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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Source Text

Original work: The Four Million; The Trimmed Lamp, and Other Stories of the Four Million; The Voice of the City; Whirligigs; Roads of Destiny; Waifs and Strays [Part 1]
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O. Henry, *Selected Short Stories by O. Henry* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

CONTENTS

The Gift of the Magi

Part 1

Della counted the money again, though she already knew the number by heart. One dollar and eighty-seven cents lay in her hand and on the little table before her, and sixty cents of it was in pennies. Those pennies had not come easily. She had saved them one by one, after careful talk with the grocer, the butcher, and the vegetable man, and each coin seemed to hold a little bit of shame and effort. Still, when she counted the money for the third time, the total did not change, and Christmas was waiting at the door of the next day.

She sat very still for a moment, as if quietness itself might produce one more coin. But nothing happened. The room stayed poor, the light stayed weak, and the money stayed small. Then the pain inside her rose too fast to hold back, and she threw herself down on the worn little couch and cried. It was not a graceful cry, and it was not short. It was the kind of cry that comes when a person has planned, hoped, counted, and tried, and still cannot reach the thing that matters most.

When the first storm of tears had begun to pass, the little flat seemed to show itself more clearly. It was a furnished home, eight dollars a week, and every part of it looked tired. Down below, near the entrance, there was a letter box that seemed to have forgotten what letters were for, and an electric bell that did not ring when anyone touched it. On the card by the door was written the name “Mr. James Dillingham Young,” but even that grand name looked as if harder days had rubbed some of the shine away. Once, when money had come more freely, “Dillingham” had stood proudly there, but now the weekly pay had fallen, and the long name itself seemed too costly for such a narrow life.

Yet when James Dillingham Young came home, none of that grandness mattered upstairs. To Della he was not “Mr. James Dillingham Young.” He was simply Jim. When he opened the door, she ran to him, put her arms around him, and called him by that short, warm name that belonged only to love. The room was poor, his coat was old, and the future was uncertain, but in that flat there was

still real affection. That was why the small heap of money hurt her so much. A woman can bear many things for herself, but she does not bear them calmly when they stand between her and a gift for the man she loves.

At last Della sat up and dried her face. She took up the powder rag and touched her cheeks, not because she felt cheerful, but because the day was moving on and sadness could not be allowed to ruin everything. Then she went to the window and looked out. The world beyond the glass matched her thoughts. A grey cat moved along a grey fence in a grey yard under a grey sky, and the whole afternoon seemed poor in the same quiet way that the room was poor.

Tomorrow would be Christmas. She had been saving for months, watching every cent, refusing little pleasures, and keeping one bright thought alive in her mind. She would buy Jim something fine. Not something loud, not something foolish, and not something cheap that pretended to be worth more than it was. She wanted something true and simple and good, something that would suit him because it had the same kind of worth that he had. But now the money lay before her like a cruel joke. One dollar and eighty-seven cents could not buy the gift she had imagined through so many careful days.

She turned from the window and looked around the room with restless eyes. Between the two windows there hung a long narrow mirror, the kind that does not give one whole clear picture at once. A thin person could move a little, look from one strip to the next, and slowly gather together the full image. Della had learned how to do that. She stepped before it now, with the quickness of someone driven by worry into action, and studied herself with unusual attention.

Her face had gone pale after crying, but there was a new brightness in her eyes. It was not happiness. It was the sharp light of a mind that has suddenly seen one possible road. For a few seconds she did not move. Then, with hands that were fast and almost rough from fear, she pulled out the pins and let her hair fall. Down it came, brown and shining, soft and heavy, until it ran over her like living water. It fell below her knees and wrapped her in colour and richness that the room itself did not possess.

In that home there were two things of which the young husband and wife

were deeply proud. One was Jim's gold watch, a family watch that had come down from his father and his grandfather before him. The other was Della's hair. If some great queen, rich with jewels, had lived across the narrow space behind the house, Della might have laughed to think that her own hair was finer than any jewels the queen could show. If some great king with cellars full of treasure had been the owner of the building, Jim might have taken out his watch just to enjoy the thought that even a king could envy it. Their possessions were few, but those two things stood above the rest.

Della gathered up her hair again and held it for a moment in both hands. She knew its beauty well, because Jim loved it and because she herself had felt, more than once, that it made her look almost grand in spite of the poor room and old clothes. Slowly she twisted it up once more and pinned it into place. Then she stood still, listening to her own heart. The thought she had seen in the mirror had now become clear. It frightened her. It also pulled at her with the force of necessity.

She walked once across the room and back again. She looked at the coins. She looked at the old couch, the shabby carpet, the weak winter light. Then she thought of Jim coming home tired, with no new overcoat, no gloves against the cold, and still carrying himself with that quiet dignity she loved in him. She imagined his face if she had nothing to give him on Christmas. No, she told herself at once, that could not happen. A gift must be found, and if the money in her hand was not enough, then something else must be turned into money.

The idea now stood before her plainly, and because it stood plainly it became easier to act. Fear remained, but delay would only make fear larger. She put on her old brown jacket. She took up her old brown hat. The clothes were plain and already worn, but she fastened them with a kind of brave hurry, as if movement could keep her from thinking too much. Then, with a last quick look around the room that seemed to hold all her love and all her poverty together, Della opened the door, hurried down the stairs, and stepped out into the cold street.

Part 2

Della stopped before a sign that read, “Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds.” She ran up one flight of stairs so quickly that she had to stand still at the top and catch her breath. Her heart was beating hard, not only from the stairs, but from the thing she had come to do. The woman who opened the door did not look warm or soft or rich in any charming way. She was large, pale, cold, and businesslike, and she seemed to care no more about beauty than a butcher cares about flowers.

“Will you buy my hair?” Della asked at once, because if she waited she might lose her courage. Madame Sofronie looked at her with quick, practical eyes and said, “I buy hair. Take off your hat and let me look at it.” Della pulled off the hat, and her brown hair fell down again in a bright wave. Madame lifted it in her hand, weighed it with the skill of a person who had done this many times before, and named the price in a flat voice. “Twenty dollars,” she said, as though she were speaking about potatoes or old cloth.

“Give it to me quick,” Della answered. She did not ask for more. She did not stand there making a sad speech. She wanted the thing finished before her heart could turn weak inside her. So the bargain was made at once, and a little later she was out in the street again with short hair, twenty dollars more in her hand, and a strange lightness around her head that did not feel like freedom.

The world seemed different now. The air touched her neck more sharply, and every step reminded her that a part of her had been cut away. But she did not let herself stop and grieve over it. There was work to do, and Christmas was very near. If she had sold her hair, then the gift for Jim must be worthy of that loss, or the whole brave act would seem empty and foolish.

So she went from shop to shop, looking into windows, stepping inside, asking questions, and moving on again. She saw things that were pretty, things that were bright, and things that were costly, but many of them were too showy for Jim, and some were too weak, too thin, or too false. She wanted nothing that only looked valuable from a distance. She wanted something honest, simple, and strong, because that was the kind of man Jim was. She knew well that his old gold watch deserved something better than the worn leather strap by which he kept it.

Della had often thought of that watch. It was not only gold. It carried time from older days, from Jim's father and his grandfather before him. But Jim was shy about showing it in company because the old leather strap seemed too poor beside such a fine thing. She had felt this many times without saying it aloud. And now she was hunting through the city for the one thing that could rest against that watch without making it ashamed.

At last she found it. It was a watch chain, and the moment she saw it she knew the search was over. It was not wide or heavy or covered with foolish decoration. It was clean, quiet, and full of real worth. It seemed to say nothing loud, but to say one true thing very clearly, and that was exactly what she wanted for Jim. The chain looked as if it belonged to him before he had even touched it.

She asked the price and found that it cost twenty-one dollars. For one brief second she felt almost dizzy, because after all her care she would be left with so little. But the chain was right, and nothing else would do. She paid the money without hesitation, and then all she had left in the world for Christmas was eighty-seven cents. Yet she felt richer walking away with that small box in her hand than she had felt when the twenty dollars lay in her purse.

She went home more slowly now. The hard part had been done, and thought had room to return. She began to imagine Jim opening the gift. She pictured his quiet face changing, first with surprise and then with pleasure. She imagined him taking out his watch again and again, not hiding it now, but looking at it freely, with that fine chain hanging from it at last. And with each of these thoughts came another one that she could not push away: he would also see her hair.

By the time she reached the flat, the first heat of courage had passed. The room looked the same as before, poor and small, but she herself no longer looked the same inside it. She set down her things and stood before the mirror again. At first she hardly knew the girl who stared back at her. The face was hers, but without the long hair she seemed younger and smaller, almost like a schoolboy in some lights, and in others like a stage singer trying to look gay.

Della began at once to do what she could. She heated the curling irons and worked patiently over the short locks. She bent close to the mirror, turned her head

this way and that, lifted one curl, pressed down another, and tried again and again to make the new hair lie softly around her face. It was tiring work, and now that the great decision had been made, she had no great strength left. But she would not stop. She wanted Jim to see not a careless accident, but the best shape she could give to this new self.

Little by little the short hair took some order. It curled close to her head and made her look lively and delicate, though not at all as she had looked before. Still, she could not help fearing that Jim might hate the change at first sight. She knew he loved her hair, and she had loved the way his eyes rested on it. Now she searched the mirror for some sign that he would still find her dear. Sometimes she thought she looked almost pretty in a new way, and then, in the next instant, she feared that she looked foolish.

When she had done all she could, she opened the little box and took out the chain once more. It was still beautiful, still exactly right. She held it in her hand and felt steadier. No matter what happened for one first moment, this gift was good. It had been chosen with love, and it had been bought by sacrifice, and there was no shame in that. If Jim looked closely enough, he must understand.

Then Della turned to the evening meal, because ordinary things continue even on the edge of great feeling. At seven o'clock the coffee was ready, and the frying pan stood hot on the back of the stove, waiting for the chops. The room filled with the familiar smells of supper, and that common household warmth calmed her a little. She doubled the watch chain in her hand and sat down on the corner of the table near the door through which Jim always came. Her body was quiet, but inside her heart beat quickly at every passing sound from the stairs.

Jim was never late. That made the waiting more exact and more sharp, because she knew almost to the minute when he would come. At last she heard his step far below, on the first flight, and all the courage she had gathered through the day seemed suddenly very small. The colour went out of her face, and for one instant she felt that she might run and hide in the other room. But she did not move. Holding the chain tightly in her hand, she whispered the kind of little prayer that rises when there is no time for longer words: "Please God, make him think I am

still pretty.”

Part 3

Jim still looked at her in that strange, quiet way, and for one more moment Della could not tell what was passing through his mind. Then he seemed to return to himself, as if some deep thought had ended, and he opened his arms and held her close. The fear in her heart began to soften at once, because whatever else had happened, his love had not changed. In that poor little room, with supper waiting and Christmas at the door, that mattered more than anything she had tried to guess from his face.

A moment later Jim took a small package from his overcoat pocket and tossed it onto the table. He told her not to misunderstand him, and said that no haircut, no shave, and no change in her appearance could make him love her less. But, he added, if she would open the package, she would understand why he had stood staring when he first came in. His voice was calm now, but there was something very gentle in it, as if he already knew that surprise and pain would come together. Della reached for the parcel with quick white fingers, suddenly full of eager hope.

She tore away the paper and string in a rush. First there came a cry of delight so bright that it seemed too large for the little flat. Then, almost at once, the joy broke into tears, and she began to sob in that swift, helpless way by which great happiness can turn into grief when it arrives a little too late. Jim had to use all his quiet strength to comfort her, for the gift lying on the table was the very thing her heart had long desired.

There, before her, lay the beautiful combs she had admired for so long in a Broadway window. They were the side combs and the back combs she had dreamed over without any real hope of ever owning. Their smooth surface and jeweled edges were exactly right for the hair she had loved and cared for and worn proudly for Jim. They were hers now, truly hers, but the long brown hair that should have carried them was gone.

Even so, she caught them up and held them tightly against her heart, as if love could bridge the loss for a while. After some time she looked up through dim eyes and managed a trembling smile. She told Jim that her hair grew very fast, as though that simple fact might repair everything. It was a brave little sentence, and it showed how quickly hope returns when love is near, even in disappointment.

Then Della remembered her own gift, and she sprang up with fresh energy. In an instant the sadness in her face changed into eager excitement. She held out the platinum chain on her open palm and asked Jim if it was not wonderful. She told him she had searched all over the city for it, and that now he would be able to look at the time a hundred times a day, proudly and freely, with a chain worthy of his watch.

But Jim did not take out the watch. Instead, he lay back on the couch, put his hands behind his head, and smiled at her with tired affection and gentle amusement. He told her that they should put the Christmas presents away for a while, because they were too fine to use just then. Then he explained the truth in the simplest words. He had sold the watch to get the money to buy the combs for her hair.

For a moment the whole little story of their Christmas stood clear between them. She had sold her hair to buy a chain for a watch that was gone. He had sold the watch to buy combs for hair that was gone. What looked, at first, like failure was not failure at all. Each had given up the thing most precious to provide joy for the other, and so each gift, though useless for the moment, became more valuable than it had been in the shop where it was bought.

Long ago, wise men brought gifts to a child in a manger, and people remembered them because they knew how to give. Jim and Della were not wise in the ordinary way, for they had made themselves poor for love when money was already scarce. But in the deepest way they were wiser than those who only choose costly things. Among all people who give and receive gifts, these two young lovers were the wisest, and that is why they may truly be called the magi.

After Twenty Years

Part 1

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue with the calm, steady air of a man who knew the street belonged to his care. His manner was impressive, but not because anyone was there to admire it. The night had already emptied the city of most of its people. It was only ten o'clock, yet the cold wind carried a thin taste of rain, and that was enough to send many earlier walkers indoors.

As he went along, he tried doors one after another, more from habit than from suspicion, and swung his club in easy, practiced turns. Now and then he looked far down the long street with a sharp, watchful eye. He was strong in build and carried himself with a slight, natural swagger that suited the uniform. In the half-empty avenue, under the poor light and in the rising wind, he seemed exactly what the city wanted him to be: a quiet guard standing between order and whatever might try to disturb it.

Most of the places on that block had been closed for some time. Their doors were dark, their windows blind, and their business for the day long finished. Here and there a cigar store still showed light, and farther off an all-night lunch room tried to look warm and inviting. But the larger part of the street belonged now to locked shops, wet pavement, and the sound of the wind turning the corners.

When the policeman reached the middle of one block, he slowed almost at once. In the doorway of a dark hardware store a man was standing, half in shadow, with an unlit cigar between his lips. He was not trying to hide, yet there was something in his stillness that asked to be noticed. The officer stepped toward him without hurry, and before he could speak, the man in the doorway began to explain himself.

"It's all right, officer," he said quickly, in the reassuring tone of someone who knew how suspicious a doorway could look on such a night. "I'm only waiting for a friend. We fixed the meeting twenty years ago, and this is the night." The idea sounded strange enough even to him, and he smiled a little as he said it.

Then he offered to explain further, as though he wanted the matter settled cleanly and at once.

He told the officer that many years before, when they were both young, there had been a restaurant on that very spot, Big Joe Brady's. The policeman answered at once that he knew it had stood there until five years earlier, when it was pulled down. That small answer seemed to please the waiting man. It gave him the sense that the city had not forgotten everything, and that perhaps an old promise could still live in a place even after the walls had changed.

