stoical and determined. Each night, though, oddly enough, before he turned out his lights and went to bed, he wrote to Cordelia. Just why he did this he scarcely knew. His letters were not love-letters in the strict sense of the word, though through them ran a strain of tenderness, alternating with a note of loneliness, that made them seem very beautiful letters to the author of *The Silver Poppy*, and, perhaps, accounted for more than one sleepless night on her part. She replied to them, sometimes almost against her will, in a note as tender, yet quite as

restrained. She complained that she, too, was often lonely there in the Spauldings' big house, and felt that she would not be sorry when they came back once more. She was glad he had returned to his work. And she wanted him to feel that she had never in any way stood between him and his great dreams, and never willingly or knowingly would do so.

On the evening of the following Sunday Hartley was interrupted in his task of tying together the pages of his completed manuscript by the appearance of Repellier.

He seemed the same old Repellier to Hartley, with the same merry smile and the quiet eyes that had always silently reminded the younger man that he was still young and that youth can never know tranquillity. But about the older man on this occasion, for all his quietness of demeanor, there clung an air of unusual sternness.

"Are you busy?" he asked, as he beheld the paper-littered desk. "I only dropped up to borrow a book of yours that you've often spoken of--The Silver Poppy. I've been overworking, they tell me, and for the rest of the week I'm going to loaf."

He confessed, as Hartley gladly enough produced the volume, that he had never as yet read it--his days had all been so taken up that he got little time for the newer fiction. But only that morning he had picked up an old newspaper notice of the dramatized story and had been unusually interested by it.

"It's rather clever?" Repellier asked, taking the book and skimming through it where he stood. Something in his question seemed almost laughable to the younger man.

"It will open your eyes," was all he said, however.

"I hope it will," said Repellier, slowly closing the volume and slipping it meditatively into his pocket. Then he looked at the still smiling man and asked:

"Are you writing any short stories now?"

"Not now; but I want to."

"Any verse?"

"No--nothing worth while."

"Novels?"

"Not quite."

"Would you like a good plot for one?"

"That all depends," answered Hartley, motioning his visitor to an armchair.

"Well, let me tell it to you, anyway. Then you can think it over by yourself and see if there's anything in it. May I?"

"Indeed, yes."

"This story that I've picked up begins rather oddly, but it runs this way: On an island--I think it's called Muciana, at the mouth of the Amazon, a surveying party found a mysterious skeleton, or rather portions of a mysterious skeleton, half buried in a sand-bar. This skeleton puzzled biologists very much; it seemed to indicate there was some possibility that the once mythical creature known as the man-eating vampire really existed--that somewhere about the head waters of the Amazon actually lived or had lived pterodactyls of enormous size, much larger than the common enough blood-sucking bats of the lower river--which to-day, as you know, rather relish a sip or two of any warm-blooded animal. Many of these bones were strangely human in appearance, but attached to what remained of the skeleton were a pair of powerful and perfectly formed pterodactyl wings. All efforts to piece together this strange creature were a failure, and in the end it was given up as impossible. But am I boring you?"

"No; it's interesting."

"Well, now we have to go back to the beginning of our story, and perhaps to the most interesting part of it. We find a professor of zoology--a German--somewhere up about the head waters of that mysterious river. Devotion to his beloved science has brought him to that dark corner of the globe. We find him drifting happily about the twilight forests in search of the man-eating vampire about which he must have heard strange rumors from the natives of the lower Amazon. We find him alone in a small boat, making his desolate way along some unknown tributary of the upper river. I needn't stop to describe his loneliness or the hardships and suffering and days of doubt through which he passed. But finally in some dark and undiscovered land of solitude he and his vampire came face to face. They closed in on one another, and he in the end captured it, though only after a bitter struggle. Yet, gently as he had treated his foe

in that struggle, he could not help injuring it a little--in fact, it *had* to be subdued. His one object then was to get down to the seacoast and back to the world with his prize, of course, while it was still alive. And his one fear was that it would die on his hands. He took it in his little boat with him and treated its wounds and fed it, and together the strange couple made their way down the river. But the journey was a long one. Before it was half over his provisions began to give out. He had not counted on the vampire, you see. But still he kept on, hoping against hope that he would reach help in time. His one dread still was that his prize would die. So day by day he ate a little less and gave a little more to his prize. But day by day his strength was failing him, and day by day, I suppose, he grew more afraid of the vampire. Then the time came when he had to decide whether he or the other should have the last scrap of his food. Finally he flung it to the Vampire. Then, in some way, he knew that he was no longer master; from that hour he was the captive. There was a brief, and I suppose, a bitter struggle. The man could no longer control that winged Hunger. It broke the cords that held it down, the two bat-like wings opened wide, and when they came together they enclosed the still struggling man. In that last battle for life the little boat was overturned. The two went down under the yellow water, and their descent, we'll say, was marked by nothing more than a line of bubbles. But even in death the wings of that man-eating creature did not draw back from the bones of its victim. Locked together, the two of them were washed down to the sea. The current carried them up on a sand-bar, and there they rested. There they found them, years afterward, I suppose it was, and when men tried to piece together what was left of the strange bones they failed. It was, as you know, not altogether either man or vampire."

There was a moment of unbroken silence.

"That's all," said the older man, getting up.

It was Hartley who spoke next.

"What the devil are you driving at, anyway?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BLOT ON THE 'SCUTCHEON

Then plant, by the right of the mind,
By the power of the tome and scroll,
Plant your heel on their neck, and grind,
Or their millions will grind your soul.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Siren City."

Oh, these towering aspirations--without a fire-escape of humor to all their sky-scrapers of endeavor!--"The Silver Poppy."

Cordelia, during a troubled night, dreamed that she had been captured by Indians and bound on two huge wild horses. These horses, she saw to her horror, refused to gallop off in line, and were slowly pulling her tortured body to pieces. But failing in this, she thought her Indians had retaken her and burned her at the stake, and that there was but one oil in all the wide world that could soothe the stinging agony that consumed her. She was seeking, naked, frenzied, alone, for this unfound ointment, when she suddenly wakened and found the autumn sun shining wholesomely on the clean high chimneys and housetops of the city.

Cordelia looked on that dream as an omen, and thinking it over, she was startled by it out of a mood of indecision and inactivity which for days had been hanging over her. Some vague sense of impending evil benumbed her. Sitting amid the torn and scattered feathers of a thousand disconsolate Cupids, she had asked herself again and again if the game was worth the candle, if the crown was worth the sweat and tears.

Acting under some sudden impulse, she made a personal call on Henry Slater, the senior member of the publishing house of Slater & Slater, of 148 Fifth Avenue. It was this firm which had handled so successfully, and, it might be added, so profitably to both themselves and the author, her earlier volume, *The Silver Poppy*. It was not unnatural, therefore, that from time to time the senior member of this business house should duly and most solicitously inquire of Miss Vaughan just when he should have the privilege and pleasure of considering another volume from her pen. Of late these inquiries had grown no less frequent, though, perhaps less hopeful. In the inspirational lull, when the town was still agog over the dramatization of the novel, he had made the most of his chance by reissuing the book in an *edition de luxe*, handsomely illustrated and signed by the author--a hastily ordered voluntary to appease the wrath of a long waiting and impatient audience.

When Cordelia, accordingly, was ushered into the private office of Mr. Henry Slater, that gentleman received her with every sign of cordiality. She could not help recalling her first visit to the same office, an awkward and overawed girl from the country, who had been kept waiting a long half-hour before the very gentleman who now cordially placed a chair for her so much as asked her what her business might be. And she felt once more that after all there was nothing that succeeds like success.

She stated the purpose of her visit, and gave him as favorable and as graphic an outline of the new book as she was able. Her quick memory served her well, and there were few points of importance which she omitted from the movement of the story.

"This appeals to me strongly, very strongly indeed, Miss Vaughan. In fact, I see no reason in the world, none whatever, why such a book should not be the success of the season. I say season because, of course, you know our best books live only a season nowadays. But how soon did you say I might see the manuscript?"

"It might be a few days, it might be even a few weeks."

"H-m-m! That is unfortunate. You see, we have already closed our list for this year, and, as you must know, the season is already well advanced."

She looked studiously into his cold green eyes; she gazed at the high, shiny, narrowing forehead, and the long line of the thin, meditating lips that so seldom relaxed, and the sharp, narrow nose with its touch of quiet cruelty. But she knew him now better than she had once known him. She rose to go, languidly.

He looked at her disconcerted, even alarmed.

"But please be seated. Rather than hold a book over until the spring, we could, of course, reopen our list and hold back other matter. What would be the earliest date--the assured date--that we could go over the manuscript?"

Cordelia could not say, but she boldly assumed it would be within a week's time.

"Hm-m-m-m! Then, I presume, Miss Vaughan, there is no reason that we should not handle the new story on practically the same basis as your earlier book; provided, of course, that it is satisfactory to our readers in every respect?"

Cordelia smiled quietly.

"I'm afraid not," she said.

"They were exceptionally generous terms."

"But this time I have an exceptional book," she retorted quite impassively. In the smoke of battle Ney had forgotten there was a Napoleon. For the moment she felt that the book was one of her own making.

"That may be quite true, but--" Mr. Henry Slater checked himself, and then asked more suavely: "What new terms would you suggest, Miss Vaughan?"

"My terms would be one thousand dollars down, with a royalty of twelve per cent on all copies up to the tenth thousand, and a royalty on all copies over the tenth thousand of twenty per cent."

An amused, sympathetic, and incredulous smile crept over Mr. Henry Slater's face.

"Miss Vaughan, our house, during all its career, has never published a book on any such conditions. And I'm afraid it never will. For months now the book market has been greatly embarrassed, greatly disturbed; competition has been most keen, and we----"

"Then I shall not impose on your time any longer." She drew her furs about her with a touch of finality. "Good morning, Mr. Slater."

"Couldn't you leave the matter open for our consideration?" he asked, going with her to the door.

"It could only be on the terms I mentioned--and already I have been keeping a number of publishers waiting."

"Well, let me have a day or two to think the matter out. If my colleagues can possibly be won over, and if anything can be done, you will hear from me to-morrow, or the next day at the latest. Will that be satisfactory?"

Cordelia thought it would, and as she stepped triumphantly out to the waiting carriage she felt that she had won her terms. And she gloried in her conquest--she found it almost a joy, this parrying with the forces that opposed her. As she sat back in the cushions of the Spauldings' bright little yellow-bodied Victoria and threaded her way through the crowded traffic of the lower avenue she could not help once more thinking of her first visit to a publisher--how overawed she had been by his lofty manner, how she had been bathed in a fine perspiration at the thought of her all too noticeable rusticity, how she had burned with silent rage at the stare of open admiration with which he had swept her from top to toe. But now, she knew, the tables were turned. Power! Power--what wine was ever half so intoxicating! That was the thought which rang through her mind as she circled homeward by way of avenue and park, bowing here and there in response to many admiring smiles and not a few obsequiously doffed hats.

She sent a note to Hartley, after much thought on the matter, asking if he could let her have the manuscript at once. The book was brought back to her by the same messenger-boy who carried her note.

On the following morning she received a contract from Slater & Slater, duly made out and awaiting her signature. It called for a royalty of twelve per cent on all copies sold, and made no mention of a cash deposit.

This contract was at once sent back by Cordelia, unsigned.

The following morning the contract came back to her. It was, however, again returned unsigned by her, this time because of the stipulation that the one thousand dollars to be paid on publication was eventually to be deducted from the royalties on ten thousand copies sold.

Once more the contract was sent to her, but again she refused her signature.

Then Mr. Henry Slater came to her in person, and in a very sorrowful mien implored, almost tearfully, to know just what was still wrong. Cordelia calmly insisted on the deletion of the newly inserted paragraph surrendering the dramatic

rights of the book. These, she stated, she intended to retain absolutely. When this paragraph had been reluctantly eliminated the contract was at last duly signed and witnessed. It was not until Henry Slater had carefully folded his copy of the document and placed it in his breast-pocket that Cordelia realized just how much he had wanted her book. But still she felt the hardest part of her battle lay before her--she had come out of her first reconnaissance successfully enough, but she wondered if she had made a mistake in leaving her one avenue of retreat uncovered.

"There is one thing more I have not mentioned"--she hesitated.

Her publisher looked at her more openly; they were now on the common basis of the commercial.

"I prefer that this book be published under a name other than my own."

Henry Slater looked at her again, this time with widening eyes. He was more or less used to the eccentricity of genius.

"This was not mentioned in our contract."

"No; but I must insist upon it!"

"But for what reasons?" he cried, bewildered.

"They are purely personal reasons--I might find it hard to make you understand them." Then she added weakly: "But it often helps a book, doesn't it, to come out under--under a *nom de plume*?"

"Not in your case, Miss Vaughan!"

She caught at a last straw.

"But I have reason to believe--to believe that there may be a concerted attempt on the part of critics to attack me!"

He had already been looking over the manuscript, and still held it in his hand.

"I don't think they will be able to hurt us much," he said confidently.

"Then it must come out *without* a name!" she cried with sudden passion. He wished to avoid a scene; he failed to see just what her object was.

"Let me think over this, Miss Vaughan. I'll send you my decision by letter to-morrow."

She followed him weakly to the door.

"There are plenty of books," she half-pleaded, "that have sold better for being brought out anonymously."

"I'll think over it, Miss Vaughan, and let you know definitely to-morrow."

Before his letter was written the printers were already at work on *The Unwise Virgins*. The note from him which eventually reached Cordelia was brief, but to the point. It said:

"MY DEAR MISS VAUGHAN: In reply to your inquiry of yesterday, I would state that we are reluctantly forced to abide strictly by the letter of our contract with you. It seems almost superfluous for us to point out that your name is now of such weight in the literary world that under no circumstances should we agree to any such terms as those you have been granted unless it had been most definitely understood the name of America's most illustrious author should go upon our season's lists. We are rushing work on the book; in fact, we hope to have it out by the end of the month.

"Very truly yours,

"HENRY H. SLATER."

Cordelia, as she read and reread this letter, dimly felt that they were crushing her to the wall. She cried out, in her bewilderment, that they were giving her no chance.

While she was still pondering over this confounding new turn of affairs she received a message from Repellier, asking if she would not drop up to his studio the following afternoon. She remembered that she and Hartley had planned to spend the afternoon in the Park. But some indefinite dread of yet meeting him face to face, a longing for some temporary escape from an ordeal which she had not the courage to go through, made her decide in favor of Repellier. But just why that stern-faced artist should want to see her she could not understand. Indeed, in her present mood she did not much care.

CHAPTER XXIII

TATTERED COLORS

... We see
The sorrowing gods regretfully
Bar out the bird, but after all
How lightly song still leaps the wall!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Lost Voice."

"But, after all, even without love, life is life," ventured Evelyn.

The older woman sighed as she answered: "Yes, it is life, my child, but it is the axle of existence without grease."

From an unpublished manuscript of CORDELIA VAUGHAN.

Cordelia failed to understand why she should feel so nervous. She half wished, as she climbed the long stairs leading up to Repellier's studio, that she had kept her promise with Hartley, and spent the afternoon in the open air, in the Park, with him. She idly wondered how many more rides they should have together--as she pulled the dangling rabbit's-foot which Repellier affected for a bell-rope--suddenly whimsically curious to know if Hartley was missing her that afternoon.

The old artist himself answered the ring, greeting her with a face that looked peculiarly aged and worn, she thought. As she stepped into the studio, notwithstanding her desire for perfect self-control, she could not help looking up at him with anxious and inquiring eyes--his solemnity frightened her.

"Why, I'm the only one," she said, inadequately, glancing round the large, airy-looking room, with its profusion of casts and sketches and scraps of costume and old armor about the walls.

"I thought from your note, you know, that there would be--be others," she went on, buttoning and unbuttoning the white glove on her slender wrist.

He asked her to be seated. "And won't you let me take your wraps?" he said, still quite impassively.

"Thank you, no," she answered coldly. "I can stay for just a minute or two."

"But this is important," he protested, still waiting dominantly, "and I fear I may detain you."

She surrendered them reluctantly, and seated herself in the chair stiffly, uncomfortably. She wondered why her heart should be beating at such a rate. But she looked out at him with coldly inquiring eyes, and with just a touch of indignation in the down-drawn corners of her thin lips.

"The truth is, Miss Vaughan," he began slowly, "I want you to help me out of a very great difficulty."

"Concerning what?" she asked nervously.

She was sitting in the full light of one of the broad-silled windows of the studio, and the afternoon sun worried her eyes. She tried to shade them with her daintily gloved hand.

"How long have you been writing, Miss Vaughan?"

"Almost two years; two *whole* years, I mean. It's that long since I really wrote my first book. Why?" Her eyebrows lifted superciliously.

"Would you mind telling me the name of that first book?"

"Of course not. It was The Silver Poppy."

The sun still worried her eyes, and she moved her chair uneasily.

"That was your only book?"

"Yes, so far."

He reached over to the table beside him.

"Did you write that book alone--I mean without help or guidance?"

"Quite alone!" she said distinctly.

He picked up a book from the table. It was Hartley's copy of *The Silver Poppy*. A mounting wave of crimson swept over Cordelia's face, leaving it, in turn, almost a dead white.

"One writes nothing quite alone," she added, smiling hastily. "I *did* have a little help, perhaps, but it was very little!"

"That's better. Could you tell me just how much?"

"Every author, I think, absorbs things that--But am I a prisoner before the bar?" she suddenly flashed back at him angrily. Then she saw his quiet smile, and an answering smile came to her own pale lips. "Or is it a--a joke?" she added.

"No," he said, "I'm afraid it's almost a tragedy."

"I don't understand," she said feebly.

"Perhaps I can help you to," he answered. "I have, for the first time, just finished reading *The Silver Poppy*. Miss Vaughan, *The Silver Poppy* was not written by you!"

She gave a little smothered cry of indignation, and started to her feet. Repellier's stern eyes were looking closely, challengingly, into hers, and she sank back in her chair again. Then she laughed a pitiable little laugh, and a touch of color came into her pale lips.

"Mr. Repellier, I must beg of you not to play these practical jokes on me. They are stupid, and besides, my nerves are not of the strongest. The next thing, and you'll be declaring I have some rhetorical *alter ego* manufacturing my manuscripts for me!" Cordelia laughed again.

Repellier's eyes were not pleasant to look into as he gazed down at the woman in the chair. She once more moved farther back out of the glare of the lowering sun that still streamed irritatingly in through the window. She opened her lips as though to speak, but remained silent. She was thinking both hard and fast.

"This is far from a joke, Miss Vaughan. I repeat that you did not write *The Silver Poppy*."

"Then--then why does it bear my name?" It seemed a fair enough question.

"Because you stole it!" he thundered at her.

"Mr. Repellier!" She drew herself up, flaming, flashing at him unspeakable indignation.

"You--you are a coward!" she cried, as a gush of tears came to her eyes.

"Then I am mistaken?" he asked, icily, but more quietly.

"It is all too ridiculous," she said brokenly, over her handkerchief. "You are more than mistaken. But I should like to know whether you mean this for a joke, or an insult!"

"And on your word of honor as a woman, *The Silver Poppy* is your rightful property?"

"It is my rightful property."

"And you wrote it out of your own head, with your own hand?"

"I wrote every word of it," was the low response.

"Would you mind telling me, please, just where and at what time you did so?" he asked.

Cordelia rose to her feet impatiently.

"I did not come here, Mr. Repellier, to go into a criminal's witness-box," she said tremulously, "and I cannot stay to answer questions that are neither courteous nor rational. I'm afraid that I really must be going."

She swept to the door.

"One moment, I beg of you, Miss Vaughan," cried Repellier after her. She turned and faced him.

"You are misunderstanding me entirely. I haven't the slightest wish to hurt or offend you in any way. I only want to clear up this mystery, so that my knowledge of the facts may be a protection to you yourself, should the occasion arise."

"A protection to *me*?"

"Yes, to you," he repeated. He motioned her toward the chair again. She hesitated.

"Couldn't you write this to me? Couldn't you put it down on paper, and then I could answer it in the same way. I hate mysteries, and I'm tired this afternoon."

She looked at him almost appealingly.

"It will have to be talked over by us, face to face," he replied. And there was nothing for her to do but to go back to her chair once more.

"Will you let me explain away the mystery as clearly and frankly as I can?" he asked her.

"Certainly!"

Repellier, seating himself opposite her and still looking closely into her face, could see the pupils of the now pale-green eyes contract oddly.

"Three years ago one of the brightest and most scholarly editorial writers on all Park Row was practically thrown into the street by the paper for which he wrote, simply because they regarded him as a man who had gone stale, who had written himself out. To his paper he was a sucked lemon—a squeezed sponge. He was careless, good-natured, and easy-going; and when he came to me for my advice I asked him: Why not make a plunge, and write a book? He was not strong, however; in fact, I had always suspected that he was consumptive, and before his book was half written I saw clearly enough that he could not last long—at least not here in the East. So I, among others, persuaded him to go South—indeed, his doctor and his friends had to *drive* him away. So off the lonely, broken fellow went to a little town in Kentucky to finish his beloved book. Ah, I see you follow me! I myself was on the point of sailing for Europe—I had to go—and was abroad for over a year. But during that last night we were together in New York he read to me what he had already written of his Great Work. I remember it more or less well—certain things about it stand out distinctly. Long before I came back to New York he was dead, poor fellow. I always thought that his book had died with him. For the first time yesterday I read *The Silver Poppy*."

He paused, and looked at her searchingly.

"Miss Vaughan, this dead man's book and *The Silver Poppy* are one and the same creation!"

Her eyes were luminous, and were riveted on his face. All color had faded out of her cheek, and in the dim light her skin looked greenish-yellow and dead. She did not speak for several minutes.

So it was all to end like this! That was the thought which pirouetted insanely up and down the foreground of her consciousness.

"You—you don't mean," she cried huskily, "you can't mean that you believe I—I stole this book?"

"You have refused to let me believe anything else," he answered, without a trace of feeling in his voice.

"But you would not—you dare not make any such—any such absurd belief public!" she cried, leaning closer toward him. The room grew unendurably hot and close, and the walls seemed reeling and swaying about her.

"You would not!" she cried again, in a higher key, putting her hand up to her head.

Their eyes met. She saw but one thing, and that thing was that there dwelt no touch of kindness or commiseration on his face.

"I have my duty to the dead to perform!"

"But they're lies, all lies!" she cried shrilly.

"That, you will have every chance to show when the time comes!"

"They are lies!" she echoed, dazed.

For just a moment he hesitated, perplexed, perhaps almost doubting. He stood before her with a face almost as white as her own.

"Will you swear before God, your Maker, that this is the truth, and nothing but the truth?"

She stood before him, with her eyes still fixed on his.

"I swear before God, my Maker, that this is the--No! No! I will *not*!" she cried hysterically. "I will not! It is all some trick, some cowardly trap! Who are you--who *are* you, to degrade me in this way? Who are you, that I must answer to you as to a judge? You are detaining me here; you are holding me a prisoner against my will!"

He held up his hand restrainingly.

"Yes, who are you?" she went on wildly, catching ludicrously at ineffectual trifles, as the drowning do. "Who, indeed, *are* you? You, with your pharasaical long face and your own underhand schemes? You, closeted alone with married women--with a woman who has made a fool of herself for you, who can't even hide her infatuation! Who are you, who have come into a home and stolen an honorable wife's love away from her husband--who are you to sit up and prate of honor and honesty?"

Again he threw up his hand, as though to ward back her termagancy, but she was not to be stopped.

"Yes, who are you to sit in judgment on me, a woman, alone in the world, a woman who has asked nothing of you! If you are so immaculate," she mocked, "if you are so above suspicion, denounce me as the thief you have said I am! Denounce me; but do not forget that you yourself will soon stand before the world in your true colors!"

He tried to silence her, but her passionate torrent was not to be stayed.

"No, of course not," she went on in her fury. "Of course it hurts when it's the other way! But when you strike at *my* name you plume yourself on being a hero, and prate about your debt to the dead!"

She stopped, at last, panting, out of breath. Her thin hands were shaking with the paroxysm of her fury, and her lips were bloodless. "Oh, if I were a man!" she cried at him. Then she sank into her chair, still breathing heavily, scarcely knowing where her fierce torrent of vituperation had left her.