The man then struck a match and lit his cigar, and for one bright moment the flame showed his face clearly. It was pale and square, with sharp eyes that looked used to judging quickly. Near his right eyebrow there was a little white scar, and in his scarf was set a large diamond that caught the light in a hard, cold flash. He did not look like a poor dreamer waiting in the rain for a lost memory. He looked like a man who had moved through the world actively and done well in it, though perhaps not always gently.

"Twenty years ago tonight," he said, "Jimmy Wells and I had our last dinner together here." Then his voice changed a little and became warmer, as if the years between had suddenly drawn back. He said Jimmy had been his best friend and the finest fellow in the world. They had grown up together in New York like brothers, knowing the same streets, the same shops, the same young hopes before life separated them.

He went on to say that he had been only eighteen then, while Jimmy had been twenty. The next morning he himself had left for the West, determined to make his fortune. Jimmy, however, had never wanted to leave New York. There was, the man said, no place on earth for Jimmy but this city, and even at that young age he had known it. So, at the moment of parting, they had agreed that no matter what happened, no matter how far one might go or how hard the years might become, they would meet again at that very place exactly twenty years later.

The officer listened with patience and even a little interest, for there was nothing wild in the man's tone. He spoke like someone who had tested life and had the right to tell his own story plainly. The waiting man admitted that it had

seemed a long time even then, and perhaps an uncertain promise. One of them might be dead by now, he said, or too poor, or too changed, or too far away. But he had always believed that if Jimmy were alive, Jimmy would come.

The man spoke of the West with open pride. He said he had done more than fairly there, and that the West had given him what he went to seek. Jimmy, he added, had always been a fine loyal fellow, but not the kind to run after fortune across a continent. Then he laughed softly and said he would give a thousand dollars to have one talk tonight with the old friend he had known before either of them became fully grown men. There was vanity in the words, but also something honest and deeply human. He had prospered, yes, but he still wanted witness from the one person who had known him before success.

The policeman asked if he had heard from Jimmy during those years, and the man answered that they had written for a while. After a year or two, however, the letters had stopped. Distance had a way of swallowing such ties, he said, and New York was always moving fast while the West was wide and restless. Still, he insisted, there were some promises a man did not forget. If Jimmy Wells was alive anywhere in the city, he would remember tonight.

The officer seemed satisfied. He said he hoped the friend would come, and the man replied at once that he would wait at least half an hour. Jimmy had always been true, he said, and he would not leave too soon. The policeman gave a final nod, wished him luck in finding his old friend, and moved on along the avenue, once more trying doors and watching the quiet street as before.

The man remained in the dark doorway after the officer had gone. The wind moved around the corner and touched the end of his cigar, and somewhere far off a carriage or cab rolled over the wet street. He stood with the easy confidence of a man used to waiting for outcomes to come his way. Yet beneath that confidence there was another feeling now, one he would not have named aloud. Twenty years had passed since the last dinner at Big Joe Brady’s, and the next set of footsteps might bring him not only an old friend, but also the judgment of all the years between them.

Part 2

About twenty minutes passed in that cold doorway. The drizzle became finer and steadier, and the wind came down the street with a more serious force. The few people still outside hurried by with their collars turned up and their hands deep in their pockets, giving little attention to the man who waited in the shadow of the hardware store. He kept smoking and watching, still holding to the old promise with the quiet stubbornness of a man who had trusted his own luck for many years.

Then a tall man in a long overcoat came quickly across from the other side of the street. His collar was turned up high, almost to his ears, and he moved straight toward the doorway without hesitation. When he stopped before the waiting man, he asked in a doubtful voice whether this was Bob. The man in the doorway answered at once with sudden warmth, calling out Jimmy Wells's name as if twenty years had fallen away in a single instant.

The newcomer caught both of Bob's hands and greeted him with loud affection. He said it was Bob for certain, and that he had known he would find him there if he were still alive in the world. The warmth of the greeting seemed real, and Bob accepted it gladly. The old restaurant was gone, the man said, and he wished it had remained so that they might have eaten there together once more, but time had done what it always does to places.

Bob answered with equal energy. He said the West had treated him well and had given him everything he had gone there to seek. Then, with easy laughter, he remarked that Jimmy had changed and seemed taller than he had once been. The other replied that he had grown a little after the age of twenty, and Bob let the explanation pass without suspicion. For the moment, success, memory, and old friendship were enough to carry the meeting forward.

They began to walk up the street arm in arm. Bob talked freely, as a man often does when meeting a witness from his youth after many years of building a life elsewhere. He spoke of his career in broad proud lines, suggesting that he had done boldly and prospered greatly. The taller man, still mostly hidden in his coat

and collar, listened with attention and gave little away of himself except that he had some position in one of the city departments and knew a place where they could sit and talk longer.

At the corner stood a drug store full of hard electric light. When the two men stepped into that brightness, each turned naturally to look more closely at the other's face. The light did in one second what darkness and memory together had delayed. Bob stopped at once. His arm fell away, and the confident warmth in his voice disappeared.

He said sharply that the man beside him was not Jimmy Wells. Twenty years, he declared, was a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from Roman to pug. In that instant the cheerful reunion broke apart, and the street seemed colder than before. The tall man did not pretend further. He answered with dry calm that twenty years could indeed change a good man into a bad one.

Then he told Bob the truth. Bob had been under arrest for ten minutes already, he said, and Chicago had sent word that it wanted to speak with a man known as "Silky" Bob. The officer asked whether he would go quietly, and the question carried less threat than certainty. Bob, who had come a thousand miles to keep an old appointment, now found that the city had been waiting for him in another way. The promise of friendship had led him exactly into the hands of the law.

Yet there was one thing left that did belong to the old friendship. Before taking him to the station, the plainclothes officer handed Bob a small note and said he had been asked to give it to him. Bob unfolded the paper and began to read it there by the drugstore window. His hand was steady when he started, but by the time he reached the end it had begun to tremble a little.

The note was short. Jimmy wrote that he had come to the appointed place on time. When Bob had struck the match to light his cigar, Jimmy had seen the face of the man wanted in Chicago. He ended by saying that somehow he could not arrest Bob himself, and so he had gone around the corner and sent a plainclothes officer to do the job. It was a policeman's act and also, in its painful way, a friend's last kindness.

The Cop and the Anthem

Part 1

On his bench in Madison Square, Soapy moved uneasily. That small movement was not without meaning. When wild geese cry high in the night sky, when wives without warm fur coats suddenly grow kinder to their husbands, and when a man like Soapy begins to turn and shift on his park bench, then winter is close at hand. A dead leaf fell into his lap, and he read the message at once. It was the quiet card of Jack Frost, politely left for one of the regular people of the square.

The warning was clear enough. Cold nights were no longer coming one by one as small troubles. They were coming now as a season, and Soapy knew exactly what that meant for a man with no room, no fire, and no certain meal. On the night before, he had tried to fight the cold with three Sunday newspapers, one under his coat, one around his legs, and one spread over his lap. Even that old method had failed him near the fountain in the square. The wind had found him through paper, coat, and pride together.

So Soapy began to think seriously, and his thoughts moved in a very practical direction. He did not dream of warm southern seas, rich hotels, or a voyage to some blue place far away. Those things belonged to other New Yorkers, the ones with money and trunks and tickets bought in advance. What Soapy wanted was much smaller and much more certain. Three months on the Island would do very well.

For years Blackwell's Island had served him as winter shelter. There he could find food, a bed, and company of a kind, and he would be safe from the bitter wind and the hard demands of the open street. He knew there were charitable places in the city where a poor man might also receive soup and shelter. But Soapy had his pride, and pride can remain alive even when coats are thin and pockets empty. Charity, in his eyes, always came with questions, baths, inspections, and the slow cutting down of a man's dignity, while the law, though strict, did not trouble itself too much over a gentleman's private feelings.

Having chosen his winter plan, Soapy sat up straighter and began to think of the easiest road toward it. There were many ways in New York for a man to put himself into the hands of the police. The best, he decided, was also the most pleasant. He would dine well at an expensive restaurant, order everything he wanted, and then calmly admit that he had no money. The manager would call a policeman, the policeman would take him without much noise, and the magistrate next morning would send him to the Island. It was a neat plan, simple and respectable in its own crooked way.

Soapy rose from the bench and walked out of the square toward Broadway and Fifth Avenue, where bright signs and costly windows shone against the dark. He chose a place where the tables were good, the glasses thin, and the men at the doors trained to judge who belonged inside. In his mind he had already ordered his dinner. He imagined roast duck, a bottle, perhaps a fine cigar, and then the quiet little fall into lawful custody that would complete the evening. It might have been a pleasant beginning to winter.

But Soapy's boots and trousers destroyed the whole dream before it reached the table. Above them, his coat and tie might still pass in dim light, but below them was the truth of the street, and the waiter at the door saw it in one practiced glance. Soapy was not allowed even the comfort of trying. Strong hands turned him around and sent him back to the pavement without dinner, without dignity, and without so much as a look from a policeman. One carefully chosen path to the Island had closed at the first gate.

He moved away without wasting time on sorrow. The city was full of glass, and glass was easy to break. A little farther on he picked up a stone and threw it through a large shop window. The crash ran loudly down the street, and people came quickly toward the sound. A policeman hurried up, energetic and important, ready to seize the criminal. Soapy stood near the broken window with his hands in his pockets and almost smiled at the ease with which fate had now offered him what he wanted.

"Where is the man who did that?" the officer demanded. Soapy, with dry friendliness, asked whether the policeman did not suppose he himself might have

had something to do with it. But the officer's mind refused the answer. A man who breaks a window, he believed, runs. He does not stay near the scene and speak calmly to the law. The policeman's eye caught another man hurrying down the block to catch a car, and with club drawn he rushed after that more suitable suspect. Soapy, left standing beside his own crime, could only turn away in disgust.

His next attempt was lower in style, but perhaps more certain. Across the street stood a restaurant of modest kind, where large hunger and little money were common things. Here his old shoes and worn trousers did not prevent entry. He sat down and ate heavily and well enough, taking beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts, and pie, and when the table was empty he informed the waiter that money and he were strangers. Then, almost with hope, he asked that a policeman be called and that a gentleman not be kept waiting.

But this plan failed as badly as the first, though in a rougher way. The waiter had no wish to trouble the police over Soapy. Instead he called another man, and together they threw the guest neatly and efficiently out onto the hard pavement, where he landed against his left ear. He rose slowly, like a folding rule opening joint by joint, brushed the dirt from his clothes, and looked down the street. A policeman standing two doors away had seen the whole thing and only laughed before strolling on. Arrest, which had seemed so easy from the bench in Madison Square, now looked strangely far off.

Soapy walked on through the cold, his coat thin against the sharpening wind, and felt a most unreasonable kind of bad luck settling over him. It was as though the city had chosen, for one night, to deny him even the poor comfort of prison. He had tried good food, open crime, and open insolvency, yet still he was free. Ahead of him the bright streets continued to glitter, and beyond them waited other chances, for New York is never short of disorder, temptation, or police. Soapy pulled his coat closer, gathered what remained of his courage, and went forward to seek another road to the Island.

Part 2

Soapy's next idea came to him in one of the brighter streets, where shop windows still threw light across the pavement and the city pretended that warmth, money, and pleasure were easy things to reach. Near a policeman stood a young woman dressed in a way that invited notice. Her face was painted, her smile was ready, and she waited with the patient skill of someone who knew how night business was done. Soapy saw at once that if he behaved toward her in the proper low fashion, the policeman would almost certainly interfere.

He straightened his coat as well as he could, set his hat at a careless angle, and tried to walk with the bold air of a man who belonged to the streets after dark. Then he stepped near the woman, smiled in a foolish way, and spoke to her with the kind of cheap friendliness that he thought would bring trouble at once. In his mind he already saw the officer coming over, already felt the firm hand on his arm, already heard the short command that would send him at last toward the station and then the Island. It seemed an easy scene to arrange.

But the city, which had already refused him in three different styles, refused him again in a new one. The young woman did not draw back in alarm, nor turn away in offended pride, nor call to the policeman for help. Instead she came close to Soapy with unexpected joy and spoke as though he were doing her a kindness. She said she would have spoken first, but the policeman had been watching. Then she fastened herself to his arm with eager familiarity, as if she had found not danger, but company.

That was too much even for Soapy. What he had offered as a performance had been accepted as an invitation. He walked past the policeman with the woman hanging cheerfully upon him, and the officer, seeing nothing that required action, let them go by. The whole scene filled Soapy with a new and bitter gloom. It was one thing to be denied arrest through accident; it was another to be denied it because his bad behavior had not been considered bad enough to matter.

At the next corner he freed himself from the woman and moved away quickly. He did not waste words of farewell. A man who is already unlucky has no wish to carry extra conversation with him. By now Soapy felt something almost like fear. A dreadful idea had begun to form in his mind: perhaps some strange magic had

made him impossible to arrest. The thought was absurd, but repeated failure had given absurdity a certain force. He felt as though the whole police system of New York had, for one night only, agreed to overlook his crimes and insults.

Determined to force the matter, he entered a district where lights were brighter, dresses finer, and voices freer. There men in greatcoats and women in rich furs passed in cheerful groups, and the theatres sent their late crowds onto the sidewalks. Near one of these grand buildings stood another policeman, comfortable and majestic in his authority. Soapy chose the most open form of public disorder he could think of. If theft, destruction, and unpaid meals had failed, then loud drunken madness might still succeed.

So he began to shout. He yelled broken nonsense in a harsh voice, danced upon the pavement, waved his arms, and made himself ridiculous in every possible way. He howled as though wine had destroyed his mind and good sense had long ago deserted him. He stamped, laughed, and raved until he thought no officer in the city could ignore such conduct under such lights. The performance was ugly enough to satisfy even Soapy's desperate purpose.

But again the policeman refused the part Soapy had written for him. The officer merely turned his back and explained to a nearby citizen that the noise came from one of the college boys celebrating a football victory. Such young gentlemen, he suggested, were allowed a certain freedom in their foolishness, and the police had orders not to interfere. Soapy's entire storm of disorder dissolved into nothing at all. The law, which he had expected to seize him, instead excused him as a harmless son of privilege.

Soapy stopped shouting at once. There was no use wasting breath where even madness could be mistaken for education. He pulled his thin coat tighter against the wind and stood for a moment in real discouragement. The Island, which earlier in the evening had seemed close enough to reach by a few clumsy crimes, now looked farther away than any warm southern coast. Yet he could not give up. Winter was too near, and the bench in Madison Square had already become too cold for dreaming.

He walked on until a new chance presented itself in a cigar store. A well-

dressed man stood just inside, lighting a cigar at a swinging flame, and beside the door he had left a fine silk umbrella. The object seemed perfect. Soapy stepped quietly in, took the umbrella, and strolled away with it at a deliberate pace, almost daring the owner to act. The man followed him immediately and said in a stern voice that it was his umbrella. At last, Soapy thought, the needed quarrel had come.

With cruel boldness he answered that perhaps it was, and asked why the man did not call a policeman. He declared openly that he had taken it and even pointed out an officer standing at the corner, as if inviting the complaint. There was insult now added to theft, and the whole matter stood clear enough. Soapy could hardly ask for a better road to arrest. He waited for the owner's outrage to become official.