"But you wouldn't do this wrong, you wouldn't?" she almost pleaded, holding her hand over her heart. "You don't know how hard I've struggled for my place in the world; you don't know what I've gone through; what I have suffered and known! Do you--do you think I would give that all up now, lightly, and without a word--and for an empty mistake? Do you think," she cried with a rising and more defiant voice as her strength came back to her again, "do you think that I would let any one come and rob me of this, without fighting them to the end? Do you think that because I'm a woman I can't fight? that you can throw me down in the dirt and walk over me, without a word? Do you? *You fool!*"

Through that turbulent darkness a far-away glimmer of light came to her, and she clutched at it eagerly.

"Now I will tell you the truth," she cried. "I will give you the truth about your dead man and his book. It was I who worked and slaved for that dead man. Without me his book would never have been written. While you, who call yourself his friend, who rant about being his defender, were loitering about the continent, I was at his bedside, tending him and watching him, wearing myself out for him, and keeping the life in him hour by hour. And it was to me, on his last day, that he gave the book, with his own hands made me take it, what there was of it. It was as much mine as his, he declared, and he gave it to me with his own hand. Do you hear?--with his own hand! And it was I who worked over it, and rewrote it word for word, and took it and made it my own!"

Repellier looked at her in silence for many minutes.

"But why did you take it?" he asked.

"It was mine! I had earned it!" Her eyes shone out at him hatefully. "I had earned it, I tell you!"

Repellier seemed deep in thought; then a new firmness came about the lines of his mouth, and he looked up at her.

"What new insult now?" she cried, tauntingly.

"It may be too late to repair the injustice to the dead, Miss Vaughan; but I can and will at least step in to save the living!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean Hartley! Have you ever stopped to think how you're ruining that man's life?"

"Ruined?--*his* life ruined?"

"Yes, or it soon will be! And for his sake, remember, for his sake alone I can make one final proposal to you. It is the only thing to do, and it is very simple. I can offer you the choice of giving up Hartley, of releasing him absolutely and completely, on the one hand, or of giving up The Silver Poppy, and all it stands for, on the other!"

She caught desperately at her last straw.

"I would," she said. "I would--and could do it, but he--*he* may refuse to accept his freedom!"

"You must take the one or the other. As for Hartley himself, I think when everything is laid before him plainly, he will see just how to act!"

"You," she cried in horror, "you wouldn't do that? You wouldn't tell him this--this lie?"

"I should have to; you have made it necessary."

"Him! Tell *him*!" she repeated, dazed. "You don't know how much he is to me," she added wistfully. It was no longer the face of a girl that looked up at Repellier. It was that of a woman, touched with age and sorrow.

"That is no reason why *his* life should be soured and broken, no reason why he should go on in the way he has been doing."

"But they're lies! He would know they were lies!" she cried, her anger seizing her once more.

"He would know they were lies! He knows and believes in me! He loves me! If I told him, he would *kill* you! But you wouldn't tell him--you wouldn't tell *him*!" she cried again, reading nothing but relentlessness in the other's face.

Repellier turned away from her, sick of it all, degraded by it, demeaned by her very passionate mendaciousness, but still resolute.

"I will give you two days to think it over," he said wearily, "and then--then I'll act on your decision!"

And she knew that he was in earnest.

CHAPTER XXIV

ROSES AND THORNS

Not for knaves like us she wept--
Yet who served or loved as we?--
Since her heart this many a day
Went to one beyond the sea!

But, if in those lands afar,
She her lightest word should say,
Here are ten good knights and true
With ten lives to cast away!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Young Queen."

We are--only what we have been!--"The Silver Poppy."

Hartley lost no more time than was necessary before responding to Cordelia's message asking that he come to her at once.

There was a touch of imperativeness in the hurriedly written little note that indefinitely appealed to him. It seemed to show him how much she had grown to lean on him. He assumed, though, that the urgency at the most implied nothing more than some impending problem in connection with her new book, and consequently Cordelia waited three anxious and impatient hours before he finally appeared before her. And greedily she was counting the minutes of that last precious day.

The ordeal through which she had passed the afternoon before had left its traces behind it. It still showed on her face in an unusual look of pensive weariness about the heavy eyelids, and a deepened and almost feverish glow to the eyes themselves. For once, too, her face was the true color of old ivory, with one small touch of the tenderest, shell-like pink burning on each of her cheeks. The languor of her voice, the calm pathos of her glance, and the heavier shadow about her lashes, suggested to Hartley, as it had done before, but never so vividly, the quiet, half-sorrowful beauty of an autumn twilight.

She was dressed in her riding-habit, of dark-green cloth, showing every line of the thin yet buoyant figure. It appeared to him as a figure with something bird-like in the very lightness and nervous quickness of movement beyond all its outward languor. The dark-green of her habit, too, seemed to give to the pale face above it a strangely heightened sense of isolation, like the gloom out of which the solitary figure of a Rembrandt portrait looks down on the world.

"Cordelia, what is it?" he asked anxiously, startled at the change, though unable to determine in just what it consisted.

She looked up quickly at the note of unusual tenderness in his voice.

"I am going away!" she said quietly.

A sudden sense of loss, of deprivation, swept over him, and both his voice and the startled face he turned to her showed his feeling.

"Going away?" he echoed.

"Yes." She shook her head sorrowfully.

"But where, Cordelia?"

"I leave for Quebec to-morrow morning, to join Mrs. Spaulding. From there I think I shall go back home--back to Kentucky!"

"But why are you going?"

"For your sake," she said, giving him her eyes unrestrainedly.

"For my sake, Cordelia?" he repeated, astonished, openly miserable.

"Yes, for you," she said in a lighter tone, smiling. "But that's all you're going to be told at present."

She went to the window and looked out at the falling rain.

"I thought," she said, "that we might have one last little ride together, for the sake of--of the old days!"

"But it couldn't--surely it couldn't be for long?" he asked, still thinking of her departure, scarcely believing the news.

"I don't think I shall ever again come back to New York," she said slowly, with something that was almost a sob.

"But can't you tell me why?"

"No, I can't--not now!"

"My poor child," he said suddenly, taking her pale face between his hands and looking earnestly into her eyes--and what gloriously luminous eyes they were that poignantly happy moment! "My poor child, is it any trouble I could take on my own shoulders? Is it anything I could ever help you with?"

It was his first voluntary caress, his first spontaneous and unlooked-for touch of tenderness. Her heart was beating riotously.

She shook her head.

"But explain to me about Quebec."

"Mrs. Spaulding has written to me and asked me to join her there. Here is the letter; read it."

She handed the letter to him; it had reached her that morning most opportunely. Hartley took it, and read:

CHATEAU FRONTENAC, QUEBEC CITY.

"MY DARLING CHILD:

"I am dying of loneliness up here in this dreary old town. Alfred has gone up in the woods to shoot moose or something, and Heaven only knows when he'll be back. I have decided that you and Mr. Hartley had better take a holiday and run up here and join me for the rest of the week; and then we can all come down together. I refuse to take 'no' for an answer."

"That's really all," Cordelia broke in; "the rest is simply orders about the servants and messages to dressmakers and that sort of thing."

He handed the letter back to her, disheartened, depressed.

"Could you come?" she asked him hesitatingly.

He thought over it; he scarcely saw how he could, but a desire to be near her seemed to be shouldering out all other feelings.

"I should like to go, but--well, to be candid, I really can't afford it just now."

"That doesn't count!" she cried happily.

Then a sudden disturbing thought came to him.

"But, Cordelia, how about our book? What would be done with that in the meantime? And what will become of it in the end, if you leave?" He had often confessed to her that he was no business man, that even the thought of approaching an editor or a publisher could take away his appetite for a day.

"Let's not talk about that!" Her hands were on his shoulders now, and she was reading his face hungrily.

"But what shall be done with it?"

"Well, everything *is* done!" she said, reluctantly, he thought. Then, slipping away from him for a minute or two, she fluttered back to the room with a bit of paper in her hand.

"And as a sign and proof of the same, permit me to present you with something which is entirely your own!"

It was Slater & Slater's check for one thousand dollars, already indorsed and marked accepted. He held it out to her, determined.

"You know I can't accept this," he said. But she was equally determined.

"But you shall, and must!"

Again he refused it, absolutely, proudly, she thought; and again she thrust it back on him. Then she saw that it was useless, and with that discovery a new trouble came to her.

At last she made a suggestion that had fluttered to the ark of her indecision, like a dove with an olive-branch.

"Let's take it and spend it--on our holiday! No, let's spend half of it; we can decide about the other half later on!"

He stopped to consider her proposal, and as she saw him wavering she declared that she, like Mrs. Spaulding, would never take "no" for an answer.

And so it was decided; and drawing on her gloves she reminded him of their ride.

While the horses were being brought round she told him of her interview with her publisher--not all of it, but at least enough to show how she had succeeded in securing the terms she had first asked for.

"What a wonderful little warrior you are!" he cried, taking her hand laughingly, but gratefully. He looked down at the frail little white fingers admiringly. "It ought to guide an empire!" he cried.

But, strangely enough, she could not find it in her heart to share in his delight. Even the mention of the book, during all that day, in some manner distressed and worried her.

"Those are far-off things and battles long ago," she said, as they started out, shrugging her little shoulders, as though to lift from them some burden of useless care.

"This is the beginning of our holiday. You remember what you said: the fulness and color of life! So let's turn vagabond. Do you know," she continued, taking a tighter rein on her little chestnut mare, who was champing restively at her bit, "do you know, I don't believe you've enough of the rogue in you ever to make a poet!"

"Try me!" he laughed, yet not altogether pleased.

"You haven't enough of the dare-devil in your make-up. You are always too staid and English and respectable and self-contained. You ought to have more of the vagabond, the swashbuckler, more of the Villon!"

"Is that," he asked, "your ideal of man?"

"By no means!"

"Then what is?"

"My ideal"--she looked at him as she spoke--"my ideal is a man who, for a woman's sake, can stand up alone against the whole wide world!"

"Try me!" he said again. As they turned into the Park she brooded joyously, hungrily, over that simple challenge, which might mean so little or so much. Try him! She wondered if he guessed how soon and how severely he might be tried. And she wondered, even more, just what would be the outcome of that test.

The driving rain had ceased, but it was still a humid, gray afternoon with a fine mist hanging in the air. The Park was practically deserted, and the bridle-paths empty.

"What a day for a ride!" cried Cordelia, waving her whip toward the tree-tops that billowed through the silvery fog, "and our last ride together!" Then she repeated aloud as they rode:

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshy screen?

"I feel that way now," she said. "I feel as though I should like to fly, as though I could ride out everything that life holds, in one crazy, delicious, rushing gallop!"

They let out their spirited animals as they turned up into the longer stretch of the Eastern path. The air and movement had brought a deeper pink to Cordelia's cheeks, and, as was usual in her moments of excitement, her expanded pupils made her eyes look dark.

"Isn't it glorious!" she cried abandonedly. "I think I'm going to make myself drunk, dead drunk, with this ride to-day!"

She put the whip recklessly to her distracted mare, and, shooting out ahead of Hartley, raced exultantly down the level stretch before her.

A Park attendant caught sight of her careering wildly down the path. He pushed his way through the bushes as she swept past and called after her warningly to lessen her speed. The little chestnut mare swerved at the sudden appearance and call of the man, and for a moment, as her mount bounded forward, Cordelia lost the reins.

The mare's speed did not yield one stride to her frantic pull at the bit. At a glance Hartley realized that it was a runaway.

He remembered, to his sudden horror, that Cordelia was not the best of horsewomen. But still, he felt, with the open stretch that lay before them there might be no immediate danger. The danger lay ahead, in the winding roadway, the brushwood and trees, the all too many overhead bridges.

Hartley did not hesitate when he realized what these might mean. A dozen times before that day he had shown his powerful roan to be the fleetest animal. As Cordelia's mare bolted through a hedge of bare lilac-bushes at the first turn of the path, and went dashing across the open greensward of the Park, he was racing down on her, not a hundred yards behind.

As they raced he could see that he was slowly gaining. It awoke in him his dormant passion for struggle, his delight in action, and he almost gloried in that strange chase, with a barbaric, a rudimentary gladness in his sense of mastery over the quivering beast beneath him.

He came bounding alongside when they were not more than twenty yards from a row of green-painted benches lining one of the walks.