Instead the man faltered. His certainty weakened at once, and he began to explain that such mistakes sometimes happened. He said he himself had picked up the umbrella that morning in a restaurant, and if this one truly belonged to Soapy, then of course he hoped to be excused. Soapy, now committed to the role, declared viciously that the umbrella was indeed his. The first owner retreated in confusion, and the policeman on the corner, seeing no useful case before him, hurried away to assist a handsome woman across the street.

Soapy walked eastward in angry disbelief. After a few moments he threw the umbrella into an excavation in the street and muttered bitterly against the men who wore helmets and carried clubs. When he wanted their power, they would not use it. He had tried nearly everything within his imagination, and still they seemed to look upon him as if he were a king who must not be touched. That was the most insulting thought of all.

Gradually the glitter of the richer avenues faded behind him. The streets grew quieter, and the movement of the city became softer and less crowded. At last he turned toward Madison Square again, for even a man determined to be arrested feels the pull of the place where he usually spends the night. It was then, on one unusually still corner, that he stopped without meaning to stop. Before him stood an old church, irregular in shape, dim and peaceful, with one soft light shining through a violet-colored window. From inside came the sound of an organ, gentle and serious, as if the player were practicing for Sunday and had forgotten the

restless city outside.

The moon hung calm above the roofs. The street held few carriages and fewer footsteps. Sparrows stirred faintly in the eaves, and for a little while the place seemed less like New York than like some quiet churchyard in the country. The music drifted out and reached Soapy where he stood by the iron fence. He did not yet know that this soft anthem, meeting him at the end of his failures, had found the one part of his life that was not already frozen.

Part 3

Soapy stood still by the iron fence and listened while the anthem moved softly out through the church window. The music did not seem weak because it was gentle. It entered him more deeply than all the loud streets had done. In that quiet place, under the moon and near the old stone walls, something long buried in him began to wake again. The sound called up not the life he had been living, but the life he had once thought he might live.

He remembered days that now seemed to belong to another person. There had been mothers then, and roses, and friends, and clean collars, and hopes that looked forward instead of downward. He remembered a time when he had not measured winter by benches and prison beds. As the music went on, he felt the full ugliness of the pit into which he had fallen. His dead ambitions, his broken powers, his low wishes, and his wasted days all rose before him at once, and for the first time in a long while he looked at them with horror instead of habit.

The change came suddenly, but it was not shallow. His heart answered the music with a strong and immediate desire to fight his way back. He told himself that he would pull free of the mud in which he had been living. He would make a man of himself again. He would resist the evil that had taken possession of him, and he would do it now, while he was still young enough to begin. The quiet notes from the organ seemed to lift him toward that decision and make it feel not only possible, but necessary.

He began at once to build the next day in his mind. There had once been a

fur importer who had offered him work as a driver. He would find that man tomorrow and ask for the place. He was strong enough for honest labor, and once he had not been ashamed of effort. He would stop drifting. He would stop waiting for luck, soup, pity, or prison. He would earn his own bread again and stand in the world like other men.

The plan grew quickly because his will was now alive and eager. He would not waste another season. He would not let himself slide one step farther down the long slope of failure. There had been a time, he thought, when he had answered the city with courage and movement, not with tricks meant to gain a jail bed. That older self was not dead. It had been covered over, neglected, and starved, but the anthem had reached it.

Soapy straightened his body and moved a little away from the fence. A new strength ran through him, and with it came self-respect. The cold did not seem less cold, but it no longer felt like a final enemy. He was no longer thinking of three months on the Island. He was thinking of work, of effort, of clean days, and of the right to look men in the face again. The city, which earlier had seemed to offer him only failure in one direction or another, now looked like a place where he might still begin again.

He stood there for a little longer, serious and almost solemn, holding himself upright with the dignity of a man who has at last made peace with the truth. The quiet corner, the violet window, the moon above, the sleepy birds, and the patient anthem behind him seemed to witness the promise he had just made to himself. It was not a loud promise, and no one but Soapy heard it. But to him it was stronger than any of the noisy decisions he had made on other nights.

Then a hand fell upon his arm. The touch was sudden and official, and it broke through the whole inward vision at once. He turned quickly and found a policeman standing beside him, studying him with the flat suspicion that belongs to night duty in a city. The officer asked what he was doing there. Soapy answered simply that he was doing nothing. That was true in the narrow sense, but it could not save him.

The policeman was not moved by quiet corners, church music, or secret

changes of soul. A man standing late at night beside an old church fence, apparently idle and without purpose, was enough for him. He told Soapy to come along. There was no long argument, no great resistance, and no witness to explain the strange injustice of the moment. The law had refused him all evening when he wanted arrest, and now that he had turned toward reform, it seized him at once.

The next morning, in the police court, the magistrate looked briefly at Soapy and gave judgment in the brisk voice of routine. Three months on the Island, he said. That was all. The winter shelter Soapy had tried to win by clumsy crimes had come to him only after he had ceased to want it. The anthem had called him upward, but the city answered in its own hard way, and its answer carried him back toward the place from which, only hours before, he had tried to escape.

The Furnished Room

Part 1

In the lower West Side there lived a restless kind of people who never seemed to stay anywhere for long. They moved from one furnished room to another as lightly as dust blown by the wind. Their homes were many, but none of them were truly home. They carried their little treasures in boxes and bundles, and the feeling of settled life never had time to take root in them.

Because of that, the old red houses of the district seemed full of hidden stories. So many men and women had passed through them, carrying hope, weariness, lies, hunger, laughter, and despair. Most of those stories were likely small and dull. But a place that has held so many troubled lives cannot remain empty of sorrow. Somewhere in such houses, one felt, old grief must still linger like smoke after a fire.

One evening, after darkness had come down, a young man moved slowly through those streets and rang bell after bell. He carried a small hand-bag in one hand, and his face and clothes showed the marks of long, tired searching. At the twelfth house he stopped, set down the bag on the step, and wiped the dust from his hatband and his forehead. The bell sounded far away inside, faint and hollow, as if it had to travel through old, tired air before any living person could hear it.

The woman who opened the door looked heavy, pale, and overfed, yet somehow unhealthy at the same time. She seemed like a creature that had lived too long in stale rooms, feeding on the needs of strangers and growing thick upon them. When he asked whether there was a room to let, she told him to come in. Her voice was rough and thick in the throat, and the sound of it matched the dim house around her.

She led him upstairs through hallways that hardly seemed to belong to light at all. There was a weak brightness somewhere, but it did not truly come from lamp or window so much as from habit, as if the house had learned to remain half-visible and half-hidden. The stair carpet was worn into something soft and sickly,

more like wet moss than cloth, and the air had that sunless, spoiled smell that comes where fresh wind is kept out too long. At each turn of the stairs were little empty spaces in the wall where perhaps plants had once stood, or perhaps images of saints had once looked down. Now they were empty, and the emptiness itself seemed more fitting than any holy or growing thing could have been.

At last she showed him the third-floor back room. She praised it quickly in the manner of someone who has repeated the same words a hundred times to a hundred strangers. It was a nice room, she said, and it never stayed empty for long. Good people had had it before, respectable people, even theatrical people, and one pair had once hung their framed marriage certificate over the dresser. She pointed out the gas, the closet space, and the water at the end of the hall, as though these were enough to make a life.

The young man listened, but not because any of those things mattered to him. When she had almost finished, he asked the question that had clearly been waiting on his tongue all evening. Did she remember, among her lodgers, a young woman named Miss Eloise Vashner, perhaps singing on the stage, fair, of medium height, slender, with reddish-gold hair and a dark mole near her left eyebrow? The housekeeper shook her head. Stage people changed their names, she said, and came and went too quickly to be remembered. She did not recall such a girl.

The answer was the same one he had received everywhere for five long months. By day he had asked managers, agents, schools, choruses, and all kinds of people in the theatre world. By night he had searched among audiences and dressing-room districts, even in places so low and miserable that he feared finding there the very woman he wanted most to find. He had loved her best, and because of that he had made himself the patient servant of one question, asking it again and again in this great city surrounded by water. Yet New York had given him back only its old answer: no.

He took the room, paid a week in advance, and said he was tired enough to move in at once. The woman left him there, and he sat down in a chair while the room slowly began to show itself. It tried, in its poor false way, to look friendly. The worn chairs, the faded couch, the cheap mirror between the windows, the

brass bedstead in the corner, the tired picture frames on the wall—all these seemed to offer the kind of welcome a bad actress gives, practiced and empty, but still made for effect.

Yet the longer he sat, the more the room seemed to speak in broken fragments of those who had used it before him. On the wall were the same old pictures that follow the homeless from lodging to lodging, as if even art in such places had given up trying to be new. A bright but worn rug lay on the floor like an island of false colour in a sea of stained matting. On the mantel stood the little useless remains of other lives: a vase, some actress photographs, a medicine bottle, a few scattered playing cards. The room had been handled, abandoned, and handed on so many times that every object seemed half-forgotten before it was even seen.

Then details began to gather meaning around him. The rubbed place in the rug before the dresser suggested where women had stood and dressed and turned to study themselves in the glass. Faint little marks upon the wall spoke of children stretching up, perhaps for light, perhaps for air, perhaps only from the blind need to touch what was beyond them. A wide stain bursting across the plaster showed where anger or drunkenness had once thrown a glass or bottle against the wall. Across the cheap mirror someone had scratched the name “Marie” with a diamond point, as if fury, loneliness, or a desperate wish to remain had forced itself into that one hard little act.

The room did not seem merely worn. It seemed injured. The furniture was bruised and chipped, the couch was bent and broken by old violence, the mantel had a great piece missing from it, and the floorboards each had their own cry under the foot. It was hard to believe that all this harm had been done by ordinary men and women who had rented the place for a week or a month and called it home. Yet perhaps that was exactly why they had hurt it. Perhaps people who are denied a real home grow angry at false ones, and strike at cheap walls and furniture because they cannot strike at the emptiness inside their own lives.

So he remained there, quiet in his chair, while the room and the house pressed in around him. From nearby rooms came many sounds: foolish laughter, the sharp voice of someone scolding, the rattle of dice, the low movement of a lullaby, and

the dull crying of a person too tired to cry properly. Somewhere above him a banjo played with thin spirit. Doors banged, the elevated trains roared now and then outside, and from far off a cat gave a long miserable cry. The whole house breathed upon him its stale underground smell of mildew, linoleum, rotten wood, and long-trapped human air, while he sat in the middle of it all, waiting without hope and yet unable to stop waiting.

Part 2

Then, all at once, the room changed. A strong sweet smell of mignonette came into it so suddenly, so fully, that it seemed less like a smell than like a presence entering by right. The young man sprang up and cried out as if someone had called him by a dear old name. For one confused instant his senses mixed together. It felt to him as though the scent had touched him like a voice, and as though the room itself had answered his long search at last.

He stood still only for a heartbeat. Then he said aloud that she had been in that room, and the words seemed to set his whole body in motion. Eloise had loved mignonette; he knew that as surely as he knew the line of her mouth or the light that had once lived in her eyes. If that scent was there, then some trace of her must still be there too. He began to search with hungry hands, certain that even the smallest thing would tell him what he needed to know.

The dresser was first. Half a dozen hairpins lay scattered on the cheap scarf across it, but they were nothing to him, too common and secret in their sameness to speak for one woman alone. He opened drawer after drawer with fast rough movements. In one he found a little torn handkerchief and pressed it eagerly to his face, but it held the bold sweet smell of heliotrope, not the scent he sought, and in anger he threw it away. In other drawers he found loose buttons, an old theatre program, a pawnbroker’s card, two forgotten marshmallows, and even a strange little book about dreams, but none of these bore her mark.

Once a black satin hair ribbon stopped him. For a moment he held it as though it might suddenly grow warm in his hand and begin to speak. But it too

was only one more common feminine thing, modest and mute, an ornament that had belonged to some woman but would not tell which one. He flung it down and went on. His search became less careful and more desperate. He looked under the bed, behind the dresser, along the mantel, inside the washstand, and in every corner where dust and forgotten scraps collected, as if love itself could force identity out of refuse.

Soon the room was in disorder around him. The small poor objects that had seemed half dead before now flew about as his hands touched them. He searched not like a calm man gathering evidence, but like one trying to seize a disappearing dream before it faded. Each useless object drove him harder. The smell of mignonette still seemed to hang near him, rich and close, and because of that nearness he could not yet give up. It was like hearing footsteps just beyond a door that would not open.

At last he left the room and rushed into the hall. He went from door to door, down one passage and up another, asking in quick broken questions whether any fair girl had lately lived there, whether any one knew of a young woman from the stage, whether anyone had seen reddish-gold hair, a dark mole near the eyebrow, a face like the one that had filled his thoughts for months. Those who opened their doors looked at him with surprise, boredom, or suspicion. Some answered sharply, some lazily, and some only stared. From none of them came anything that could feed hope.

Then he hurried down to the housekeeper again and questioned her once more, though he had already heard her answer before. Now he asked not only whether Miss Eloise Vashner had lodged there, but whether any girl like her had stayed in the third-floor back room at any time during the last year. The woman tried to think. She told him of one lodger after another, naming a man who had left owing a week’s rent, a woman with two children who had stayed four months, and an old man whose sons had paid for him. Her memory went back through the room’s poor little history of passing strangers, but it did not come to the name he needed. A year, she said, and beyond that she did not remember.

He thanked her and climbed slowly back to the room. Now the place had

changed again. The strange bright life that had rushed into it with the scent was gone. The perfume of mignonette had faded away, and in its place was only the old stale breath of the house, the smell of mould, old furniture, shut windows, and lives that had soured in transit. The room was dead once more. What had seemed a sign had become only a cruel stirring of air, or else a true sign arriving too late to be followed.

He sat down and stared at the gaslight, yellow and singing softly to itself. The light did not comfort him. It only made the room's poverty look more tired and more false. Five months of searching, five months of asking the same question in all parts of the city, seemed to gather there into one final emptiness. The monstrous city had swallowed her so completely that even when it gave him one breath of her, it would not give her back. Hope, which had risen in him like a fire a few moments before, now began to drain away as if some hidden hand had opened a wound inside him.

For a long time he remained motionless. The sounds of the house went on as before, careless of him. Somewhere laughter broke out and ended. Somewhere a chair dragged, a child cried, a man coughed, and then all these separate little noises fell again into the same cheap general life that the building lived every night. None of them had anything to do with Eloise, and yet all of them seemed to mock him by continuing when the one voice he wanted had been denied him. He looked around the room one more time, not with expectation now, but with the dull knowledge that nothing further would come from it.

Even so, something in him still resisted the final admission. Love does not give up its dead quickly, especially when the dead are not certain. He told himself that she might still be elsewhere in the city, in some other room, on some other street, under some changed name, and that tomorrow the search might begin again. But the thought had no real strength left in it. The room had offered him the nearest thing to her he had known in months, and that nearness had become nothing. In the silence after that loss, he felt the cold shadow of an end moving toward him, though he had not yet decided what shape that end would take.

Part 3

When he came back from the housekeeper's door, the room no longer felt haunted. The strange life had gone out of it as suddenly as it had come. The scent of mignonette had vanished completely, leaving behind only the old dead air of the house, the smell of stale furniture, mould, and rooms used too long by passing strangers. Whatever had touched him before had withdrawn, and the place stood before him once more as only a poor hired room with tired walls and a gaslight burning yellow above its usual misery.