"Shake off your stirrup!" he called to her. He was almost near enough to reach out his arm and touch her, but at first she did not understand him. She had, indeed, lost all control of herself and her horse. Before he could make her understand, the row of benches were under their noses. They had to take them together. Cordelia's mare struck the top board of a bench-back and splintered it as she went over.

Then Hartley, in desperation, rode straight down on her, for already they were getting in among the thick of the trees. He caught her under the shoulders with one arm, as he swung in on her, and as her mare was shouldered over and went suddenly sprawling and tumbling to the grass, he held tight with his knees and clung to the trailing figure in green.

He clung to her and carried her out at his side in that way until his own frightened roan could be pulled up, panting and bewildered, with the blood staining the foam from its bruised mouth. He slipped to the ground, in some way, still holding her. Her face was colorless, but she looked up at him with the old luminous and wonderful eyes. He was breathing heavily, but he still held her.

"My darling!" she said, locking her arms about his neck, as a torrent of happy tears came to her eyes. "My darling!"

He still held her there close to him, but in silence, until two gardeners and a Park policeman came to their assistance. Ten minutes later a mounted policeman rode up with the recaptured mare. A passing hansom was stopped, and Cordelia was handed up into it. The mounted policeman wrote down his notes, and rode away tucking Hartley's bill into his pocket. It all seemed over and past with kaleidoscopic rapidity.

"Will you be able to manage them?" Cordelia cried, concerned, as she saw Hartley mounting again, with her mare held short by the bridle-rein.

"Quite easily. But you must get back at once!"

Nothing, at that moment, could have made her happier than that commonplace half-command from his lips.

She waved her gauntleted hand back at him; her face still stood out pale and wistful against the darkness of the hansom-box.

"And you?" she asked.

"I'll be right after you."

"Then I'll have dinner ready for you!" she cried, as the hansom turned and disappeared down through the darkening mist, smiling to herself at the incongruousness of what she had said. It was only in fiction, she felt, that the opportune moment and the adequate word coincided.

But driving home through the gray evening air with the tears still wet on her lashes, she pondered over a new and

perturbing and yet not altogether painful problem: Could it be that she had played her part with him too, too earnestly? Must she lose him now, when he meant so much to her?



CHAPTER XXV

TARNISHED GOLD

She yielded then where she had frowned,
And fell her tears like leaves;
She sank before him on the ground
And clasped his iron greaves.

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Broken Knight."

After all, Rabelais' religion and women are one and the same thing--a great Perhaps.--"The Silver Poppy."

The lights of Cordelia's little yellow-trimmed study were carefully shaded and softened. Cordelia herself, with bright but restless eyes, with a slightly flushed face, and a little quickness of speech and movement betokening, perhaps, nerves too tensely strung, was already waiting for Hartley, when, an hour later, he stepped up to her door.

He had long since grown used to that freedom of action, to that unthought-of abandon of the Bohemian which Cordelia laid claim to as her natural right, and which the world about her had the habit of laughing away as the mere unrestrained eccentricity of guileless genius. He had noticed that this careless freedom seemed to suit her best. He liked her least when she was least ingenuous.

"It's so stupid and lonesome downstairs in that big sepulchral dining-room!" she said. "Let's have dinner up here."

A momentary and careless feeling that some too boldly effacing sponge was wiping out the last blurred line of formality passed through him.

"Oh, I have nearly all my meals served up here, now that I'm alone!" she explained. "It's much quieter and more cozy. Here we can have dinner in peace, and be undisturbed. You don't mind, do you?"

After his stiff ride the blood was still running through his veins vigorously. He could feel life pulsing dominantly through him, and some mysterious back-wash of that wave of joyous intoxication which earlier had taken possession of Cordelia now seemed sweeping in turn through him.

"The queen can do no wrong!" he cried, looking down into the unnatural brightness of her face that gleamed like a flower in the half-light. Then something transient, fugitive, inscrutable, something that crept up into her eyes, drove the careless smile from his lips, and they looked at each other, man and woman.

"Stevens," she said, turning to the servant who had answered her ring, "I am at home to no one this evening! Remember, Stevens, to no one!"

She had replaced her dark-green riding-habit by a loose, heavily pleated robe of bebe blue, lined with the palest of yellow satin. Its sleeves hung loosely about her white arms, which they left partly unconcealed, as though by accident. Her even whiter throat, too, was left bare. She seemed suddenly converted from a child of alertness to a woman of languor. Hartley did not go out of his way to analyze the mystery of that sudden alteration by means of a mere change of raiment. But it seemed as if some magical breath of enchantment had blown away the fragile petals from the blossom of youth and left in its place the mellowed and rounded fruit of womanhood.

As he gazed across the table at her during that strangest of dinners she seemed to take on a warm maturity and a vitality quite new to her. The heavier shadows, caused, no doubt, he thought, by mere weariness of body, that seemed to dwell under the arch of her eyebrow, again and again suggested to him the picture of her as a young mother, saddened with the burden of her first maternity.

"Do you know," she said to him suddenly--they had been talking but little that night--"I have never yet once called you by your Christian name! John! How that sounds like you: substantial, solid, dignified! No; I have never dared. I believe I am still afraid of you--John!"

He made her say it over a dozen times. She repeated the name until it seemed to fall to pieces on her tongue, and lose all meaning. Then she sighed heavily.

"I'm tired!" she murmured, locking her fingers behind her head. He noticed an unlooked-for fulness about the round,

tower-like neck that seemed to sigh into the white breadth of the shoulders like a river into its sea.

"Cordelia, you *are* tired," he repeated suddenly: and he moved as though to rise from his chair. A frightened look shot into her face. She wondered for a moment if he would have the heart to leave her there, so soon, so unsatisfied, and without a sign. She dreaded the thought of the solitude that would come after he had gone, the thought of that last night of what she must soon call her old life.

"I wonder if you know how tired I am?" she murmured absently, pushing back her sleeves and leaning forward with her elbows on the table.

"I wonder if you can imagine how heavily I'll sleep to-night, and how tired I shall get up, even, in the morning?"

He rose from his chair, and walking round to the side of the table where she sat, stood behind her without speaking. She could feel the caress of his hand on her thick hair.

"I feel as though I'd like to be mothered to-night by some one!" she murmured softly, as her eyelids drooped.

He still touched her hair, almost reverently, but that was all.

Then she turned to him with the smile of a tired child.

"Lift me up--I want you to lift me up, and carry me over to my couch!"

He lifted her in his arms as he might a child of three, and as he did so the memory of another night when he had first done the same thing rushed back through his mind; and without a word he carried her to the little Japanese couch beside her writing-desk of gold and mother-of-pearl. He found a rug and covered her feet.

She gazed up at him with lips that appeared to pout girlishly.

"Do you want to sleep now?" he asked gently, bending over her.

As he looked down at her in the silence that followed his words her mouth seemed to grow heavy. That fugitive, inscrutable something crept into her eyes once more; and all of a sudden his face grew deathly pale, and then flushed again.

"John!"

He turned and made three steps toward the door.

"John!" she cried after him, with a note of pain in the cry. She had flung off the rug, and was leaning on her elbow. He looked from where he stood, hesitating.

He went slowly back, and bent over her once more. Her pleading lips were perilously close to his.

"Must you go?" she asked, sinking back in her weariness, and raising two arms from which the loose silken sleeves fell back. The next moment a vibrant tremor of exaltation swept over her.

"Don't go! Don't go!" she murmured. "Don't leave me!"

The two white arms came together and folded over him and drew him in like wings.

Time and the world were nothing to her then; time and the world were shut out from him. It was the lingering, long-delayed capitulation of the more impetuous, profounder love she had held back from him, of the finer and softer self she had all but famished in the citadel of her grim aspirations. She no longer allured him, or cared to allure him; she had nothing to seek of him thereafter; she had only the ruins of her broken life to give him.

And he, too--he felt those first thin needles of bliss that crept and projected themselves over the quiet waters of friendship, and he knew that a power not himself was transforming those waters of change and unrest and ebb and flow into the impenetrable solidity of love itself.

CHAPTER XXVI

AUTUMN SUNLIGHT

There we watched those troubled eyes,
And her laughing face grow wan;
And the birds sought other skies,
And she knew her year--was gone!

JOHN HARTLEY, "The Valley Princess."

This dog of a life--mongrel of joy and misery that it is!--"The Silver Poppy."

Cordelia had found, and with bewildered eyes was watching unfold, her first and only love. About the belated flowering of that tender and reluctant growth clung a touch of tragic bitter-sweetness; it seemed so poignantly ineffectual, so like the odorous second blossoming of orchards at the betraying breath of a St. Martin's summer.

Yet Cordelia's week in the little old French city on the St. Lawrence was, perhaps, the happiest week in all her life. It was not all pure happiness; it had its moments of pain--but it was enough. She felt within her some shy subliminal renewal, as silent yet as implacable as the insidious first workings of spring.

Through all the gray years that followed, her week of happiness remained a beautiful memory, colored with the quiet passion of a pathetic struggle up toward the light of that impossible new world into which she seemed to glance for one fugitive moment. And that golden week of happiness had come, too, upon her so unlooked for, so unasked for! It had crept upon her like a quiet dream through broken and restless sleep. And even she herself felt, at times, how it had transformed her--seeing, at the last, how nearly it had liberated from the gloomy walls of pride and egoism those phantasmal dead selves which clamored for air only in life's more exalted moments.

A pale wistfulness took possession of her, a quietness and gentleness of demeanor which was new and strange to her. More than once in their rambles about the quaint old city Hartley had surprised her looking at him out of troubled and tearful eyes, with an indefinite, dumb entreaty on her quivering under-lip. And each time he caught that passing look it touched him and intangibly drew him closer to her. She felt the necessity of having him to lean upon, the want of his arm and voice and presence. And some passionate dread of the solitude she felt ominously before her drove Cordelia still closer and still more desperately to his side.

This was not lost on Hartley himself. Those sorrowing eyes seemed to trumpet to the knight that lay dormant in him; and if he said little at the time, he nevertheless felt much. With the birth of this tenderer feeling came a newer and deeper trust in her, a less active quest of motive and meaning in all her acts. Though he knew, indeed, that she was still holding back something from him, he made no effort to wring a reluctant statement from her. He was willing to wait her time. She had given him much; the little he could and would not claim.

In the meanwhile, with the sense of something slipping between their fingers, and with a premonition of impending change hanging over both of them, they made the most of those passing days. Mrs. Spaulding did not care to take part in their wanderings, and it was only during their hours at the hotel that the shadow of her presence fell between them.

More than one happy day they spent in visits to the Basilica, to the old Citadel fortress, to the ancient ruins of the Chateau Bigot in the valley of the St. Charles. They idled away a merry forenoon in search of the Golden Dog, and when that strange figure in gilt was found at last, on the northern facade of the post-office, Hartley put its still stranger rhyme into English for her. For many an hour, too, they rambled about the crooked little streets of the lower town, which Hartley declared to be wondrously like a second Dieppe or Amiens. And they went on long walks out upon the Plains of Abraham, and visited the tall shaft which marks the spot where Wolfe died victorious.

"How sad it seems," said Cordelia, "to die on the day, in the very hour, that life has grown most worth living!"

She gazed up at the ironical towering marble with musing eyes.

"But isn't it better it should come even in that last moment, than never at all?" Hartley asked, looking up to where her own eyes rested, and himself busy, for the moment, with his own thoughts.

"It may be!" said Cordelia, looking from the marble to the man. "It may be!" she repeated absently.

One day they went by train to the straggling little village of Ste. Anne de Beaupre, and together visited the Shrine, and drank a cupful of the miraculous waters from the Holy Spring. A pilgrimage had brought to the town that day a sadly picturesque army of life's unfortunates, so that both Cordelia and Hartley drew a breath of relief when the halt and the maimed had been left behind them and they had escaped from the pitiful tumult of cassock and crutch and wandered out into the cool quietness of the open country. There Cordelia, venturing inquisitively into one of the little whitewashed cottages, was smitten with a sudden vague sense of homesickness on hearing once more the familiar hum of a spinning-wheel; while to Hartley the softness of the mingled *patois* of Brittany and Normandy, the sedate tranquillity of the clean little huddling riverside villages, and the crowded yet rambling rows of tiny cottages with wide eaves that drooped down over mullioned windows like tired lids over sleepy eyes, brought back from time to time many thoughts of his older Oxford. Cordelia listened, with wondering eyes and a strangely heavy heart, to his descriptions of that far-away English country, trying passionately, yet vainly, to see it as she knew he beheld it in his own eyes.