As his hope drained away, something deeper went with it. All through the long months of searching, he had at least carried belief. He had believed that the city held her somewhere, that the next question, the next street, the next face might at last lead him to her. Now, after the scent, after the near illusion of her presence, and after the final dull answers downstairs, belief itself seemed empty. He sat staring at the small singing flame of the gas as if it were the last living thing in the room, and even that light gave him no counsel.

For a while he did not move. The house around him continued its usual life, careless and coarse, and that very indifference made his loneliness harder. Somewhere a laugh rose and broke off. Somewhere a door shut, a chair scraped, and a voice passed briefly through the wall and died. The city had not changed because his heart had come to the edge of its strength, and there was something terrible in that.

At last he stood up and went to the bed with a steadiness more frightening than despair. There was no violence in him now, no crying out, and no more hurried searching. He began to tear the bed sheets into long strips. With methodical hands he pressed them into the cracks around the windows and along the door, sealing the room as tightly as he could.

He worked slowly and carefully, like a man attending to a necessary task that must not be spoiled by haste. Each strip he pushed farther in with the blade of his knife, making certain that no opening remained. The whole room seemed to wait with him in a silence heavier than before. What had been a place of false

hospitality, of stale objects and borrowed lives, was becoming something final and private.

When he had done all that needed doing, he turned out the light. Then he turned the gas on full again and lay down upon the bed. There was even a kind of gratitude in the way he gave himself to it, as though at last some struggle had ended and some answer, dark but undeniable, had been reached. The room that had yielded him nothing in life now offered him one final shelter, and he accepted it.

Later that night, far below, in the underground place where women of the houses sat together, Mrs. Purdy spoke over her beer to Mrs. McCool. She said that she had rented the third-floor back that evening to a young man who had gone to bed two hours earlier. Mrs. McCool admired her skill in letting such rooms and then, lowering her voice with interest, asked whether she had told him. Mrs. Purdy answered in her thick furry tones that rooms were furnished to rent, and she had not told him anything.

Mrs. McCool agreed that such silence was good business. Many people, she said, would refuse a room if they were told that someone had died there by suicide. Mrs. Purdy answered that they all had their living to make. Then the other woman recalled that it was exactly one week since she had helped lay out the body in that same third-floor back. She remembered the dead girl as a pretty young thing with a sweet face.

Mrs. Purdy, agreeing in her practical way, added the one detail that mattered most and came too late. The girl, she said, would indeed have been called handsome if not for the mole growing by her left eyebrow. Then she invited Mrs. McCool to fill her glass again, and the talk of death and rent and business sank back into the common speech of the house. Above them, in the sealed room, the man who had searched the whole city had at last found her only when finding her could no longer save him.

A Service of Love

Part 1

When people love Art, they often speak as if sacrifice were easy. They say hunger is light, cold rooms are nothing, and work done for another dream does not really count as work. This story begins in that spirit, though it does not end there. Joe Larrabee and Delia Caruthers were both young enough to believe that talent, devotion, and a little courage could force the world to make room for them.

Joe came out of the Middle West with a head full of painting and a heart that had long believed in his own future. When he was only six, he had drawn a picture of the town pump with such promise that it had been framed and displayed in the drug store window beside a specially admired ear of corn. In the small place where he grew up, that was enough to make people say he was meant for great things. So, at twenty, with a flowing necktie, a little money, and a very large faith in himself, he went to New York to become an artist.

Delia came from a pine-tree village in the South, where she had shown such promise at the piano that her relatives had helped send her North to finish her musical education. They could not explain her gift in technical words, but they believed in it with family seriousness and pride. She went to the city with the same mixture of innocence and ambition that Joe carried, though her art spoke not in colour and form, but in sound. She too expected hardship, no doubt, but not defeat.

The two met in an atelier where art and music students gathered to discuss everything with equal confidence. In such rooms people talk not only of painting and sound, but of names, movements, schools, methods, reputations, and theories that are half understood and wholly defended. Joe and Delia found each other there among all the talk of masters, styles, tone, and beauty. It did not take them long to become necessary to one another. Then, because youth believes in swift unions and because each loved both art and the other, they married.

Their married life began in a small flat that had little to recommend it except that they shared it. It was narrow, poor, and close, but they were happy, for they

had what seemed to them the two great things. They had Art, and they had each other. In such a home even discomfort could almost be turned into play, and they learned to laugh at the way furniture seemed always too large for the room or the room too small for the life they wished to live inside it.

The best part of that early time was not any single success, because success had not yet come. It was the daily life itself. They had lively talks after study, hopeful plans at breakfast, cheerful little dinners at night, and long exchanges of dreams that crossed and joined until Joe's future and Delia's future no longer stood apart. Each believed not only in personal greatness, but in the greatness of the other. That made poverty feel temporary and made small meals seem almost festive.

Joe studied under the great Magister, whose fame was large and whose fees were equally so. Delia studied with Rosenstock, whose reputation at the piano was high enough to demand a painful payment from pupils with serious aims. For a while the money they had brought with them held out, and their lessons continued. Joe imagined the day when collectors with narrow whiskers and heavy pocketbooks would fight one another to buy his paintings. Delia imagined herself so fully mistress of music that public performance would be something she could refuse rather than seek.

But Art, though often praised as noble, has a habit of asking for money before it gives any back. After some time the little store they had lived on began to disappear. Everything went out, and nothing came in. Lessons still cost what they had cost before, food still had to be bought, and rent still expected its regular answer. At last there was not enough left to keep paying both Magister and Rosenstock and still keep the flat alive with coffee, supper, and hope.

It was Delia who first turned necessity into a plan. When one loves one's art, she said, no service seems too hard, and therefore she would give music lessons for a while to keep the little household going. She spoke bravely, almost gaily, but the decision was real. For two or three days she went out looking for pupils, climbing stairs, knocking at doors, asking questions, and offering what she knew. Joe did not like it. To him it seemed wrong that she should labor for money while

he continued to move among high artistic hopes.

One evening she came home shining with success. She told Joe, with happy speed, that she had found a pupil at last, and not merely any pupil, but the daughter of General A. B. Pinkney on Seventy-first Street. The house, she said, was splendid beyond anything she had seen before, with a grand front door and rich rooms within. The girl's name was Clementina. She wore white, had the sweetest manners, and was only eighteen. Better still, Delia was to give three lessons a week at five dollars each.

Joe tried to be pleased for her sake, but his pride rose at once against the arrangement. He said he could not let her earn wages while he merely studied and waited for fortune. He talked of selling papers or laying stones in the street if necessary. Delia came to him then and put her arms around his neck. She told him he was foolish, and that she had not abandoned music at all. While she taught, she said, she would still be living inside her art, and with fifteen dollars a week they could be as happy as millionaires if only he would continue with Magister.

At last Joe yielded, though unwillingly. He said he hated to see her teaching for money, because it did not feel like Art, yet he could not resist her courage and tenderness. Delia answered again with her little creed that no service seems too hard when one loves one's art. Then, because poverty becomes easier when dressed in cheerful words, Joe reported that Magister had praised the sky in one of his sketches, and that Tinkle had agreed to hang two of his pictures in a window where some rich fool might see and buy one. Delia smiled sweetly and told him that he surely would sell one, and then she asked him to stop worrying and be thankful for General Pinkney and the veal roast waiting for supper.

Part 2

During all the next week the Larrabees rose early. Joe talked with growing enthusiasm about certain morning effects he wished to catch in Central Park, and Delia packed him off at seven o'clock each day as though he were already a young master whose work must not be delayed by ordinary household concerns. She

gave him breakfast, praise, and kisses in a cheerful mixture, and then sent him out with his sketching things and his hopes. Art, in their flat, was not treated as something distant and solemn. It was as living as coffee, rent, and affection.

Most evenings he came back at about seven, tired but bright-eyed, carrying the air of a man who had spent the day among serious colours and larger destinies. Delia too returned from her supposed music lessons with that sweet weariness which is half fatigue and half pride. They met each evening as fellow workers in beauty, each willing to admire the other's struggle a little more than his or her own. Their poverty remained, but it had now been given a useful rhythm.

At the end of the week Delia came in with a look of gentle triumph and tossed three five-dollar bills upon the little centre table in the parlour of the eight-by-ten flat. She said that sometimes Clementina tried her patience, because the girl did not practice enough and had to be told the same things too often. She added that the constant white dresses of the young lady had become almost too much of a sameness for the eye. Yet all this was spoken with real fondness, for General Pinkney, she said, was the dearest old gentleman in the world, and Clementina herself was so gentle and well-bred that one could not help growing attached to her.

Then, because imagination sweetens labour, she began to describe that grand house again in loving detail. She wished Joe could see the beautiful woodwork in the drawing room and the rich rugs hanging like curtains. She repeated, smilingly, the General's favourite question about semiquavers and demisemiquavers, and said that he would stand there pulling his white goatee like a man who believed music to be some lovely military matter half beyond his command. Clementina, she added, had a funny little cough and did not look very strong, which made Delia feel even more tender toward her. The brother of General Pinkney, she concluded, had once been Minister to Bolivia, which seemed to give the whole piano lesson an added elegance.

Joe, not to be outdone in splendour, then drew forth his own earnings and laid them beside Delia's with the dramatic air of a conqueror. He produced ten dollars, then five, then two, then one, and announced that he had sold the

watercolour of the obelisk to a man from Peoria. Delia cried out in playful disbelief, and Joe, delighted with the effect, gave the buyer a full body and soul at once. He was, said Joe, a fat man with a woollen muffler and a quill toothpick, who had first mistaken the sketch for a windmill and then bravely bought it anyway. Not content with that, he had also ordered an oil painting of the Lackawanna freight depot to carry home with him.

Delia was delighted beyond all proportion to the amount itself, though the amount was great enough in their little world. Thirty-three dollars between them felt like a fortune. She declared at once that they would have oysters that night, and Joe answered by adding filet mignon and mushrooms to the celebration, asking where the olive fork might be found as if servants stood ready in the next room. Their happiness was made not only of money, but of the proof that each could bring something home. Love grows easier under self-respect, and that evening both possessed it.

So the days went on in that brave little pattern. Delia continued to tell stories of Clementina in white, of the old General's questions, of the rich rooms and the patient lessons at the piano. Joe continued to report progress with his sketches and the favourable opinions of those who, if they were not exactly connoisseurs, at least seemed willing to pay. They were not deceiving each other in the spirit of cold dishonesty. Each falsehood was a gift wrapped in hope, made for the protection of the other's dream.

By the next Saturday evening Joe came home first. He spread eighteen dollars on the parlour table and went to wash, taking a long time over the task. When he came back, there seemed to be a great deal of dark paint removed from his hands, and he carried himself with that tired satisfaction which belongs to a man who believes he has worked for someone he loves. The money lay on the table as plain evidence of that effort, and the small room seemed, for a little while, almost rich enough for ease.

Half an hour later Delia arrived. At once Joe saw that her right hand was tied up in a shapeless bundle of wraps and bandages. He asked what had happened, and she laughed, but not in the free way she used when joy came naturally. She

explained that Clementina had insisted on a Welsh rabbit after the lesson and that the General himself had rushed for the chafing dish as if no servants existed in the house. In serving the dish, she said, the girl had spilled a great mass of the hot mixture over her hand and wrist. It had hurt terribly, Delia admitted, though Clementina had been full of sorrow and the General had nearly lost his senses in his concern.

Joe took the hurt hand tenderly and examined the bandage. Beneath the wrapping he found soft white fibres and asked quietly what they were. Delia answered that it was only something soft with oil on it, sent up in haste from the drug store by the man from the basement or the furnace room, for the General had rushed some one out at once to fetch the needed things. Then, as though eager to move away from the subject, she asked Joe whether he had sold another sketch, having seen the money on the table the moment she entered.

Joe replied readily enough. Yes, he said, the man from Peoria had taken his depot that very day, and there was no telling but that he might yet want another landscape and even a view on the Hudson besides. His tone was light, but his mind was already elsewhere. He then asked Delia, very quietly, at what time in the afternoon she had burned her hand. She answered that it had happened at about five o'clock. For one nervous instant she stumbled and almost said "the iron" before correcting herself to "the rabbit," and then hurried again to talk about General Pinkney and the confusion in the great house.

Joe did not answer that chatter directly. Instead he drew her gently to the couch and sat beside her with his arm across her shoulders. There was no anger in him, only a tenderness made serious by knowledge. The little room, with the money on the table and the smell of their plain supper waiting somewhere near, seemed suddenly to grow very still around them. Then he asked her, with quiet firmness and all the love in the world, what she had really been doing for the last two weeks.

Part 3

Delia tried for a little while to hold up the pretty story of General Pinkney and Clementina, but love does not stand well against close knowledge. At last the truth came out with tears. She confessed that she had found no music pupils at all. She could not bear the thought of Joe leaving his lessons with Magister, so she had taken work ironing shirts in the big Twenty-fourth Street laundry and had invented the General and his daughter to hide it.

Even while she cried, she tried to make her deception sound light and brave. She asked Joe whether she had not done rather well in creating both Clementina and the old General. Then she said what mattered most to her: when one loves one's Art, no service seems too hard. The phrase that had once sounded cheerful and bright now returned with a deeper meaning. It was still brave, but it had lost its playfulness and become the plain truth of sacrifice.

Joe held her close and spoke to her very gently. He told her not to mind the music lessons, because she could not have stopped him from loving her no matter what work she did. A person, he said, might sell matches, break stones, work in a shop, or iron shirts in a laundry, and none of that could lessen love when love was the real thing. He made her sit quietly against him until her crying grew softer and the first storm of shame and relief had passed.

Then he asked her whether she would remember something he had once said. He reminded her that he had told her one could not let the other give up art alone. She looked up at him with sudden attention, because now there was a new tone in his voice, one that made the room feel still around them. There was tenderness in it, but also a kind of shy confession preparing to come into the light.

Joe then told her the rest. For the last two weeks, he said, he had not been painting in the park at all. He had been working in the same laundry where she had found employment, only downstairs in the engine room, firing the furnace. The dark matter he had washed from his hands before supper had not been paint. It had been the marks of hard work below the steam, heat, and machinery. The man from Peoria, the obelisk, and the depot had been no more real than General Pinkney and Clementina.

Delia drew back a little and stared at him through the remains of her tears.

The whole sweet false life they had been making for each other now stood clear between them. She had invented noble pupils so that he might keep his dream. He had invented buyers of sketches so that she might believe the same. Each had gone secretly to labor, and each had carried the daily burden with pride because it was carried for the other.

Joe explained then how he had known the truth about her hurt hand. That afternoon, he said, the girl in the ironing room above had burned her wrist on a hot iron. The foreman in the engine room had sent Joe up with oil and cotton for the burn. When he saw Delia that night and heard her story of Welsh rabbit and the General's confusion, he had understood at once. The little white fibres beneath the bandage had finished the proof.

For a moment neither of them laughed. The feeling was too deep for quick laughter. What they had done was foolish in one way, because both had hidden the same kind of sacrifice behind pretty lies. But it was beautiful in another, because each had chosen hardship not for pride, not for comfort, and not for gain, but to protect the other's hope. Their poverty remained exactly where it had been. Yet their little flat had become, in that hour, much larger in spirit than many rich houses.