"Some day I hope we shall see it," he said, wistfully. "We two, together!"

Then they were both charmed into silent wonder by the old-world quaintness of the rambling hillside road, and following it idly, they wandered on, enchanted into forgetfulness by the beauty of the blended tints of the autumnal maples and oaks, by the soft verdure of the terraced foot-hills, broken with little rifts of silver where flashing streams fell musically down to the blue St. Lawrence, on which, here and there, they could catch glimpses of low-lying batteaux and drifting sails.

They had strolled happily on through the tiny village of Riviere des Chiens, pausing a moment before a towering line of Lombardy poplars that stood black against the setting sun, when the sound of broken weeping startled them both from their day-dreams. Hartley, in alarm, ran on ahead, and under a blighted thorn-tree, crouched amid the roadside goldenrod, he found a woman with a child clutched to her breast. Her gaunt body rocked back and forth as she sat there, and she neither looked up nor ceased her wailing when he bent over and touched her on the shoulder. He called to her in English, and then in French, but still she sat amid the dusty goldenrod, clutching the child to her breast.

"Is it dead?" asked Cordelia, in a frightened voice, trying to see into the muffled face. "Oh, be careful! Do be careful! It may be something horrible--some horrible disease!"

Hartley had wakened the woman from her stupor, and in broken French, rich with the idiom of the seventeenth century, she was explaining in her dead voice that she had tried to make her way on foot to Ste. Anne, that if she once reached the shrine of the blessed saint she knew her boy would be saved. Two of them had died, of the black sickness; he was all she had left! And in a fresh paroxysm of grief she caught the sick child once more up to her bent body, and swayed back and forth with it in hopeless despair.

Hartley sent Cordelia hurriedly to the nearest farm-house, for a conveyance. Impatient at the delay while the *habitant* harnessed his stocky little pony to a cart, he helped the woman to her feet, and taking the child in his own arms, started back for the village, not a mile distant. There he sent a messenger post-haste to Ste. Anne's, and an hour later the ponderous little wagon that did service as ambulance for the convent of the Franciscan Sisters at Beaupre was speeding homeward with both mother and child, and Hartley and Cordelia were waiting on the chilly little wind-swept platform for the Quebec train, intangibly detached from one another and mysteriously depressed in spirits. It was not until the warmth and lights of the hotel had shut out the night from them that either cared to talk. Then, of a sudden, Hartley found the woman at his side shaken with a passionate burst of seemingly inconsequential weeping.

"Cordelia, what is it?" he cried, in startled wonder.

"Motherhood!" said Cordelia, inadequately, through her tears--"it--it is such an awful thing!"

And then she fled from him, and he sat up late into the night, thinking.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SCARS OF SLAVERY

And from the gloomy caves of Mem'ry came
The bandits of Repentance in the night
And left her naked, and in spirit torn.

JOHN HARTLEY, "Street Dust."

Every Klondike of achievement has its Chilkoot of adversity.--"The Silver Poppy."

The next afternoon they were on the Grand Battery, leaning against one of the obsolete old mortars that frowned down over the river. A calm sky of robin's-egg blue stretched over them. Golden and quiet as were the Laurentides about them, there was a touch of chilliness in that clear, northern air, a muffled coldness which Hartley likened to a naked saber-blade buried in rose-leaves. The wide St. Lawrence lay beneath them like a pool of silver. In the remoter distance stretched the blue and purple foot-hills of the Laurentians themselves.

Miles beneath them they could see the valleys of gloomy greenness, dotted with their little flashing whitewashed *habitant* houses, and over everything the mellow, autumnal sunlight lay; over the gray walls of the Citadel, burning like fire on the windows and spires, gemming the long hillside sloping down to the river, making opals and pearls of the little sails and softening the very grimness of the dark and more distant headlands frowning so sternly out over the peaceful water.

It had been a day full of quiet happiness for both of them, and a feeling of vague regret, of languid sorrow, fell over them, as they stood in silence, looking on the beauty of river and foot-hill and mountain bathed in autumnal silence and gold.

"Oh, if we never grew old!" Cordelia said, with a wistful little shake of the head, drawing closer to Hartley, and slipping her hand through his arm.

He looked down at her with a strange sternness that was not all sternness in his eyes. She turned away, gazing across the wide stretch of river dotted with its shifting opals and pearls.

"Cordelia," he said, softly.

She did not answer. Her musing eyes were far away, on a drifting bank of gray cloud that was slowly shrouding the glory of the sunset and bringing with it a breath of colder wind.

"Cordelia," he repeated, even more softly, "will you marry me?"

She fell back from him, startled, amazed. It came as a bolt out of the blue.

It was the one thing she had not looked for, had not hoped for, had never thought to ask for.

"Marry you!" she repeated, as though the words were words she did not know. "Marry you!"

The molten silver of the river so far beneath her seemed to rise and fall and fade, and the purple line of the foot-hills wavered and darkened and went out. A new voice had come to her in the wilderness of her doubt, a new path seemed to lead out of the two-fold desert of her despair.

"Yes, dear," he said, quietly, taking her gloved hand in his, "will you marry me?--be my wife?"

No words came to her tongue, and her face was white; but the slowly awakening light that crept into her eyes and illuminated all her pallid face made a new, a transformed woman of her. A belated song-sparrow alit on one of the old guns near them, and sang thinly for a moment or two. Never had the man beside her seen that tender light which came to her that minute and hung over her like a halo.

She drew back from him for a moment again, still doubting, still perplexed, still hesitating. He held out his two arms for her as one does for a child.

"I love you, my darling; I love you!" she murmured, as he folded them about her. And he knew it was true. He bent over

her, and she gave him her mouth to kiss, reluctantly, as though it had never been kissed before. He kissed her, not passionately, but gravely, almost reverentially; and she was happier at the thought that he had done it so.

"I used to half fear you, dear," he said, still holding her hand through his arm. "I thought you were cold. I looked on you only as the woman who wrote books, as one who worked for praise and fame and success, as a woman hardened and schooled by a selfish world. That suspicion of selfishness, I believe, made *me* selfish. No, no; you must listen, dear, for this is a confession. What I took for coldness in you challenged a certain coldness in me, and for weeks and weeks I misunderstood you and misjudged you. Now I know better. What has happened during the last week has shown me how wrong I was. And now I want you to forgive me, if you can, for all those old misunderstandings. Will you, Cordelia, dear?"

"You believe in me? You trust me, fully?" she cried, thrilling through all her frail body, trembling with the fierceness of some newer, finer fire.

For one silent minute he looked deeply into her eyes, and, seeing that great and glorious light in them, he responded: "I do, Cordelia! I do, my own!" And there was no shadow of doubt in his voice.

"But I have done so much that is--that is not right!" she hesitated, almost imploringly, leaning over the grim old gun-carriage and burying her face shudderingly in her hands.

"But now I love you because I know you could never deceive me, just as I would never deceive you. I can read it in your eyes, dear. In the past we have both done things which we ought not to have done, perhaps. But that was because we were both misguided, and both hemmed in by the wrong influences, wasting all the best of our lives, and the best of our hearts, on the things that were wrong."

"It is too late!" she almost wailed.

"No; no, indeed; we can go back and begin all over again, this time with a clean slate. I have been thinking these things over, trying, the last few days, to work them out by myself, and I believe I have learned more than one lesson in that time. Think how easily it can be done! We can slip around to that haven of the love-tossed, to the Little Church Around the Corner, and then we can hunt us out some little nook of our own in the big city, and there we can live our lives, and dream our dreams, and do our work, and be happy together! And how happy I shall be, working for you, dearest," he said, with the tremble of emotion in his voice.

"No, no; not back to New York!" she pleaded. "Couldn't we go to England, to Oxford--your own Oxford, and live there, alone, away from them all?"

"Yes, we could, if you thought best!"

The idea of it was new to him.

"John," she said, suddenly, and her voice seemed to lose its softness as she spoke. "John, I have something to tell you! I did not intend to tell you so soon, but now I must!"

She felt that in that exalted moment she must burn every bridge behind her; she must give herself no further chance of defeating herself.

"It is about your book--I could not take it; I have not taken it. I have given it back to you. It is being published now, but--but not in my name!"

Oh, if that could have been the whole truth, she thought, as the first thorn of her poor rose of abnegation pierced her. But it was the best that she could do, she told her aching heart pitifully. It was not too late; she could still make it the truth. In that moment of new birth she felt that she must tell him everything, from the first to the last. But as she framed the very words of her confession she saw that she must still wait a little--that was the most agonizing part of it. Yet nothing, she said to herself sternly, nothing, in the end, should be kept back from him. By her very frankness and openness of soul she would hold him and bind him the closer to her.

"It is being printed now--but not in my name!" she repeated, weakly, clinging to that one prospective act of redemption.

"I thought you would do it," he said, showing no surprise. "And I am glad of it, for your sake, dearest. I don't mind about the book; I do not want that. But it is *You*, the true *You*, that I want!" And as he said it his hand sought her hand once more.

"But I have done other things, oh, so many other things, that were--were ignoble, that were wrong!" she cried, pitifully, a terror of her past growing up within her.

"Do you love me?" he said, suddenly, turning to her.

"I would die for you, this day!" she said. And by the beauty and the sudden glory that swept over her face once more he knew her word was not to be doubted.

"Then the other things can never count!" he answered, kissing her tenderly on her cold cheek.

A cold wind blew up the river, and the dusk was falling. Their day was almost gone. Cordelia looked up at the darkening sky, and held her hands out before her.

"See," she said, "the snow-flakes!"

A few white flakes drifted and fluttered down between them; she caught at them with her hands, but they eluded her.

"Yes," he said, standing close beside her, happily, and gazing with her up into the darkening air. "It *is* snow, falling already!"

Then through the sober autumn air they walked slowly back to the hotel, arm in arm, and silent.

"I must be alone, dearest, for the rest of this day," she said, happily. He understood, and left her to her own woman's thoughts.

When she knew him to be safely in his own room she slipped stealthily down to the hotel telegraph-office and hurriedly wrote out a message for her New York publisher. It said:

"Substitute name John Hartley for Cordelia Vaughan on title-page of novel *The Unwise Virgins*. For this I agree to relinquish all royalty claims. Will explain later. Answer."

She signed the message and handed it to the operator with a slightly shaking hand, asking nervously how soon she could get a reply. There was no reason why she should not receive one in two hours, perhaps three hours, at the latest.

When that time had expired, and no answer came to her, she repeated the message, this time sending the despatch to Henry Slater's home address.

Late into the night she sat up in her room, frantically waiting for some word from him. As the hours dragged on she paced the little chamber in a fever of unrest, pausing and listening at every footstep that passed her door. Midnight came and went, and still no word arrived. Then she knew that there was but one thing for her to do.

In the gray of the morning, when Hartley and all the hotel were still sleeping, she called a carriage, and, hurrying to the railway station, caught the early morning express for Montreal, on her way to New York. It was no time for half measures.

Three hours later, when Hartley went down to breakfast, after a night of mysteriously depressing restlessness, he found awaiting him an incoherent little note from Cordelia. Bewildered, only after many readings he gathered from it that she had been called away because of some business tangle about which she would tell him later.

"If that isn't like her, the crazy child!" was Mrs. Spaulding's cry when she heard of it all, less disturbed in spirit than Hartley had expected.

And while, indeed, he was still pondering over his surprising note from her, Cordelia herself was speeding along past the old French settlements on the banks of the upper St. Lawrence, gazing absently out at the low-eaved little cottages, and desperately asking herself, again and again, if it would be too late.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ALTAR OF EMINENCE

Hate wrong, as a bull hates red;
Fight strong, till the wrong lies dead,
For to him, just God, the fight
Who smites for the sake of the right!

JOHN HARTLEY, "Juvenilia."

A woman's heart never breaks, but O how often it withers!--CORDELIA VAUGHAN, "Motherhood."

Cordelia's train crept into Montreal one hour and twenty minutes late, and it was already after three before she stepped out of the overheated car into the cool, crisp air of the station platform. She saw a uniformed attendant, and hurried to him at once.

"Can I catch the New York express?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, ma'm!" he answered, promptly.

Her heart gave a sudden great bound of joy; she was not yet too late; she felt that it was a good omen, that luck was with her.

"What time does it leave?" she asked, hurriedly.

"From the other station, ma'm, some time this evenin'!"

Her heart went down like lead. That meant hours more of suspense, hours more of waiting, and when time was so much to her!

She could never remember just how those dreary hours were passed. She had a dim recollection of walking, walking without a stop, along narrow and hilly little city streets, of turning restlessly stationward once more and pacing feverishly up and down platforms, with ghost-like trains coming in and going out, with ghost-like passengers hurrying this way and that way on every side of her. She heard the jangle of far-away bells, and the muffled voice of the guard calling the departing trains. She looked out at it all vaguely, and wondered if it would never end.

Once in the express for New York she felt tired and faint. She attempted to read, but it was useless. The rhythm of the speeding wheels seemed pulsing against her very brain itself. It seemed to pound, like a hammer on an anvil, and she repeated its cries again and again under her breath: "Hurry-Hurry, Hurry-Hurry, Hurry-Hurry!"

She called the porter and asked him to make up her berth. In the curtained, stifling gloom she flung herself down, in the forlorn hope that sleep would come to her tired eyes and wearied limbs. But that, too, was useless. She tossed from side to side in the hot berth, listening to the maddening rhythm of the speeding wheels' "Hurry-Hurry, Hurry-Hurry!"

She had known such nights before, but none had ever seemed so long. She raised the window-blind beside her, as she lay in the berth, and looked out. It was a clear, star-lit night. A great, lonely sea of black country with a fleeting light or two in the distance, seeming to make its blackness even lonelier, was all that she could distinguish. Toward the east she thought she saw a thin rind of pearl and pink on the horizon, and looked at her watch feverishly.

It was twenty-seven minutes to two. She shut out the night and the star-light, and listened once more to the pulsing rhythm of the car-wheels.

Then her thoughts went back to the happy week that lay behind her. She reviewed each day, hour by hour, and event by event. From that her restless mind leaped still farther back to the scene with Repellier, to that unspeakable hour of shame and despair. Then she went even farther back, to the very beginning, and step by step lived over her life, as she lay there, trying to shut out from her ears the maddening "Hurry-Hurry" of the wheels. She recalled the day that a tall, hollow-cheeked stranger came swinging up the path of her father's red-tiled home and inquired with his wistful smile if this was where the Rice who took in boarders lived. She remembered her sense of shame at her plain gingham dress, and how she had forgotten both shame and dress at the stranger's admiration of her yellow hair, twisted into a loose knot at the back of her head. "Why, child, it's a second Golden Fleece that should call for the outfit of a second Argo!"

he had said to her, as though speaking to a girl not yet in her teens. That speech and that moment had marked the turning of all her life's tide. She was no longer the happy and petted belle of a little Kentucky village. She was a woman with aspirations toward the larger world of which he seemed a harbinger, of the knowledge and power of which he seemed an apostle. From that day innocence and content fell from her, leaf by leaf. Yet she remembered how she had clung to the lonely invalid, how for weeks together they had wandered about that far-away land of clover meadows and blue-tinted grasses, and sunsets made golden with gentle frosts. She remembered how she had labored with him on his Great Book, how his cough had grown faster than his manuscript, and how he had called for her when he was dying, and entrusted to her all his precious work, and wrung from her frightened lips the promise that she would copy it out, word for word, and when that task was finished take it herself to a publisher. She remembered how he had turned, then, and died in peace. She remembered her weeks of secret toil, her long, strange, first journey to New York, her trembling visit to the publisher, how later he had sent for her, and made her his dazzling offer--so unconsciously bewildering, so unconsciously tragical--on condition that she discard the masculine *nom de plume* which he imagined a shrinking timidity had forced her to adopt, how he had enlarged on the advantages of the woman's name on the title-page, how he had unthinkingly paved the way for that first duplicity, how he was prepared to push the book, and in the end, he believed, make both her name and her fortune. She recalled that brief and most bitter struggle which took place within her, how she had gone back to her publisher still vacillating, how she had learned, when he had thrust his crisp, new check into her hand, how narrow one's ethical Rubicon can be, and how much one can suffer when once that narrow stream is crossed. She remembered the day she had discarded her own name, how one morning she was Frances Rice, or often plain Fanny Rice, and the next morning Cordelia Vaughan. She took the name from the Virginia branch of her family, after much hesitation, she recalled, because Valérie Vaughan, her cousin, had already identified that patronymic with the gentle art of letters, smiling bitterly at the thought that under that new name she had sprung into being as an artist as maturely and as miraculously as the goddess Minerva herself.

Then she let her busy thoughts dwell on her first triumphant year in New York, on many memories of the growing belief of her friends that she was the daughter of an old and aristocratic Kentucky family, of her interviews and her invitations, of her first intoxicating draught of publicity, of her gradual dismay as she found herself being forgotten, of her months of silent and agonized effort, that resulted in nothing, of her restless nights and her feverish days, when her spirit cried out for some balm for the itch which was burning and consuming her. She was no fool, she knew; she was as clever as other women. But some essential touch of imagination, some necessary element of creativeness, was not hers; and it had been imposed upon her to seek by sheer strategy and despairing strife that which came so lightly to the hand of others.

As she lay there alone in her rocking berth her withered and barren heart itself grew appalled at the thought of those years of smallness, of meanness, of deceit and duplicity, and endless lies. The enormity of her wrong-doing overwhelmed her. And the bitterest sting of all lay in the fact that so much of it was irreparable, that she had wronged not only the living, but the dead as well.

The one appeasing oasis in that arid desert of deceit and self-seeking was the memorial week she had journeyed back to the little Kentucky town of her childhood and there watched over the erection of a granite shaft beside the sadly neglected grave of a young Northerner who had once come so intimately into her girlhood life.

She was not all bad, not all bad, she cried out to herself, piteously! It was not yet too late. It might cost her much, but Love would show her the way. That old dead past should be wiped out. She would tell her husband everything. She would hold nothing back from him, and, with her slate once clean, from that day she would show him, by her devotion to him and his work, by her patient help, by her humility and her tenderness, how she could be good, as other women--as the best of other women.

Yet it would be better, she decided, on second thoughts, to wait until after their marriage. If he, too, should forsake her at the last moment she would have nothing left to her in all the world. No, she must cling to him, she said, whatever happened, at whatever cost. She needed him; she was not strong enough to fight her fight alone. For him, and with him, she could do it. But alone, by herself, she could not do it. She would go with him to Repellier and tell them everything. Repellier could do what he cared to, it would make little difference; other things, after that, would scarcely count. And she could reason out her answer and her excuses to the world later. Perhaps he might even be willing to let bygones be bygones, when he saw and understood the new turn things had taken. But on that one point she was decided--she would, some day, tell her husband everything.

Then her thoughts traveled lightning-like back to the present moment, and her one haunting fear crept up into the foreground of her consciousness. What if she should yet be too late! What if the die had already been cast? She felt that Hartley would never forgive her that last and bitterest lie. Why had she let her heart run away with her; why had she told him so soon? Why had she not made sure before she had capitulated so utterly? Even to have confessed and repented, even to have thrown herself to the utmost on his goodness and his generosity would have been safer. But

that chance now was gone.

Would she be too late? That was the question she asked herself again and again as the rhythmical "Hurry-Hurry" of the car-wheels smote on her ears once more. They used to tell her that she was lucky; she remembered it to her joy; she clung to the belief that luck would still be with her.

Cordelia had passed a sleepless night when the Montreal express drew rumbly down into the darkness of the Grand Central tunnel. She had found it impossible to eat, but a cup of strong coffee seemed to have refreshed her. The air was raw and cold as she finally stepped out into the vaulted gloom of the depot, and her breath hung in little white clouds as she pushed her way hurriedly toward the carriage-stand, where a pack of yelping and barking cab-men surrounded her, like hounds about a timorous quarry. She stepped into a public automobile, and started at once for the office of her publisher.

As she turned into the early morning quietness of Fifth Avenue, and the old, familiar, intangible smell of the city stole up into her nostrils, it seemed as though she had stepped back into life and the world again. Had she not dreamed a dream, she asked, as the very intangibility of that city odor crept up to her, teasing to be remembered and named. Here was the world where she had lived and fought and worked, here was where her sterner and wider and darker life had opened out before her. Here she had passed her happiest and her most miserable moments. That lost week in the sleepy old northern city on the St. Lawrence seemed mockingly unsubstantial. Which was the real, she asked herself, as she rolled down the familiar, smooth asphalt. And which, from that time on, was to be the unreal?

Her knees were shaking under her and her heart was beating tumultuously as she stepped into the offices of "Slater & Slater," and inquired for the senior member of that firm.

A chubby-faced office-boy, opening envelopes with a sharp steel paper-knife, was the only person to be seen. Mr. Slater had not come down yet; would not be there before half-past nine. Would she wait, and, if so, would she take a chair.

Cordelia could not wait; she left word that she would be back in half an hour, with a request that Mr. Slater keep himself disengaged until she saw him, as her business was most important. It was, indeed, vital, she tried to impress on the boy, who seemed, nevertheless, to give more attention to his envelopes than to his visitor.

Once back in her cab she instructed the driver to turn up the avenue and drive as far as the Plaza and back. At Twenty-ninth Street, in response to a sudden whim, she called out for him to turn east, and as her motor-cab slowly glided past the Church of the Transfiguration, the Little Church Around the Corner, she looked with veiled yet with curiously alert eyes at that diminutive edifice, at the ivy on the walls, at the garden-like greenness between its doors and the street, at the Gothic arches showing through bare tree-branches, and at the little roofed gateway, through which so many happy hearts, in their time, had passed out and been forgotten.

Would it be too late, she asked herself again, with a sudden, new-born passion of restlessness.

Mr. Henry Slater received Cordelia with a smile that was both conciliating and commiserative. This was partly because of the firm line of her thin and tightly closed lips and a latent fire that shone in her eyes, and partly because of the ghastliness of her pale and worn and withered face, as she stood between him and the chair he had blandly put out for her to take.

"You received my telegram?" she asked, her voice dry, trembling in spite of herself.

"Yes, I did," he answered, suavely, "but not, unfortunately, until this morning. I leave the office at four in the afternoon, you know, and every Thursday I am at our printing-plant at Newark. But in connection with your wire, Miss Vaughan, while----"

"Have you done what I asked?"

Mr. Slater's smile waned and flickered and quite went out; he was beginning to lose patience with his eccentric authoress.

"Your request, Miss Vaughan, was an impossible one."

"But it *must* be done!" she cried, passionately.

He shrugged his shoulders, ambiguously.

"And it *shall* be done!" she cried again, even more passionately. Then she added, in a calmer voice, watching his face: "It must be done, though I surrender everything to you, royalties, copyright, *everything!*"

"Your book is out, Miss Vaughan!"

His words sounded to her like the snap of a steel trap. She said nothing, and made no move, but looked up at him, dazed.

"In fact," he went on, "it has already received three reviews, in response to my advance copies. And I might add that its career will be phenomenal, simply phenomenal! Here are three clippings from yesterday's papers; all of them, as you can see, highly favorable--in fact, enthusiastic. What more could you ask for? Indeed, you are *made*, Miss Vaughan--*made!*"

She took the three long ribbons of paper with unconscious hands, still holding them at arm's length before her. Her eyes were still on Mr. Henry Slater. Something in her look made him nervous. He smiled slightly, bowed, and waited for her to speak.

"You are made, Miss Vaughan--*made!*" he repeated, with simulated joyousness. Still she did not speak.

He turned to his desk with an expression which was intended, perhaps, to denote that he was a very busy man, and that he himself had his troubles. Then the shadow of a frown crept over his usually well-controlled features. But still the woman with the ribbons of papers did not move.

He called one of his assistants.

"Henry, show Miss Vaughan to her carriage, please--Miss Vaughan, this lady here, Henry. I think she is not well!"

She had dreamed her dream.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESINAT IN PISCEM, MULIER FORMOSA SUPERNE

... A life

By love's black frost all blighted and foregone,
Glad that it suffers not; with sorrow in
Its poor thin laughter sadder far than tears.
Ah, more than pain in that abysmal breast
Each broken, dark, irresolute delight!

JOHN HARTLEY, "Street Dust."

To wear love's brand you must bear love's burn.--"The Silver Poppy."