At last the sadness and the tenderness together grew too warm to stay solemn, and the poor little room softened back into home again. Joe told her once more that nothing she could do for love would ever seem low to him. Delia, still leaning against him, did not try to defend General Pinkney any further. There was no need. The truth, though humbler than the invention, had turned out to be finer.

So the false stories fell away, but not the devotion beneath them. They had both failed, in a worldly sense, to remain purely among the high regions of art. Instead they had gone into wage work, heat, laundry steam, and tired hands. Yet what carried them there had been the same thing that first drew them together in the atelier: a generous, eager faith in something beyond the self. If art had seemed distant for a little while, love had not. And in the end, that was the greater service.

The Romance of a Busy Broker

Part 1

Pitcher, the confidential clerk in the office of Harvey Maxwell, was not a man easily surprised. His face had long ago learned the useful stillness of office life, where noise, hurry, and strange requests pass every hour and yet business must keep its exact shape. But on this particular morning, when Maxwell entered briskly at half past nine with his young lady stenographer beside him, even Pitcher's steady expression changed a little. There was not enough change in it to be called wonder, but there was certainly enough to be noticed by anyone who knew him well.

Maxwell did not seem aware of any unusual thing. He threw out a quick good-morning to Pitcher and rushed to his desk with the force of a man who might have leaped over it if that had saved him three seconds. Letters and telegrams lay waiting in a heavy pile before him, and he went into them at once with the hungry energy of a mind already running ahead of its own hands. It was clear from the first instant that this would not be an easy day, even by Wall Street standards. In Maxwell's office, business did not begin gently. It struck like weather.

The young woman who had entered with him had served as his stenographer for a year. She was beautiful in a way that did not match the ordinary office picture of a stenographer made by careless men. There was nothing loud, flashy, or cheaply charming about her. She wore plain grey with quiet fitness, and in her neat black turban there was only the gold-green wing of a macaw for ornament. Yet on this particular morning she looked softly radiant, as though memory itself had laid a light hand upon her face. Her eyes were dreamily bright, her cheeks held warm colour, and her whole expression seemed full of happiness touched with tender remembrance.

Pitcher noticed another small difference in her behavior. Usually she would pass at once into the inner room where her desk stood, ready for the day's dictation, letters, and notes. But this morning she lingered in the outer office with a slight

uncertainty, as though waiting for something that had not yet happened and ought to happen at once. Once she moved near Maxwell's desk and stood close enough for him to know she was there if any part of his attention remained free. But the machine at the desk was scarcely a man now. It was a busy New York broker, driven by springs and wheels, and there was no room in that mechanism for anything not immediately connected with the market.

Maxwell looked up sharply and asked what it was, whether there was anything needed. The question was quick and impatient rather than rude, but it carried none of the warmth one might have expected for so radiant a face standing so near. His grey eye flashed over her only for a moment and returned at once to the white storm of opened mail upon the desk. The young woman answered that it was nothing and moved away with a little smile, though one could not tell whether the smile covered amusement, disappointment, or only quiet understanding. A person who loves a man deeply will often excuse much from him when work holds his mind.

She then turned to Pitcher and asked whether Mr. Maxwell had said anything the day before about engaging another stenographer. Pitcher answered that he had. Maxwell, he said, had instructed him to notify the agency, and a few samples were expected that very morning, though none had arrived yet. There was dry office humour in the clerk's tone, but the fact itself stood plain enough. Whatever Miss Leslie may have felt in that moment, she gave no outward sign except to say that in that case she would continue the work as usual until someone came to fill the place. Then she removed her hat, hung it in its accustomed place, and went quietly to her desk.

To anyone who has never seen the office of a Manhattan broker in full motion, many human activities may still seem impressive. But there is a special violence in financial haste that belongs to its own world. The poet may speak of crowded glorious hours, but the broker's hour is crowded down to its minutes and seconds, each one packed and hanging on for dear life. Before long the ticker began to spill out its narrow twisting tape, the telephone started its constant angry buzzing, and men came in through the door in growing numbers to demand, question, argue,

plead, order, and announce. Messenger boys ran in and out, clerks leaped from place to place, and even Pitcher's face relaxed into something almost like animation under the strain.

Maxwell himself seemed made for the storm. He shoved his chair back against the wall and did his work standing, darting from ticker to telephone, from telephone to desk, from desk to railing, and from railing back to the mail like a performer trained to impossible speed. Stocks and bonds, margins and securities, loans and mortgages, customers and orders filled the air around him so completely that there seemed no room left for anything human. The ordinary world, with its weather, meals, affections, and remembered promises, had been forced outside the office walls. Here there was only finance, and finance spoke with ten voices at once.

The strange thing was that the stenographer remained within sight of all this turmoil and yet seemed to belong to another order of life. She took notes, rose, sat, crossed with papers, answered questions, and kept pace with the office rhythm as she always had. But from time to time Pitcher, whose eye missed little though his face showed less, noticed in her some soft inward recollection that made the day's noise appear even harsher by contrast. Her movements were correct, modest, and quiet. Still, now and then, it was almost as if some sweet private fact within her resisted the whole brutal rush of figures and refused to be beaten down by it.

Maxwell saw none of that. He was submerged too deeply in business to perceive any undercurrent not made of profit or peril. The market had its own seasons, and on this day the Exchange seemed to suffer all the disorders of nature at once. There were hurricanes and landslides, snowstorms and eruptions, all translated into little strips of tape, quick shouted orders, and the impatient movement of men who believed one lost second could cost them a fortune. If someone had told Maxwell at that hour that beauty stood ten steps away from him in the next room, waiting not for business, but for remembrance, he would probably have answered without hearing the words at all.

So the whole morning pushed forward in that hard mechanical splendor, and the office became less like a place where men worked than like an engine room

of finance, full of heat, motion, and exact danger. Pitcher kept the channels open as best he could. The clerks flew where they were needed. Miss Leslie worked as though nothing in the world had changed. And Harvey Maxwell, with hair slipping over his forehead and paper in both hands, gave himself wholly to the market's demands, unaware that before the day was over the busiest business in New York would prove weaker than one human truth waiting quietly within his own office.

Part 2

In the midst of that rushing office world there suddenly appeared, like a small absurd pageant in a machine room, a high roll of yellow hair under velvet and ostrich tips, an imitation sealskin jacket, and a long silver heart swinging near the floor. Attached to these decorations was a self-possessed young woman from the stenographers' agency, and Pitcher stood ready to interpret her presence. He explained at once that she had come about the open position. Maxwell, turning only halfway with both hands still full of papers and ticker tape, stared at him as if the words had come from a disordered brain rather than from his own office.

When Pitcher reminded him that he himself had ordered another stenographer the day before, Maxwell showed open irritation. He said Pitcher must be losing his mind. Miss Leslie, he declared, had given perfect satisfaction for a year, and her place would remain hers as long as she wished to keep it. There was no vacancy, he said, and the visitor must be sent away at once. The offended lady departed with her silver heart swinging and knocking itself indignantly against the office furniture as she went.

Pitcher seized the first available second to remark to the bookkeeper that the old man seemed every day more absent-minded and forgetful. But private comments had no power to slow the office. The business storm grew fiercer than before. On the Exchange, stocks in which Maxwell's customers were heavily involved were being beaten and lifted with dangerous speed, and orders flew in and out of the office as thickly as birds. It was a day in which every nerve of a

broker had to work like wire under strain.

Maxwell, under that pressure, became less and less human in the ordinary sense. He was now a delicate, powerful, exact machine running at full speed, never hesitating, never failing in the proper word, decision, or gesture. Stocks and bonds, margins and securities, loans and mortgages filled all the space about him. The human world seemed shut out entirely. There was no room for flowers, memory, affection, or any of the softer obligations by which life ordinarily claims a man.

Yet when the luncheon hour began to draw near, the uproar slackened a little, and that slight pause proved enough to let something utterly unlike business break through. Maxwell stood at his desk with telegrams and memoranda in his hands, a fountain pen still hooked above his ear, and his hair hanging in disorder over his forehead. The window was open because the first warmth of spring had begun to touch the city. Through that open space came a wandering little breath of lilac.

That scent halted him more completely than any shouted order had done. It belonged to Miss Leslie, and to Miss Leslie alone. In one instant the whole world of finance, so immense a moment before, shrank to the size of a speck. What stood real before him now was not the market, but the woman in the next room, only twenty steps away, who had quietly served beside him day after day while he gave his soul to figures and forgot to give his heart its speech.

Maxwell seemed almost shocked by the force of his own awakening. He said aloud that he would do it now, and wondered how he could have failed to do it long before. It was characteristic of him that even his great emotional decisions came with the abruptness of business orders. A lesser man might have waited for evening, for flowers, for a walk, or for some properly sentimental hour. Harvey Maxwell, being what he was, rushed at love as he rushed at everything else—late, breathless, and direct.

He dashed into the inner office with the same haste he might have used in covering a dangerous market position. Miss Leslie looked up from her desk with a smile already waiting for him. A soft pink rose into her cheek, and her eyes were kind, clear, and untroubled. Maxwell leaned one elbow on her desk, still clutching

his papers, still absurdly wearing the pen above his ear, and began to speak without preparation, ornament, or even proper calm.

He told her he had only a minute to spare and so she must listen quickly. He said he wanted her to marry him. There was no time, he went on, for the usual long speeches, and perhaps there never would be if he waited for business to grow light, because business was never light enough for that sort of thing. He loved her, he said, and if she cared for him even a little, she must answer now. The proposal came out of him not as polished romance, but as the truth of a man who had at last remembered his own life in the middle of his work.

Miss Leslie rose, and for one instant she looked at him not merely with tenderness, but with a kind of astonished pity, as though the scene before her was both dear and impossible. Her face deepened in colour, and the smile upon it changed into something gentler and far more serious. She did not recoil, nor did she laugh, nor did she answer in the quick delighted way he seemed to expect. Instead she looked at him as if one astonishing piece of forgetfulness still stood between them and the meaning of his words.

Part 3

For one instant Maxwell only stared at her. The words struck him with the force of a thing both impossible and perfectly true. Then her arm around his neck, the tears in her eyes, the softness of her voice, and the strange light that had rested on her face all morning came together and explained everything at once. What had seemed to him a sudden proposal was, to her, the astonishing proof that business had swept even yesterday evening out of his head.

She told him gently that she understood now. It was this old business, she said, that had driven everything else away for the time. At first she had been frightened, but now she saw the reason for his strange forgetfulness. Then she reminded him in the quietest possible way of the simple fact that made all his urgency so absurd and so tender together. They had been married the evening before, at eight o’clock, in the Little Church Around the Corner.

The whole romance of the morning stood revealed in that one sentence. The soft radiance with which she had entered the office, her lingering hesitation near his desk, the slight hurt hidden beneath her smile, the agency girl dismissed in confusion, and Maxwell's own sudden rush to propose were all parts of the same comic and human truth. Harvey Maxwell had loved deeply enough to marry, but the violence of Wall Street had seized him so completely the next morning that he had forgotten his own wedding overnight. That was not a failure of feeling. It was the final, ridiculous victory of business over memory—if only for a few hours.

One may suppose that the broker then stood a little less like a machine and a little more like a man. The office beyond still roared with money, orders, telephone calls, and the sharp cries of the market. Union Pacific was no doubt still being beaten and lifted without mercy. Pitcher was still keeping callers apart, messages moving, and confusion from becoming ruin. But for one brief moment none of that could be allowed to matter quite so much. The human world had forced its way back in.

Miss Leslie, now more truly Mrs. Harvey Maxwell, did not mock him cruelly for his forgetfulness. Her tears had no bitterness in them. She had been startled, then touched, and finally amused in the loving way one may be amused by a person whose fault comes directly from overwork rather than coldness. The proposal had been unnecessary, but it had also been sincere, and sincerity covers many absurdities. There was something almost sweet in being asked, with such desperate haste, by one's own husband.

As for Maxwell, one can imagine that his astonishment must soon have changed into the kind of embarrassed joy which comes only when a man discovers that his heart has been faithful even while his memory has behaved like a fool. He had proposed because he truly loved her. He had forgotten because he truly was what everyone in the office took him to be: a broker so swallowed by work that the market could, for one morning, drive even marriage from the front of his mind. The contradiction was ridiculous, but it was entirely his.

There is, after all, a difference between a man who forgets because he does not care and a man who forgets because his whole nature rushes too violently in

one direction. Harvey Maxwell belonged to the second kind. He was not heartless. He was overdriven. The same force that made him dangerous and brilliant in business made him absurd in love. He could not propose in a garden, under moonlight, with flowers and leisure. He had to do it standing up, with papers in both hands, a pen above his ear, and the market pounding at the door.

So the romance of that busy broker is not the romance of slow courtship, polished speeches, or carefully remembered anniversaries. It is the romance of a man who, even after marrying the woman he loved, found himself seized so fully by the day's uproar that he had to discover his own happiness all over again before lunch. That is foolish enough to be comic, but also human enough to be dear. And perhaps that is why the little scene in the inner office feels truer than many grander declarations made under much finer conditions.

Behind them the telephones still rang, the ticker still chattered, the boys still ran, the market still twisted and struck, and Pitcher no doubt still kept his confidential face as steady as possible before the clerks. Yet inside the quiet of that inner office one plain truth had set the whole morning right. The proposal had become a memory, the memory had become a joke, and the joke had become a fresh proof of love. Business would reclaim Harvey Maxwell in the next instant, no doubt, but not before he had been brought back for one necessary moment to the life he himself had created the night before.

The Last Leaf

Part 1

In a little district west of Washington Square, the streets behaved in a way that seemed almost playful. They broke apart, crossed themselves, bent at odd angles, and turned into small strips called “places,” as though even the map had refused to stay sensible there. An artist had once discovered that these crooked streets held one practical advantage. A collector coming through with a bill for paints, paper, and canvas might suddenly meet himself returning the other way before a cent had been paid. Because of such odd streets, old houses, north windows, Dutch attics, and low rents, the art people had slowly gathered there and made it into a colony.

At the top of a squat little three-story brick house, Sue and Johnsy had their studio. Johnsy was short for Joanna. One of the two young women came from Maine, and the other had drifted east from California, and they had first met at the table d’hôte of an Eighth Street restaurant. There they discovered that their tastes in art, chicory salad, and bishop sleeves were so alike that they soon joined forces and set up housekeeping together.

That had been in May, when the city is easier to forgive and a studio seems more romantic than poor. But by November a cold unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, moved through the colony like an enemy choosing victims at will. On the East Side he struck boldly and in great numbers, but in the narrow old places of Greenwich Village he came more slowly, as if feeling his way among the moss-grown twists and turns. He was no gentlemanly enemy. A tiny girl whose blood had been thinned by California winds was hardly a fair match for such a hard red-fisted old destroyer. Yet he touched Johnsy, and after that she lay almost without motion on her painted iron bed, looking through the little Dutch windowpanes toward the blank wall of the next brick house.

One morning the doctor drew Sue out into the hallway and spoke to her with a rough honesty that was meant as kindness. He said that Johnsy had perhaps one

chance in ten. Even that chance, he added, depended less on medicine than on whether she herself wanted to live. If a sick person once began arranging in the mind for funerals, graves, or the future without herself, then drugs could do very little. He had already heard Johnsy ask whether people in Naples wore long cloaks, and that, to him, sounded dangerously like a mind turning away from recovery.

Sue asked him if Johnsy's mind had turned toward some foolish romance, some man, or some secret grief. The doctor answered that no man was worth a penny's worth of worry in a case like this and that he had not meant anything so particular. What troubled him was weakness of spirit. Then, trying to leave at least a little hope behind him, he said he would do everything science allowed, and that if Sue could once make the sick girl ask about fashions, sleeves, or any living earthly nonsense, the chance of saving her might rise from one in ten to one in five. After that he went away to his other cases, while Sue stood alone with fear and determination together.

Sue did what brave poor people do when there is no time for collapse. She went into the workroom and cried into a Japanese paper napkin until the first sharp pain had spent itself. Then she walked into Johnsy's room carrying her drawing board, trying to whistle ragtime as if nothing in the world had happened. She had to finish an illustration for a magazine story, and the figure she was drawing was an Idaho cowboy, elegant in riding trousers and a monocle. Work, broth, rent, doctors, and hope all had to be kept alive together in that little studio.

As Sue was working, she heard a low sound repeated from the bed. She crossed quickly to Johnsy and found her with eyes wide open, fixed on the window, counting backward. First she said "twelve," then a little later "eleven," and after that "ten," "nine," "eight," and "seven," almost falling over one another in the weakness of her voice. Sue looked out at once to see what there could possibly be to count. There was nothing in view but a bare dreary yard, the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away, and an old ivy vine whose roots were old and decayed and whose leaves had mostly been stripped away by autumn.

When Sue asked what it meant, Johnsy answered in almost a whisper that there were only six leaves left and that they were falling faster now. Three days

earlier, she said, there had been almost a hundred, and counting them had made her head ache. But now the matter had become simple. When the last leaf fell from the vine, she said, she too would go. She had known this for three days already and seemed surprised that Sue had not somehow learned it as well.

Sue answered with magnificent scorn, because love sometimes has to fight despair with anger before it can use tenderness. She told Johnsy that old ivy leaves had nothing to do with getting well and reminded her that she had once loved that vine. The doctor, Sue insisted, had said that her chances were ten to one, which was nearly as good as the chances people took every day riding streetcars or walking under new buildings in New York. Then she urged broth upon her, partly to nourish her and partly to force her mind back toward ordinary life, saying she needed to finish the drawing and sell it so she could buy port wine for her sick child and pork chops for her greedy self.

But Johnsy kept her eyes on the window and answered as if Sue's brave speech had only passed over her without entering. Another leaf had fallen, she said, and only four were left now. She wanted to see the last one drop before dark, for then she too would go. The words were quiet, but they had the still hardness of true surrender. Sue bent over her and begged her to close her eyes until the drawing was done, because she needed the light and could not pull the shade down unless Johnsy would promise not to look. Johnsy agreed coldly, like a fallen white statue, and said only that Sue must tell her as soon as the work was finished, because she was tired of waiting, tired of thinking, and wanted to let go and drift downward like one of those poor tired leaves.

Sue told her to try to sleep, though she knew that sleep was not the true enemy here. What had to be fought was the strange thought that had fastened itself onto the sick girl's mind and tied her life to the vine outside. In the darkening room, with the blank brick wall beyond the panes and the old ivy clinging there in the autumn wind, that fancy did not look easy to defeat. Yet Sue also knew that she could not surrender an inch to it. Before another leaf fell, she would have to find some way to stand between Johnsy and that deadly idea, or else the little studio under the roof would lose more than one living thing before winter had

properly begun.

Part 2

Sue waited until Johnsy closed her eyes and lay still like a white fallen figure upon the bed. Then she went quietly into the other room and tried to work, but the pen in her hand had lost its confidence. Every few moments she looked toward the door, listening for any movement from the bed by the window. At last she made up her mind that she could not fight this strange sickness alone. She would have to go downstairs and bring up old Behrman to serve as the model for the hermit miner in her drawing, and perhaps his rough presence might help more than his pose.

Behrman lived below them on the ground floor and had been an artist in name and hunger for forty years. He was past sixty, with a beard that seemed to belong to one creature and a face that belonged to another, like some old forest spirit who had wandered into a city basement and never found his way out. He had long spoken of painting a masterpiece, yet the great work had remained for twenty-five years only a blank canvas waiting on an easel in the corner. Now and then he painted little commercial things to keep himself fed, and sometimes he earned a little more by sitting as a model for younger artists too poor to pay a professional. He drank too much gin, shouted too much, and loved the two girls upstairs with the fierce helpless tenderness of an old dog that pretends to bite while guarding the door.

Sue found him in his dim room below, smelling strongly of juniper, with the untouched canvas still standing there in the corner like a patient witness to his years of promise. She told him everything: Johnsy's illness, the cold grip of the fever upon her mind, and the strange belief that when the last leaf fell from the ivy vine she too must go. Behrman listened first with red eyes full of anger and then with something wetter and deeper than anger. When Sue had finished, he burst out in a storm of rough contempt. Was there such foolishness in the world, he demanded, that a person should wish to die because leaves dropped from a

confounded vine?

Sue answered that Johnsy was very ill and very weak, and that weakness had made her mind dark and fanciful. If Behrman did not wish to pose, she said, then he need not do it, but she thought him a horrid old old flibbertigibbet all the same. That insult, which she used only because she knew him well, had its effect. He cried out that she was like all women, hearing only half of what was said. Of course he would come, he told her. Of course he was ready to pose. And then, in the middle of his shouting, his old boast returned once more, but now it sounded less like drink and more like a vow. Some day, he said, he would paint his masterpiece, and then they would all go away from such a place.

When they went upstairs, Johnsy was sleeping. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill so that the sick girl could not see out, and she led Behrman into the workroom. There the two of them looked fearfully through the window at the ivy vine on the brick wall outside. The night had turned bitter. A cold steady rain was falling, mixed at times with snow, and the vine clung black and skeletal against the crumbling bricks. After gazing at it for a moment without speaking, Behrman sat down in his old blue shirt upon an upturned kettle and let Sue place him as the hermit miner for her drawing.

But there was very little peace in that night. The storm did not pass gently over the city and leave weak things alone. It beat at the windows, drove rain against the panes, and let the north wind loose among the roofs and eaves with a fury that seemed more than enough to strip the last leaves from any vine in the world. Sue worked and listened. Again and again her heart turned toward the window and the wall outside, and always the thought came back that by morning nothing might remain there at all. Between her drawing, the wind, and the breathing of the sick girl in the next room, the hours passed with cruel slowness.

When at last day came pale enough to show the outlines of things, Johnsy woke and whispered for the shade to be raised. Sue obeyed, though weariness had fallen heavily upon her face. She looked first in dread, expecting the blank wall, the naked vine, and the beginning of the end. But against the bricks there still hung one ivy leaf. It was dark green near the stem, though touched along its ragged

edges with the yellow of age and decay, and it clung there bravely on a branch far above the ground after the whole night's beating rain and fierce wind.

Johnsy looked at it for a long time and then said quietly that it was the last one. She had been certain it would fall during the night because she had heard the wind, and now it would surely fall before the day was over. When it did, she said, she herself would die at the same time. Sue leaned over the pillow with a face worn by watching and begged her to think, if not of herself, then of the one who loved her and what such a loss would mean. But Johnsy gave no answer. There are times when a soul withdrawing from life grows lonelier than any room can measure, and in such times even love seems to stand too far away to be reached.

The day wore on, and still the leaf remained. Even through the late dimness they could see it hanging to the stem against the wall. Its persistence gave Sue a little secret strength, though she hardly dared trust it, while Johnsy watched with the fixed stillness of one waiting for a sentence to be carried out. Then night came once more, and with night the north wind returned. The rain again beat sharply against the windows and came dripping from the low Dutch eaves outside, while the room inside held its poor little circle of gaslight, illness, fear, and endurance.

Sue did what she could through that second evening to keep Johnsy's mind from the vine. She brought her broth, adjusted the pillows, moved softly about the room, and tried now and then to speak of ordinary things, of drawing, of cooking, of work that would be waiting when strength returned. Yet each small household act seemed to take place in the shadow of the window, and each pause in speech seemed full of the silent question hanging outside on the wall. Sue herself did not sleep much. She listened to the storm and thought of the leaf, and perhaps of old Behrman below with his blank canvas and his rough shouting tenderness.

So the second night passed under the same threat as the first, only deeper now because hope and dread had both grown sharper. Outside, wind and rain laboured against the city. Inside, a young girl lay waiting for permission to die, and another kept watch against that thought as if watchfulness alone might hold her friend to earth. When morning should come again and the shade should rise, something decisive would be seen upon that wall. Whether it would be merely the

end of an ivy leaf or the turning of a human soul, neither of them yet knew.

Part 3

When it was light enough the next morning, Johnsy, still merciless in her strange fixed idea, ordered that the shade be raised. Sue obeyed with the fear of two nights and two days heavy in her heart. But when the window was uncovered, the ivy leaf was still there. Against the brick wall it clung in the morning light, dark near the stem and worn yellow at the edges, yet steady and unshaken after all the storm.

Johnsy lay looking at it for a long time without speaking. Something had changed in the silence. The leaf had done what no argument, no broth, and no loving scolding had been able to do. It had stayed. And in staying, it had begun to speak to her in a way deeper than words. At last she turned and called Sue in a different voice from the one she had used through all her dark waiting.

She told Sue that she had been a bad girl. Something, she said, had made that last leaf stay there to show her how wrong it had been to want to die. The thought came to her now not as a lesson forced from outside, but as shame rising from within. It was a sin, she said, to wish for death in that way. Then, with the small returning greed of life, she asked for a little broth and some milk with a little port in it. A moment later she changed her mind and asked first for a hand mirror and then for pillows to be packed behind her so that she might sit up and watch Sue cook.

An hour later she had gone farther still toward the world of the living. She told Sue that some day she hoped to paint the Bay of Naples. That was not merely a remark about art. It was the sound of the future returning. A sick person who plans a picture for some day yet to come has already taken back the road from death and turned her face again toward life. Sue heard it and understood, though she did not make a great cry over it. Sometimes joy must be held very quietly so that it does not frighten the weak thing returning.

In the afternoon the doctor came again. He examined Johnsy, asked his few

questions, and then went out into the hallway with Sue as before. But the line of his face had changed. This time he took Sue's thin shaking hand and told her that the chances were now even, and that with good nursing she would win. Medicine had little more to do. Food, care, patience, and the will to live were now enough. Sue, who had carried so much fear in silence, at last had something solid to hold on to.

Yet the doctor had not finished with sorrow for that day. He said he must go downstairs to see another patient, one named Behrman, some sort of artist, he believed. Pneumonia had taken hold of him too. He was old and weak, and the attack was sharp. There was no hope for him, the doctor said. He would be sent to the hospital that day only to be made more comfortable. The words struck Sue hard, though their full meaning had not yet opened.

The next day the doctor brought better news for Johnsy and no hope at all for the old man. He said simply that Johnsy was out of danger. Sue had won. Nutrition and care were all that remained now. That afternoon Sue went to the bed where Johnsy lay contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woolen shoulder scarf, and she put one arm around her, pillows and all, as if what she had to say could only be spoken from close beside her.

She told her then that Mr. Behrman had died of pneumonia that day in the hospital. He had been ill only two days. On the morning of the first day the janitor had found him downstairs in his room helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing had been wet through and icy cold, though no one could imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. It seemed impossible that a man so old and so frail should have gone out in the middle of that storm for any ordinary purpose.

But after that they had found the things that answered the question. There was a lantern, still lighted. There was a ladder dragged from its place. There were scattered brushes. There was a palette on which green and yellow colours had been mixed. The poor old room downstairs, which had waited twenty-five years for a masterpiece, had at last given up its secret. Behrman had gone out into the storm with paint, ladder, and light while the wind and rain beat at the wall.

Then Sue told Johnsy to look out of the window once more at the last ivy

leaf upon the wall. Had she not wondered, Sue asked gently, why it had never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? That was the truth of it. It was Behrman's masterpiece. He had painted it there on the wall the night the last real leaf fell. The old man who had talked for years of his great work and never begun it had made it at last in a single night of cold, rain, and love, and by that painted leaf he had held one young soul back from death.

Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen

Part 1

There is one day in the year that Americans claim with a special warmth, whether they live grandly or poorly, whether they travel home to old porches and pumps or remain in the city where work has held them. Thanksgiving has a way of making even large hard towns remember that there is such a thing as custom, and that custom, when repeated long enough, begins to look almost like love. New York, which often forgets the rest of America except when business requires it, makes on that day a kind of public pause. Even its noise seems, for a few hours, to stand back and allow old family hunger, old memories, and old forms of charity to come forward.

In Union Square, on the third bench to the right as one enters from the east by the walk opposite the fountain, Stuffy Pete had taken his seat. He had done so every Thanksgiving Day for nine years, always promptly at one o'clock. The bench had become, by repetition, as fixed in his life as a church pew is in the life of a devout old parishioner. It was not merely a place to sit. It was the meeting point of a tradition, and tradition, even among the poor, can grow strong enough to command obedience.

Yet on this particular Thanksgiving Day Stuffy Pete had not come there because hunger drove him. That was the first oddity in the case. He had just finished a dinner so large and so rich that his body seemed scarcely able to manage the simple acts of breathing and sitting upright. His eyes looked pale and buried in a swollen face. His clothes, lately repaired by charitable hands, had already begun to protest under the pressure of a stomach loaded beyond wisdom with oysters, turkey, potatoes, salad, pie, pudding, and all the rest of the heavy joy that attends a serious holiday meal.

The dinner had come to him by chance, though in New York chance often wears the dress of old habit. On his way toward the square he had passed a red brick mansion near the beginning of Fifth Avenue. In that house lived two ancient

ladies who held fast to their own idea of Thanksgiving. They believed in the old custom with such stubborn devotion that they had a servant waiting each year at the side gate, under strict orders to admit the first hungry-looking wayfarer who passed after noon and feed him to the full. Stuffy Pete, by the luck of timing and appearance, had come exactly when needed, and the ceremony had been carried out upon him with complete success.

So when he reached the bench in Union Square, he came not as a starving man but as a stuffed one. The November breeze even brought him comfort, for his body burned with the inner heat of too much food. He sat there heavy, ragged, and split open at the shirtfront, yet carried by that momentary grandeur which follows an excessive dinner. If contempt for the world can ever be produced by turkey and plum pudding, Stuffy Pete had achieved it. He gazed before him with the dull after-feast severity of one who has been overfed past gratitude.

After ten minutes of staring in a straight line, he decided that the world deserved at least one side glance. That small movement changed everything. When he turned his head to the left, his eyes swelled in alarm, his breath almost stopped, and his short rough-shod legs began to move in nervous helpless little wriggles on the gravel. For the Old Gentleman was crossing Fourth Avenue toward the bench. With that sight the whole annual institution rose before Stuffy Pete in dreadful fullness.

For nine years the Old Gentleman had come there on Thanksgiving Day and had found Stuffy Pete waiting on that exact bench. For nine years he had taken him away to a restaurant and watched him eat a great holiday dinner. The old man’s purpose was no passing whim. He wished to found, if one may put it so grandly, a private tradition of his own. Some men establish libraries, some endow chairs at colleges, and some leave monuments. The Old Gentleman, moving in his own modest moral world, had chosen instead to create a yearly act of benevolence and see it repeated until it took on the dignity of custom.