It was the second morning after Cordelia's seemingly whimsical return to New York that Hartley awoke in an indeterminate gray vapor of impending evil. A feeling of chill nausea crept over him as he dressed, and, in a sudden fit of weakness, he fell back on the bed, filled with the strong man's unreasoning, weak terror of illness.

He ate no breakfast whatever, and, as the morning wore miserably away and his torpor of mind and body seemed to increase, he at last ventured dizzily out into the streets, looking up and down the little French-Canadian city for the sign-board of an English doctor. He found one, finally; and in response to his ring a homesick young surgeon just over from London, after cheerily pounding him about and casually looking down his throat, handed him an antiseptic gargle for tonsillitis, and then talked for an hour of home, of the London music-halls, and of his hatred for the Colonies.

When Hartley made his escape from the sickeningly odorous, drug-scented little surgery, a new irrational hatred of the subdued, bustling, big-roomed hotel took hold of him. Following a sudden impulse, he bought a pair of heavy walking-shoes and a little leather knapsack, madly determined by a few days of open-air tramping through the valley of the St. Lawrence to walk himself once more into health and strength.

He had covered five dreary miles of what seemed endless, undulating dust and gravel when he tottered weakly to the whitewashed palings of a *habitant's* cottage and gave up. Crawling and staggering to the door, he incoherently cried for water.

The swarthy, keen-eyed little French doctor who, two hours later, came bustling to his straw-mattress bedside, grew suddenly serious as he bent over his stalwart patient, while the patient himself, as he sank from soft gray heights of silence into black pits of torturing desolation, listened languidly to a thin, far-away voice that seemed to be telling somebody that he was in a bad way, with black diphtheria, and that above all things he must be kept quiet, and must not be moved. It was the last declaration that left the sick man so dreamily content. He felt that he could rest there forever, almost--that nothing better could come to him than to lie there for countless years, resting.

When, three days later, the Spauldings returned to New York with no news of Hartley or his whereabouts, Cordelia went through a second day of silent torture. She wrote to him twice, and, receiving no reply, telegraphed in Henry Spaulding's name to Hartley's Quebec hotel for information. No definite news could be given her, so she wrote to him still again, imploring him to come back at once, saying that she needed him, that she had much to confess to him and ask of him. In the course of a few weeks her different letters were returned to her, unopened.

In those first days of silence and suspense she vacillated miserably between two fears: one, that Hartley had already learned the truth about The Unwise Virgins; the other, that Repellier had at last intervened and written to him the actual history of The Silver Poppy. But in some way, she knew, he had found her out.

At the end of a long week of tormenting uncertainty, in sheer despair she flung herself into the currents of activity that rose about her, like a hundred inviting Lethes, with the first success of The Unwise Virgins. For the triumph of that volume did not long remain a matter of doubt. Gaily designed posters, clustering flamboyantly about bill-boards and blind-walls, about street-cars and elevated-railway platforms, about even urban and suburban ash-barrels, told of its merits and its unprecedented sales. More than one of the larger department stores gave the volume a table by itself,

above which hung a huge photographic print of the authoress, showing the frailest of white shoulders emerging from a swathing cloud of lace-work, and above them a face with femininely appealing eyes and the pensive shadow of a half-bitter and yet half-girlish smile. An English edition was soon called for, and was more than moderately successful, while even *The Silver Poppy* itself appeared in a new binding, to reappear still again as a newspaper serial, and to bring yet a little more publicity to the young authoress, in the very heyday of a fame for which it was commonly said she was at heart most contemptuous.

Yet Cordelia flung herself into it all as into a cooling stream, drugging herself during the following month or two with an incessant, opiate rush of activity that, spread thinly, might easily have irrigated a less tumultuous lifetime. The newspapers were full of her doings; one day she was winning the prize in a world's beauty competition; another day she was to go on the stage and star in a dramatized version of her new book; and at still another time she was to return to the South and devote the rest of her life to a cycle of novels dealing comprehensively with American national life. Hanchett was commissioned to paint a portrait of her for the Southern Women's Club; and, while she remained a guest in the little, yellow-tinted study on Seventy-second Street, there was never a day when either the yellow Victoria or the more massive brougham of the Spauldings was not in use. But she had grown strangely averse to many of her former friends, and Mrs. Spaulding soon realized that the older feeling no longer held them together, though, indeed, it was not until after the first announcements of Cordelia's proposed lecturing tour that the yellow-tinted study was actually deserted by her. When the author of *The Unwise Virgins* did migrate, she sought apartments in one of the handsomest of those lower Fifth Avenue private hotels, consecrated, in the words of Miss Short, "to white-gloved attendants, lap-dogs, and opulent valetudinarianism." Cordelia felt that there must be no shadow of excuse for her enemies--and how many of them she had!--to claim that the social tide had turned against her. The cost of these apartments frightened her a little at first; but until they had been well photographed and the views in turn reproduced in the evening newspapers, with appropriate descriptions--until, indeed, she actually started out on her hurried and yet much-heralded lecturing tour--she kept them up sumptuously, with a studious recklessness of expense, receiving as her guests many long-haired men and many heavy-jawed women, bristlingly aggressive of intellect and eminence. Yet all of them, in her heart, she knew she despised, though again and again she found it useless to fight against her new strange dread of old friends, bitterly realizing that once more her tree-like growth to fame must be marked by its new and ever-widening circle.

Then came the lecture tour itself. It was preceded by a campaign of advertising, artfully laid out by her manager, and in the end proved so marked a financial success that Cordelia herself was assured--whatever else might happen--of a generous competency for the remainder of her natural life. And many times, brooding over and making the most of this fact, she thought of those earlier and sadly uncertain days when she had frugally washed out her own towel and hung it to dry before her little studio window.

If the lecture itself--prepared by an expert in the employ of her manager, and dealing gravely, yet with flashes of facetiousness, with *The American Woman*--was a somewhat qualified success in the larger Eastern cities, effete tending to a flippant view of life's more vital problems, Cordelia's tour through the South, and also the West, partook not a little of the nature of a Roman triumph.

Not that this triumph was without its trials, from the blunt suggestion of her manager that her next lecture deal with *How I Wrote My First Novel*, to the long and agonizing night of nervous collapse after the ordeal of her first appearance on the platform. Though frail in body, she could withstand much, and was seldom ill. But the ordeal of that first lecture had left her white and shattered and limp; and it was then, the first time for many a long day, that she gave herself over to tears. She wept long and bitterly, and walked the room of her hotel till morning. Then she sent for a doctor, and clung to that kindly eyed man, when he came, with the pitiful forlornness of a lost and homesick child.

In many of the towns, particularly in the West, she became the guest of different women's clubs, and sometimes after her lecture a reception was held, and often hundreds of admiring and anxious-eyed women would press up to shake her hand. Through all this she carried herself well, and with a certain dignity. But many of those who met her at once remarked how different she was from her pictures, and asked, perhaps a little bewildered, just how young--or how old--she was.

When she lectured at Lexington her father came in secret--for she had written to him pleading with him not to do so--to hear his wonderful daughter, whom even he himself had never quite understood. And when, toward the close of the lecture, the sound of quiet sobs rose from the back of the audience, there was a dramatic moment when the woman on the platform stopped speaking and caught hurriedly at the little table beside her for support.

It was in her own State, too, that she delivered her much-talked-of address on Motherhood before the Four-O'clock Club--an address which later appeared in a tiny *edition de luxe*, and was looked on by certain of her admirers as the most tender and most human utterance of all her career.

There appeared but one small cloud on the horizon of all that open success, remarkable for the unexpected strangeness of its appearance, and notable because of the equal abruptness of its passing.

It was during the dull and quiescent days following the alleviatingly active weeks of the lecture tour. Cordelia felt that she would go mad if she remained longer with nothing to take up her mind. Her restless feet had worn a dull pathway in the pile of the over-gaudy carpet that ornamented her soberly magnificent apartment-hotel. In despair, she turned once more to literature, and once more alone and most bitterly she struggled to wrest from a reluctant Muse some solitary bay-leaf of her own, some final shred of laurel to which no other hand might lay claim, aspiring to climb once more to the pinnacle of that most delectable mountain about whose dangerous fringe she had now fretted for many months.

It was a courageous struggle. But it proved a futile one. Then casting desperately about her, in a new-born terror of helplessness, hidden away on the obscure shelf of an obscure library she stumbled across a badly bound, age-yellowed little volume which bore the title *The Spirit Child*. It had been conceived and written by one Florence Hitch, of Boston, and dedicated to "all seekers after Truth and the Spirit." Could there be, Cordelia asked herself, another such book so obviously dead and forgotten!

It had, indeed, been lost to the world, unremembered this many a year. But it still remained the first-born of that aspiring heart which had once conceived and laid it in the lap of unapproving mankind. When, in the despair on her new-found sterility, Cordelia made not ungenerous use of that faded and grotesquely bound little volume, during the creation of her own remarkable spiritualistic story which appeared in one of the Sunday papers under the title of *A Daughter of Dream*, the fair snapper-up of unconsidered trifles had anticipated no slightest word of reproof. But that elderly maiden lady, Miss Florence Hitch, at once beheld and recognized her first-born, stripped as it was of its original swaddling-clothes, and with a maternal and quite natural fury proceeded to fight to the end for her own. It was a spirited and moving struggle, in which the daily press at once took issue, and though Miss Hitch mysteriously and unexpectedly subsided at the end of a two-weeks' warfare, and in carefully dictated phrases attempted to explain away the entire matter as a singular and interesting example of literary parallelism, lingering echoes of that disturbing explosion came to Cordelia from quarters least expected. And those were most unhappy days, when she sat waiting for her daily envelope of carefully labeled articles and news items from her clipping agency, among which she lingered for hours, like a pale dryad amid the thickly falling leaves of autumn.

One November night of constant rain, when she could not sleep, her brooding fancy half conceived the thing she was. John Hartley had once told her of that strangest of sights, a salmon-run. She felt that she must live a life like one of those poor creatures, that she must fight, and push, and shoulder, and battle ever up some dark river whose tide was ever against her--must struggle madly on, day by day, losing day by day a little of herself, shoal by shoal and rapid by rapid shedding a little of what had been best and beautiful in her, still panting and pushing on for those unknown and cruelly distant head waters of peace, into which she might finally creep a tattered and half-naked, hideous thing, stripped to the vertebra, a toy of a passionate instinct stronger than her own will, and sweeter, perhaps, than her own life.

Yet rest and peace was the one thing which she reached out for, in those troubled days, with thin and futile arms, feeling, even as she did so, that it could never be attained.

She at last determined, in a sudden fury of daring, that she would endure it all no longer, crying out within herself that life owed her more than it was giving. As a result of that new spirit of audaciousness, she appeared early the next day at the studio of Repellier; yet even as she stepped into the familiar, high-ceilinged room she quailed inwardly, and found herself with little to say. She was dressed in a tightly fitting whip-cord gown--her eye for outward apparel had in no way dimmed--and on her breast she wore a huge bunch of English violets. Repellier's quick eye noticed that her cheeks were rouged, and that a touch of crimson had been added to her usually pale lips. During all her brief visit she appeared ill at ease--so ill at ease that the kind-hearted old Repellier did not have the courage to speak of anything but the lightest commonplaces, even showing her his newer canvases and, from his windows, pointing out to her the city muffled in rain.

When she rose to say good-by he went with her to the door, wondering why she had not spoken, and marveling at the change in her. From his open door he gazed after her, musingly. It was at the top of the stairs that she turned hesitatingly back.

"Mr. Repellier!"

He waited for her to speak, though some subterranean medium seemed to carry her words to him before they were uttered.

"Do you ever," she hesitated, "I mean have you ever heard anything of--of Mr. Hartley?"

The picture of a humbled and half-wistful suppliant, of a woman withered and broken, weighed down by the monotony and starvation of an empty life, yet consumed by a still insatiable greed, of a being who had grown old unwillingly, clinging there weakly to his baluster-rail and looking back at him through the half-light of a gloomy hallway, photographed itself indelibly on Repellier's memory, as there flashed over him the incongruous image of Hanchett's new portrait of her, hung but a week before in the hall of the Southern Women's Club, where, he knew, she was to look down for all time from her great gilt frame, beautiful to the eye, frail and tender, mysteriously seductive, the drooping eyes luminous and mutely pleading, the mouth pensive, almost pathetically weak in its excess of timorous femininity, the proudly poised head weighed down with its heavy burden of golden-red hair, the whole figure touched with a fervor hinting at the inner fire consuming the all too frail flesh. It was AEschylean, Repellier felt, in its piercing irony.

"Yes, I have heard from Hartley," he answered, slowly, as she raised a suddenly vivid face to him. "He has been ill, and alone, for weeks."

"Ill!" she cried, in a hard, thin voice; and a baffled life seemed to ebb away with that one little cry. Through the half-lights the woman did not move.

"For six weeks the poor fellow lay ill with malignant diphtheria, in a *habitant's* cottage, below Quebec," Repellier went on, more compassionately. "His strength did not come back to him, so they advised him to take the sea voyage, on a freighter, round to New York. They had a rough time of it, and they landed him here a little worse than when he crawled aboard."

"And then?"

"He's been strengthening up in a Brooklyn hospital--only last week he sent for me. I might as well tell you, Miss Vaughan, that he wrote to you three times, from Canada, and that only yesterday, on his way to his rooms to pack up his things, he picked up a copy of *The Unwise Virgins!*"

"And then--then you told him everything?" she whispered, tensely.

The old artist went over to her, and placed a hand gently on her arm.

"I told him only what I had to; the rest, I fear, he guessed." She drew back from him quickly.

"It was better for you both, I know now," he said, with his hand still touching her rigid arm. "And some day I think you will both forgive me for it!"

She turned from him where he stood, and groped her way blindly down the long stairs, her brain reeling with the mockery of it all, while her heart still cried blindly out for the man who had crowned her with his love, as she frantically told herself that she must still find him, and that in some devious way it might not yet be too late.



CHAPTER XXX

THE WORLD AND THE MAN

We dared so long, and doubted not,
The saddest is that you should fail
Now all the battle has been fought,
And doubt, or daring, no avail!

JOHN HARTLEY, "Pale Souls."

It is the ebb-tide of love that shows the mud-flats of the soul.--"The Silver Poppy."

For two days Cordelia drove irrationally up and down beneath the windows of Hartley's apartments, hiding timorously back in the shadows of the curtained brougham, yet every alert moment watching the crowded sidewalks and carriage-lined drive, half-hoping that through some vague operation of the ionic of affection she might still find a way back to him, and to the life she had so miserably lost.

Then, as the second day of her tacit search wore fruitlessly on, she once more grew audacious with the last courage of desperation. Driving briskly up to the apartment-house which had been the pivot of her dreary two-days' reconnaissance, she alighted and peremptorily asked if she might see the rooms recently occupied by Mr. Hartley.

The clerk glanced at her sharply, for a moment not recognizing the white, weary-looking face under its heavy veil but partly caught up. His hesitation was only momentary, for, immediately he had placed the familiar, flute-like contralto voice, he obsequiously called over a brass-buttoned attendant.

"Mr. Hartley, by the way, releases his rooms to-morrow," amiably commented the clerk, as he reached for the keys.

"Yes, I know!" murmured Cordelia, impassively, yet with a quailing heart, struggling to hide the tremor of dull fear that was shaking her. She saw that she must act with decision.

"I wonder," she went on, evenly, "if Mr. Hartley explained to you my intention of occupying these rooms once more--until the lease runs out, at any rate?"

"He simply sent word that he would come for his things to-morrow, and that you would take possession of the furniture later."

"Yes, of course! But I should like to put things in order, at once." She turned to go, but looked back, toying nervously with the keys.

"You say Mr. Hartley comes for his trunks to-morrow?"

"Yes, Miss Vaughan, to-morrow afternoon."

Hartley hesitated before the familiar door, as he slipped his pass-key into the lock. He knew that it would be for the last time, that once more the continuity of life was to be rudely snapped. His thoughts went back to another day, wearily, when he had closed the door on those same rooms and hurried away careless, hopeful, light-hearted. He thought, too, as he stood there, with what different feelings, at different times, he had passed in and out of those same apartments.

Within, he expected everything to be dust and neglect and disorder. To his surprise there was no sign of this; the very empty quietness of the rooms seemed still touched with an unknown presence. Everything had been put carefully to rights, the furniture and rugs were spotless, the curtains were looped back airily, clusters of freshly cut flowers stood on his desk and on his mantelpiece.

He looked about him, and sighed heavily, pacing the rooms impatiently for a bitter minute or two. Then, with an effort, he pulled himself together, and fell to hurriedly packing his trunks. A sudden new-born fever to get away from the place swept over him; he had made a grievous mistake in ever coming back; he was reaping his own reward of corroding memories. No, no, he told himself, he had no wish to see her again. She was like the dead to him; she belonged to the

ghost-like past. He had no resentment against her now; he felt no hatred for her. All that he seemed to feel was a dubious pain, dull and faint and far-away, a pain for all those days he had blotted out and cut off from his actual life--as men are said to feel an ache in a limb that has been amputated.

When he had packed his many-labeled steamer-trunk--brooding absently over a half-obliterated label bearing the word "Turin," a word that conjured up strange memories for him--he stowed away the last of what belongings he cared to take with him in his larger box, inwardly rejoicing that he was carrying away nothing of hers, or nothing that should remind him of her, and the life of which she stood the center. He was forcing down the lid of his trunk when the sharp, metallic click of a key in the door-lock startled him into sudden uprightness.

The door opened slowly, timorously, and Cordelia stood before him, with her hand on the knob.

She looked at him in silence, studying his impassive face with pleading, unwavering eyes, seeming to drink in every detail of feature and expression, searching for something she had, perhaps, half-hoped to find there, startled, too, at the change in him.

"John," she said, in a whisper, taking a step toward him. He looked at her, unrelaxed, without moving.

"John," she whispered once more, pitifully, creeping a step or two closer to him, and stopping again.

She was dressed all in black, and wore a heavy black-plumed hat that framed the white oval of her face; it was a face that looked tired and wan and touched with the twilight of lost happiness. In her hand she carried a great cluster of lilies of the valley. Their sickly, heavy, penetrating fragrance surrounded her and floated in with her, until Hartley himself could smell it. For all the rest of her days the odor of lilies of the valley was hateful to her.

She stood there for a moment, still hesitating, and then turned and closed the door, which had remained open behind her.

"You--you are not going away?" she gasped.

He was glad, inwardly, that it was all definitely settled, that no mischance could now turn him back, that even his own hand could no longer bar his outward way.

"I'm going to England to-morrow," he said, impassively. He stooped and turned the key in his steamer-trunk with a movement of determined conclusiveness that did not escape her.

"You are going," she echoed, "forever?"

She crept toward him, meekly, wistfully; she touched him with her hand. He was sallow and shrunken, with new, hard lines about the once boyish mouth; but to the woman who clutched at his arm, he was a lover clothed in beauty and a liberating angel of redemption in one.

"John," she said, in a low half-sob, "you won't--you can't leave me, without a word?"

He drew back from her; he, too, was humbled and broken, but the pride of his youth and the pride of his race still clung to him.

"There is nothing for me to say," he answered, coldly. He asked himself fiercely why he had half-heartedly wished, so many times, to see her but once, before going.

With a sudden impetuous movement she ran to him and flung her arms about him, clinging to him, panting and shaken.

"I love you; oh, I love you!" she cried out, passionately, locking each thin arm about his resisting body. He no longer tried to force her away, and she clung to him and cried out again and again: "I love you, my own, I love you!"

Yet he stood unmoved, feeling as though she had long since drained to the bottom his deepest springs of emotion; now he could neither care nor resist.

"I have done wrong," she cried to him, feverishly; "I have made mistakes, and I have suffered, and grown wise! But see, through it all, how humble I have come to be! See how I crawl back to you! It was all vile, that old life of mine, I know!--but I only stumbled into it at first, by the littlest, most miserable chance; and I had to keep it up, to the end! And you couldn't understand that old, ceaseless craving for what it brought, and how the passion for that world they thrust me into made me half-blind and half-drunk, and how I had to keep on, and on, and on!"

She tried to draw his face down to her own.

"If you knew what, or how, I have suffered! If you only knew--you'd forgive me! If you could understand how I love

you now you would take me back, you would say that never in all the world would you find another love like mine! Oh, it isn't too late! It isn't too late! We have our lives still before us; we have both been living on the north side of life too long; we have been missing all the sun, and warmth, and color. And you can save me from myself; you were saving me from myself! With you I could begin over again, from the first!"

He broke away from her then, with a vehemence that she had not looked for in him, but still she went on, feverishly: "Oh, you are strong, where I am faltering and weak. I *want* to be honest, and good, and upright--but from the first they wouldn't let me! Oh, they wouldn't let me!"

"You have lied to me!" he cried out to her, harshly. "You lied to me from the first. You lied to me in the very hour when I asked you for all your open trust. Your life has been a lie! You are a lie--a living lie!"

She tried to muffle the words with her hand, but his passion swept him on.

"What you are now you'll be to the end! You have gone through life a cheat, an impostor, and you'll be one to the last! Even now you are acting a lie, even *now*, with me!"

He knew it was not the truth he spoke, but he felt safer after flinging it at her.

"No, no," she cried back. "*This* is no lie! What woman would come and say what I have said? I couldn't ever act a part with you! I have no one but you--I have no one but you!"

As he flung her from him, in his own sudden terror of himself, she fell back and crouched on his trunk, rocking her frail body weakly back and forth, and sobbing over and over again: "Let me go back with you! Oh, have mercy on me, my own, and let me go back with you!"

Then she crept up to him on her knees, and clung to him with her thin, white hands, her eyes streaming with tears.

"I have friends," she went on, hysterically. "I have power and influence! I will work for you; I will slave for you! I will help you on, to the end; I will *make* you, my own! Only *love* me, love me! I need your love! You have taught me what it means, and I must have it! See, see how humbled I am, here, on my knees to you!"

With a sudden passionate movement he seized her drooping head between his hands and looked down long and searchingly into her white, tear-stained, up-turned face. His penetrating glance took note, for the first time, of the golden tint in the iris of her gray-green eyes, of the golden tint in her face itself, as if pale gold had been infused under some translucent shell of rose-white. Something in its reckless, wan beauty mounted to his brain intoxicatingly, and with a gasp he broke away from her again. As he fell back from her touch, his foot crushed her copy of *The Silver Poppy*, and he looked down at it, liberated, remembering how he had flung it there from among his own books, when he had stumbled unexpectedly upon it as upon the hideous sloughed skin of a snake. Intuitively, as she watched him, the woman at his feet saw her last flickering glimmer of hope die away, and then, in her utter despair, she beat her forehead with her hands and flung herself down and sobbed out brokenly that the whole world was against her, that he had trapped and betrayed her into loving him, and that he, and he alone, could save her.

Then, seeing him still obdurate and unmoved, she fell to beating the floor with her clenched fists, raving insanely at his cruelty, imploring him to have pity on her. And again, as her impotent passion wore itself out, she lay there sobbing weakly, while he still stood above her, gazing out at the wheeling sea-gulls, into the blue distance beyond the lower Hudson.

Then a bell rang sharply, and she sat up, limp and exhausted, wiping the tears from her swollen face.

Hartley went to the door; a breath of relieving fresh air seemed to break in on him as he opened it. Two uniformed expressmen stood outside, waiting for his baggage. They had witnessed tearful farewells before, and their faces were respectfully expressionless, like masks, while they lifted the larger trunk out through the door and down the hallway.

Cordelia crept brokenly over to the window where Hartley stood, her shaking hands moving and feeling hesitatingly about his averted shoulders, as the hands of the blind do.

"Only kiss me--once!" she whispered, quietly, with a sudden white calm sweeping over her face. "Kiss me--once!"

She lifted her wet face, with its tumbled red-gold hair, up to his. Her eyes were closed, and she clung swaying to his coat-sleeves, waiting. He looked down at her, swept away from her by a sudden alienating, dispiriting wave of pity, and kissed her with a kiss that seemed to leave her shrouded and coffined.

"Now *go*! Oh, *go*!" she cried out to him quickly, with her face still uplifted, and her eyes still closed.

He turned away from her and crossed the room slowly, waiting to close the door after the expressmen stoically carrying

down his remaining trunk. He felt, in that last minute, as he passed out, that she was richer by an indeterminate something that he himself had lost, although the sound of her broken sobbing crept out to him through even the closed door.

THE END.