Stuffy Pete understood all this too well. That was why terror, rather than gratitude, took hold of him at the sight. To refuse would be to insult the old man’s solemn institution. To accept would be to attempt the impossible. The first feast

still lay upon him like a physical weight. Another, no less ceremonial, stood already advancing across the avenue in the person of his benefactor. Fate, which on ordinary days leaves the poor to scramble for crusts, had on this day prepared to destroy Stuffy Pete by abundance.

The Old Gentleman, as he approached, showed the marks of his role so clearly that one might almost have seen the ceremony walking before him. He was a man perhaps sixty years of age, dressed with great care in old black clothes that belonged to a better period of taste. His head was covered with a very old-fashioned broad-brimmed hat, and his white moustache and little pointed beard gave him the look of someone who had made peace with dignity long ago and saw no need to hurry. In his eyes lived mildness, but also that particular firmness which belongs to a man who has once decided upon a ritual and means never to break it.

He reached the bench and looked down at Stuffy Pete with a grave courtesy that lifted the whole matter out of the field of accident. Then he asked, in the ceremonious style proper to such occasions, whether the sounds of another year now flown had seemed to summon Stuffy to the old familiar place. The words were formal, even old-fashioned, but they were not mockery. This annual meeting mattered deeply to him. He required Stuffy Pete, not merely as a hungry man to be fed, but as the other necessary actor in a personal liturgy of Thanksgiving.

Stuffy Pete tried to rise and at first could hardly do so. His overburdened body made even that duty laborious. Yet he knew he must stand. To remain seated would be disrespectful. At last he got himself upright and made some answer fit for the occasion, though the exact words mattered less than the submission behind them. What stood before him now was no ordinary invitation to dinner. It was tradition itself in a frock coat, carrying him off toward his second banquet of the day.

The Old Gentleman then offered his arm with the old-world politeness of one gentleman to another, and Stuffy Pete took it. Together they moved away from the bench and across the square toward the restaurant long associated with this yearly act. To those who saw them pass, they may have looked like a harmless and even touching picture: age and poverty walking together under the mild command of

charity. Only Stuffy Pete knew that each step carried him nearer to a table at which duty and indigestion were about to join hands in the name of Thanksgiving.

Part 2

Stuffy Pete looked up at the Old Gentleman for half a minute in pure misery, stewing in his own self-pity and helplessness. The old man's eyes were bright with the pleasure of giving. His face had grown more lined since last year, but the little black necktie was tied as jauntily as ever, his linen was still beautifully white, and the ends of his gray moustache were curled with loving care. At last Stuffy made a bubbling sound that hardly seemed human speech at all, but the Old Gentleman had heard it often enough before and knew exactly what it meant.

So the old answer came from Stuffy once more, because custom was stronger than pain and gratitude stronger than bodily fear. He said that he would go, and that he was very hungry, and he even added his thanks in the proper form. The words were false only in the matter of appetite. In another sense they were perfectly true, for his Thanksgiving hunger no longer belonged to himself alone. It had become, by nine years of repetition, something almost owned by the Old Gentleman and by the little private institution he was so carefully building.

The two went southward together to the restaurant where the feast had always taken place. The waiters recognized them at once, and one of them remarked in the easy tone of restaurant memory that the old gentleman had again come to blow the same poor fellow to a meal. Such comments did not matter. To the Old Gentleman the place was no mere eating house. It was the hall in which his yearly ceremony became visible and complete. He took his seat opposite Stuffy Pete glowing with satisfaction, like a man laying yet another stone in some small but beloved monument to tradition.

Then the food began to arrive, and there is no other honest way to describe Stuffy's conduct except as heroism. No more valiant fighter ever pushed through the ranks of an enemy than he pushed through that meal. Turkey, chops, soups, vegetables, pies, and all the rest vanished before him as fast as they could be

placed upon the table. He had entered already filled nearly to the edge of human endurance, and the very smell of the dishes had almost tempted him to surrender his honour as a gentleman. Yet he rallied again and again, because he kept seeing the Old Gentleman's face shine with beneficent happiness, and he had not the heart to let that look fade.

There was something terrible and noble in that struggle. Stuffy Pete was no saint, no philosopher, and no proper martyr with clear principles to sustain him. He was merely a ragged man bound by habit, gratitude, and the unwillingness to wound a kindly old heart. Yet those poor motives were enough to carry him through a second feast when one would already have been more than enough for a stronger person. If institutions are kept alive by human sacrifice, then Stuffy gave his share very literally that afternoon.

At the end of an hour he leaned back from the table with the battle won. His thanks came out in puffs like steam escaping from a damaged pipe, but they were heartfelt all the same. Then he rose heavily, his eyes glazed, and moved in the wrong direction toward the kitchen until a waiter spun him around and pointed him toward the proper door. The Old Gentleman, still exact and ceremonious in every part of the observance, carefully counted out one dollar and thirty cents in silver change and left three nickels for the waiter.

They parted at the restaurant door exactly as they had parted in previous years, the Old Gentleman going south and Stuffy Pete north. The ritual had been completed, and for anyone watching from the outside the matter would have seemed closed in quiet dignity. But custom and digestion are not always able to remain at peace together. Around the first corner Stuffy stopped for one minute as if trying to gather the broken pieces of his strength. Then he seemed to puff out his rags like an owl swelling its feathers, and fell to the sidewalk like a horse struck down by the sun.

When the ambulance came, the young surgeon and the driver cursed softly at his weight while they lifted him. There was no smell of whiskey about him, so there was no excuse for passing him on to the patrol wagon as a mere drunkard. Stuffy Pete and his two dinners were carried to the hospital instead, and there the

doctors stretched him out on a bed and began looking him over for unusual diseases with the hopeful curiosity of young men who enjoy a difficult medical puzzle. His case, however, was less mysterious than excessive. The poor body had simply been asked to endure too much Thanksgiving.

And then, as though the story had not yet finished proving its strange point, another ambulance brought in the Old Gentleman about an hour later. He too was laid upon a bed, and there was immediate professional talk of appendicitis, for he looked just right for an expensive diagnosis. The hospital thus received both the giver and the receiver of the annual feast within the same afternoon. In separate beds, under separate guesses, they came to rest in the same hard institution toward which neither had consciously intended to travel when they first met at Union Square.

Before long one of the young doctors stopped to talk with one of the young nurses whose eyes pleased him, and in that easy pause the truth of the two cases came out. Stuffy, he explained, would soon be all right; he had been made sick by overeating. But the Old Gentleman was a far more serious matter. He had not eaten a thing for three days. He had gone hungry in order to save up for Stuffy Pete's Thanksgiving dinner, and so the true victim of starvation in the story was not the ragged man on the bench, but the dignified old founder of the institution himself.

While the Auto Waits

Part 1

At the beginning of twilight, the girl in gray came again to the same quiet corner of the same small park. She sat on a bench and opened a book, using the last good light of day while she still could. Her dress was gray and plain at first sight, but it was made with perfect taste and fit, and the plainness only hid how careful and costly it really was. A large veil covered her hat and softened the beauty of her face without truly hiding it. She had sat there at the same hour on the two evenings before, and there was one person who had noticed it very well.

The young man who had noticed her waited nearby, trusting himself to luck and to the little accidents by which many city romances begin. He had watched her before, but had found no proper way to speak. This evening fortune helped him. As she turned a page, the book slipped from her fingers and fell a little distance away from the bench. He was upon it in an instant, picked it up, and gave it back to her with that respectful boldness which belongs to men speaking to strangers in public places. Then he made a mild remark about the weather and stood waiting for either encouragement or ruin.

She looked at him slowly and without hurry. He was neat enough, but entirely ordinary in dress and face, with nothing striking about him except his willingness to take a chance. After that calm examination, she told him that he might sit down if he liked. The light, she said, was already too poor for reading, and she would rather talk. He took his place beside her with complete satisfaction, feeling luck smile upon him more kindly than before.

But when he began in the easy foolish manner common to park benches, he nearly spoiled everything at once. He told her that she was the most beautiful girl he had seen in a long time and let one cheap little word of street flirtation slip into his speech. The effect was immediate. Her voice turned cold, and she said sharply that she was a lady and that, if her invitation had made him forget that, then it was withdrawn. At once he apologized, awkwardly and sincerely, explaining that there

were many kinds of girls in parks and that he had spoken wrongly because he had mistaken her. His foolish confidence fell away, and in its place came real humility.

She let the matter pass and then surprised him by asking not about himself first, but about the people moving along the paths. Where were they all going, she asked, and why did they hurry so much, and were they happy? He answered cautiously that it was indeed interesting to watch them, and that one could not help wondering what their histories were. She replied that she herself was not inquisitive in that way. She came there, she said, because only there could she sit near the great common heart of humanity, a thing from which her own life was shut away. When she asked whether he could guess why she had chosen to speak to him, he gave his name as Parkenstacker and waited eagerly for what would come next.

She said at once that, if he heard her true name, he would know it instantly, because such names were always in the newspapers. This hat and veil, she explained, belonged to her maid and gave her the only disguise she could manage. Then she spoke of money with deep weariness. She was tired, she said, of endless wealth, endless pleasure, endless jewels, endless travel, and endless men, all made in the same pattern and polished with the same useless shine. Even the sound of ice in a glass of champagne, she declared, could almost drive her mad. When he gently suggested that money must still be a fine thing in some ways, she answered that a moderate amount might be pleasant, but that too many millions only turned life into one long repetition.

The young man listened with a humility that was not wholly free of curiosity. He even allowed himself one small correction, saying that he had always thought champagne was cooled in the bottle rather than by putting ice in the glass. She laughed then, with real amusement, and told him that people of her class depended for their pleasures on breaking ordinary rules. At present, she said, putting ice in champagne was fashionable because a visiting prince had once done it at the Waldorf. That fashion, no doubt, would soon give way to another equally foolish one, just as some dinner guests recently had worn green gloves while eating olives. The young man accepted the lesson meekly and let her continue, for by then he

had understood that she wished not for argument, but for admiration mixed with escape.

Then her tone changed and grew softer. Sometimes, she said, she had thought she might love a man of humble place, a worker rather than an ornament. Yet such freedom was probably impossible for her, because birth, rank, and money drew hard lines around a life. Even now she was being pursued by two men she disliked. One was a German Grand Duke, cruel and dangerous, and the other an English Marquis so cold and selfish that his politeness made him worse rather than better. When she asked the young man again what kind of work he did, he answered that it was humble, but that he hoped to rise in the world. Then, encouraged by what she had just said, he asked whether she had truly meant it when she said she might love a man of low position.

She answered that no calling would be too low if the man himself were right. So he told her the truth, simply and without decoration. He worked in a restaurant, he said. At that, she drew back a little and asked quickly whether he meant as a waiter, for labour was noble, but personal attendance was another matter. He said that he was not a waiter. He was the cashier in the bright restaurant across the street.

That answer seemed to change the air between them. She looked at the small watch on her wrist and rose in haste, saying that she had to go at once. There was a dinner waiting, and then a box at the theatre, and after that no doubt the same old empty round again. She asked whether he had noticed the automobile at the upper corner of the park, the white one with the red running gear. That, she said, was hers, and her chauffeur Pierre was waiting there, believing she had only gone shopping in the department store across the square. Then she gave him one last command in a firm voice: if he respected her wishes at all, he must remain on the bench for ten minutes after she left. With that she said good-night and moved away through the dusk, swift, graceful, and full of the mystery she had so carefully built around herself.

Part 2

The girl in gray moved away quickly through the dusk, carrying her little drama with her as lightly as she had first opened the book upon the bench. The young man remained where he was, obedient not only because she had asked it, but because her whole air had compelled obedience. He watched her cross the square instead of going at once toward the white automobile with the red running gear that stood near the upper corner of the park. That small difference in direction struck him first as a surprise and then as a clue.

She did not go to the motor at all. Instead she crossed the street and entered the cheap little restaurant in which the young man had said he worked. There was no hesitation in the movement, no secret sign to a waiting chauffeur, and no pause of aristocratic reluctance before the bright ordinary doorway. She passed within exactly as one passes into a place one belongs to by habit. The whole splendid story she had told upon the bench began to loosen and slip from its shape at once.

For another minute the young man still sat where she had left him, but now his expression was changed. He was smiling a little, though not in cruelty. The smile was for the oddness of the world, which so often makes people invent riches when what they want is attention. Then he rose and crossed the street in the other direction, not toward the restaurant, but toward the waiting automobile. There was no dramatic hurry in him. He moved with the calmness of a man whose part in the comedy has only just become clear.

At the side of the white car stood a handsome girl in elaborate evening dress, plainly anxious and plainly belonging to the world of money that the other girl had only described. When she saw the young man, she spoke at once with a tone that was both relieved and reproachful. She asked where he had been and told him that they had looked for him at the club. One could hear in her voice the easy intimacy of people to whom motors, dinners, and clubs are ordinary furniture of life.

The young man answered simply that he had been talking with a girl in the park. He added, with a kind of thoughtful amusement, that she was a very good-looking girl, though perhaps a little too fond of making herself out richer than she

was. Then, as he put his foot upon the step of the car, he gave the final turn to the whole little adventure by speaking to the chauffeur. He asked whether he was late for dinner. The question was not that of a cashier. It was that of the man for whom the auto had been waiting all along.

So the story closes with two equal pretenses crossing in the dusk of a city park. The girl on the bench had pretended to be an heiress escaping for an hour from wealth, boredom, and titled suitors, while in truth she was no more than a cashier or counter girl slipping into romance before beginning her evening's work. The young man had pretended to be only a modest restaurant cashier trying to rise, while in truth he was the one to whom the automobile and the richer life actually belonged. Each had wished, for a little while, to step outside the ordinary facts of social place and be loved under a different description.

There is no bitterness in the ending, only a small bright irony. Neither deceived the other out of money, safety, or future. Each merely borrowed another station in life for half an hour because twilight, a quiet bench, and a stranger's attention made such borrowing feel possible. In a city full of wealth and want, of clerks dreaming upward and rich people looking downward with curiosity, that sort of exchange may be one of the commonest romances of all.

Part 1

In Harlem, Mrs. Fink had dropped into Mrs. Cassidy's flat one flight below, and the visit began in that half-intimate, half-comparative spirit with which married women sometimes examine one another's fortunes. Mrs. Cassidy turned her face proudly toward her friend and displayed one eye nearly closed by a great greenish-purple bruise. Her lip was cut, there were red finger-marks on her neck, and yet she bore the damage with the air of a woman exhibiting jewels rather than injuries. Mrs. Fink, while pretending disapproval, could not keep envy out of her voice.

Mrs. Cassidy declared openly that she would not have a man who failed to beat her up at least once a week. To her mind such treatment proved interest, passion, and masculine spirit, and besides, she said, Jack would now be the sweetest man in town for the rest of the week to make up for it. This eye, she added, was good for theatre tickets and a silk shirtwaist at the very least. Mrs. Fink answered that Mr. Fink was too much of a gentleman to raise his hand against her, but even while she said it she sounded not satisfied, but cheated.

Mrs. Cassidy only laughed, happy in the security of being wanted violently. She pulled down the collar of her kimono and revealed another treasured bruise from an earlier occasion, now fading through maroon, olive, and orange into memory. Mrs. Fink could no longer maintain superiority before such evidence. The formal light in her eye softened into open admiration, and she asked the one question she had really come to ask: did it hurt very much when he struck her? Mrs. Cassidy, with the authority of experience, answered like a connoisseur discussing weather or wine.

Then the deeper comparison came out. Mrs. Fink confessed that her Mart had never hit her a lick in his life. He came home grouchy, she said, and had scarcely a word to offer. He never took her out. He sat about the house like a chair-warmer, bought her things sometimes, but looked so glum while doing it that the

gifts lost all flavour. Mrs. Cassidy slipped an arm around her and pitied her with real affection, saying that not everybody could have a husband like Jack.

Then, warming to her theme, Mrs. Cassidy laid down her whole philosophy of marriage. These discontented wives one heard about, she said, needed a masterful man who would come home and kick their slats in once a week and then make it all up in kisses and chocolate creams. That would put spice into life. What she wanted was a man with enough sand to slug you when he was jagged and hug you when he was not. Preserve her, she cried, from the man who had not the courage to do either. Mrs. Fink sighed from the middle of a becalmed domestic sea.

At just that moment the hallway below suddenly filled with sound, and the door flew open under the kick of Mr. Cassidy. His arms were full of bundles, and Mame flew straight into them, hanging about his neck with delighted cries. He shouted to her like a conquering hero returned from campaign. He had tickets for Barnum and Bailey's, he said, and if she would open one of the bundles she would find the silk waist. Then, noticing Mrs. Fink at last, he greeted her cheerfully and asked after old Mart.

Mrs. Fink answered with proper politeness and went upstairs again to her own flat. There she had a little cry, not a grand cry with one clear cause, but the strange transient cry that comes to women from no single wound and yet from many at once. Why had Martin never thrashed her? He was as big and strong as Jack Cassidy. Did he not care for her at all? He never quarrelled, came home silent and glum, provided fairly well, and then ignored all the spices of life.

Mrs. Fink's ship of dreams, as the story sees it, was becalmed. Her captain ranged only between plum duff and his hammock. If only he would shiver his timbers or stamp his foot on the quarter-deck now and then, she thought, there might be some sign that blood still ran in him. Instead she was tired out without a scratch to show for all those tame rounds with her sparring partner, and for one shameful moment she almost hated Mame Cassidy, with her cuts and bruises and the presents and kisses that followed them.

At seven o'clock Mr. Fink came home, and if ever a man seemed soaked

through with the curse of domesticity, he was the one. He asked for little, said less, and answered his wife's effort over supper with only a grunt of approval. After the meal he gathered his newspapers to read and sat in his stocking feet. No trumpet of passion sounded in the Fink household, only the soft dull rustle of print and the dreadful comfort of routine.

The next day was Labor Day, and Mrs. Fink took Mrs. Cassidy's pattern down early. Mame had on the new silk waist, and even her damaged eye managed to shine with holiday triumph. Jack was fruitfully penitent, and there were parks and picnics and Pilsener waiting in their day's plans. When Mrs. Fink returned to her own flat above, an indignant jealousy had risen in her so strongly that mere sighing no longer seemed enough. Something in her had begun at last to wish not for peace, but for action, and to wonder whether Martin Fink could be driven into becoming, even once, the kind of husband who left marks worth remembering.

Part 2

Labor Day began brightly enough in Harlem, but Mrs. Fink carried into it an uneasy heart. The holiday plans below stairs only sharpened the dull ache of comparison in her own marriage. Jack Cassidy had storm and apology, bruises and theatre tickets, quarrels and embraces. Martin Fink had only slippers, newspapers, grunts over supper, and the thick settled air of a man already old in habit before his time. By the time the morning had fully opened, Maggie Fink's jealousy had ripened into that strange state in which peace itself begins to look like injury.

And then, by one of those sudden revolutions in human affairs that give the story its title, the scene turns far from Harlem and its flats and stoops to the Cumberland country in Tennessee. There another husband and wife, poor mountaineers with very little between them but hardship and temper, had reached the opposite conclusion from Maggie Fink's. Ransie Bilbro and Ariela Bilbro had come before Justice of the Peace Benaja Widdup to be divorced. Their life together, so far as they could see it, had not lacked spice. It had lacked peace.

The Justice, after much solemn thought and some searching of a law book that gave him very little help, decided according to equity, the Constitution, and the golden rule that if a justice of the peace could marry people, then by fair reasoning he ought also to be able to divorce them. That judgment satisfied his mountain logic perfectly. Ransie thereupon laid upon the table a five-dollar bill, all the money he had in the world, earned by selling a bearskin and two foxes. The regular price of a divorce in that court, said Benaja Widdup, was five dollars. With an air of indifference not supported by the size of his fee, he placed the bill in his homespun vest and laboriously wrote out the decree on foolscap.

When he read the document aloud, it had all the gravity and all the homemade strangeness one might expect from mountain law. Ransie and Ariela, standing there in their rough clothes and silence, listened to the announcement that they would hereafter neither love, honour, nor obey one another, neither for better nor worse. The words were solemn enough, yet beneath them lay the simple truth that poor people often break apart not because they have ceased to matter to one another, but because living itself grows too sharp and narrow. The Justice was just about to hand over the paper when Ariela suddenly stopped the proceedings. Her rights, she said, had not yet been settled. She must have alimony.

This demand struck both men dumb. There had been no earlier mention of alimony, and, as the story drily remarks, women were always bringing up startling and unlooked-for issues. Yet the Justice could not deny the force of the point. The law might be silent, but Ariela's feet were bare, and the road to her brother Ed's place on Hogback Mountain was steep and flinty. When asked how much would be proper, she answered with practical modesty that five dollars would do for shoes, snuff, and the little things required to get her there. Benaja Widdup ruled that the amount was not unreasonable and ordered Ransie to pay it before the divorce decree could be delivered.

Ransie answered helplessly that he had no more money. The five dollars already paid into the court was all he had possessed. In another setting that might have ended the matter, but Justice Widdup, once he had taken the law into his hands, was not inclined to weaken its dignity. Otherwise, he said, the husband

stood in contempt of court. Since Ransie could do no better, the case was adjourned until the next day, when he must return with the alimony, obey the order, and receive the decree. There was nothing for the couple to do then except climb back into the cart, one on either side, and go down to Uncle Ziah's to spend the night in that suspended state between marriage and freedom.

Benaja Widdup spent the rest of the day as usual, reading his weekly paper until the light failed, then continuing by tallow candle until moonrise told him it was time for supper. He crossed the branch near the laurel thicket on his way home, wearing the satisfied look of a magistrate who has not only administered justice but improved it. There, in the darkness, a man stepped from the laurels and covered him with a rifle. The robber wanted money and wanted it without talk, since his finger, he said, was wabbling on the trigger. The Justice, trembling, admitted that he possessed only five dollars. He was ordered to roll the bill and place it in the muzzle of the gun. The crisp note disappeared into the barrel, and the lawgiver went hurriedly on his way, poorer by exactly the amount he had expected to admire on the morrow.

Next day the little red bull brought Ransie and Ariela back to the office door. Justice Widdup had his shoes on because he was expecting them, and in his presence Ransie handed to his wife a five-dollar bill. The official eye rested sharply upon it, for it looked strangely familiar, tending to curl in a way that might have suggested to a more fanciful mind the interior of a gun barrel. But the Justice made no comment. He handed each of them a decree of divorce, and there they stood for a moment, no longer husband and wife in law, though not yet anything simpler in feeling.

Then came the talk that revealed more than the entire legal process had done. Ariela asked whether Ransie would be going back to the cabin and reminded him where the bread and bacon were kept. She told him not to forget to wind the clock that night. He asked, with studied unconcern, whether she was truly going to her brother Ed's. She answered that she had nowhere else to go and would say good-bye, if he cared to say it. Each line of the talk moved awkwardly, like people walking barefoot among stones, yet each word carried household memory,

concern, and the ache of separation. Divorce had been obtained, but the old cabin, the clock, the dogs, the bread tin, and the shared life within them had not so easily been untied.

Justice Widdup, watching the five-dollar bill disappear into Ariela's bosom, now spoke in a tone that made him feel himself either a great sympathizer or a great financier. It would be kind of lonesome in the old cabin that night, he said. Ransie admitted that it might, though when folks got mad and wanted a divorce you could not make them stay. Ariela answered that there were others who wanted a divorce too, and besides, nobody wanted anybody to stay. That drew from him the reply that nobody had ever said they did not. Then came the little domestic turn upon which the whole wheel of the story began to swing. Nobody, he said, could wind that old clock. "Want me to go back along with you in the cart and wind it for you, Ranse?" Ariela asked. At that, the mountaineer reached out and took her hand. He told her the hounds would trouble her no more and confessed, in his plain way, that he had been mean and low down. She answered at once that her heart was in the cabin along with him and that she was not going to get mad any more. They were already turning back toward each other before the law had finished speaking.

Part 3

Justice-of-the-peace Benaja Widdup had nearly forgotten his own presence in the warmth of the reconciliation before him. But as Ransie and Ariela moved toward the door hand in hand, he recovered the full weight of his office all at once and interposed himself between affection and departure. In the name of the State of Tennessee, he said, he forbade them to defy its laws and statutes. The court, he declared, was more than willing and full of joy to see clouds of discord rolling away from two loving hearts, but it was also bound to preserve the morals and integrity of the State. The solemnity with which he made this speech was so complete that for a moment the reunited pair could only stare at him.

Then he reminded them of the exact legal obstacle standing between them

and the old cabin. They were no longer husband and wife. By regular decree they had been divorced, and as such they were not entitled to the benefits and appurtenances of the matrimonial estate. Ariela clutched Ransie's arm tightly when she heard those words. It seemed impossible that law should now snatch him away at the very instant when they had at last understood one another. The wheel of life had swung them back together only to show them that the papers in their hands had cut the bond while they were learning how little they truly wanted it broken.

But Benaja Widdup had not spoken his last word. The same ingenuity that had invented the divorce now came forward to repair its work. The court, he announced, was entirely prepared to remove the disabilities set up by the decree. It stood ready on the spot to perform the solemn ceremony of marriage, thus fixing matters up and enabling the parties in the case to resume the honourable and elevating state of matrimony which they desired. The fee for performing that ceremony, he added with judicial calm, would be, in this case, five dollars.

Ariela saw the promise in his words before Ransie had fully understood them. Swiftly her hand went to her bosom, where she had placed both the decree and the alimony. Freely as an alighting dove, as the story says, the bill fluttered out and fell upon the Justice's table. Her cheek coloured while she stood there hand in hand with Ransie and listened to the reuniting words. The same five dollars had now served, in their roundabout way, as fee for divorce, as alimony, and as the price of being married again. The wheel had turned completely.

So Benaja Widdup, having first divided them and then joined them, restored the mountain pair to one another under the full dignity of the law. Ransie helped Ariela into the cart and climbed in beside her. The little red bull turned once more, and they set out hand-clasped for the mountains and the cabin where the clock still waited to be wound. The law had taken them apart by paper and had put them together again by paper and five dollars. Life itself, turning like a whirligig, had done the real work in between.

A Retrieved Reformation

Part 1

The warden stood in his office with the air of a man who had given the same advice to too many prisoners and had learned not to expect gratitude from any of them. Before him stood Jimmy Valentine, known in the prison books as Number 9762, neat in figure, composed in face, and so innocent in manner that his innocence itself seemed almost like a polished performance. The warden told him that he would go out in the morning and that he ought to brace up, stop cracking safes, and make a man of himself. Jimmy answered with mild surprise that he had never cracked a safe in his life. The warden laughed in the dry way of one who had heard such purity before and reminded him, with friendly mockery, of the Springfield case and of the many inventive reasons by which innocent men explain their convictions. Jimmy only repeated that he had never even been in Springfield. Then the warden ordered the guard to take him back, fit him with outgoing clothes, and let him out at seven sharp in the morning.

At a quarter past seven the next day Jimmy stood in the outer office dressed as the State thought a reformed citizen ought to be dressed. The suit hung badly, the ready-made coat had no interest in his shape, and the shoes creaked with that stiff official virtue which belongs only to prison issue. The clerk gave him a railroad ticket and a five-dollar bill, as though law and civilization believed a man could begin honest prosperity with one poor note and a destination. The warden added a cigar and a handshake. The prison books recorded that Valentine had been pardoned by the Governor, and Mr. James Valentine walked out into the sunshine.

Freedom, however, did not awaken in him any tears over birds, flowers, or moral rebirth. He ignored the waving green trees and went straight to a restaurant. There he celebrated liberty in the practical form of a broiled chicken and a bottle of white wine, ending with a cigar of a grade better than the one the warden had offered him. Then he moved on leisurely to the depot, tossed a quarter into the hat of a blind man by the door, and boarded his train. Three hours later he stepped off

in a little town near the state line and went directly to the café of Mike Dolan, where an old understanding still waited behind the bar.

Mike greeted him with the genial regret of a friend whose influence had worked hard, though not quickly enough, against official resistance. Jimmy asked at once for the key, received it, and went upstairs to a rear room exactly as he had left it. There on the floor still lay Ben Price's collar-button, torn off when the detective and his men had overpowered Jimmy at the time of arrest. The sight of that little object did not trouble him. Instead it belonged naturally to the room, like a hat on a peg or dust on a shelf, one more reminder that the life he was now resuming had merely paused rather than ended.

Pulling out a folding bed from the wall, Jimmy slid back a panel and drew forth a dust-covered suit-case. When he opened it, the real emotion of the morning showed itself at last. Inside lay the finest set of burglar's tools in the East, a complete professional kit of specially tempered steel: drills, braces, bits, punches, clamps, augers, jimmies, and several clever devices of Jimmy's own invention, all made at great expense and with the most recent improvements known to men of that trade. He looked over them not like a criminal revisiting guilt, but almost like an artist rediscovering beloved instruments. The tools had cost him more than nine hundred dollars, and every polished piece of them represented skill, care, and pride.

In half an hour he came back down through the café dressed now in tasteful, well-fitting clothes and carrying the cleaned suit-case in his hand. Mike asked whether he had anything on, and Jimmy replied in a puzzled innocent tone that he did not understand the question. He said he was representing the New York Amalgamated Short Snap Biscuit Cracker and Frazzled Wheat Company, a claim so absurdly smooth that it delighted Mike and earned Jimmy an immediate seltzer-and-milk. He never drank hard liquor, the story notes, and that detail is important. Jimmy Valentine was not a common rough criminal sinking under vice. He was a cool, skilled workman in a crooked profession, disciplined enough to keep his hand steady and his nerves clear.

A week after his release there was a neat little safe-burglary in Richmond,

Indiana. The haul was only eight hundred dollars, but the job was exact and left no clue behind it. Two weeks later a patented improved burglar-proof safe in Logansport was opened as easily as a cheese, yielding fifteen hundred dollars in currency while securities and silver were left untouched. Then an old-fashioned bank safe in Jefferson City suddenly became active and threw out five thousand dollars in notes. Three jobs, three clean openings, and in each case the same cool professional judgment appeared: take the real money, leave the bulky or traceable things, and move on.

These losses were now large enough to interest the better class of man-hunter. The rogue-catchers compared notes and observed a remarkable likeness in the methods. The combination knobs had been jerked out with swift certainty, the steel handled in one particular way, and the whole workmanship carried the same unmistakable hand. When Ben Price investigated the scenes, he did not need long to reach his conclusion. The jobs, he said, bore Dandy Jim Valentine's autograph. Jimmy had resumed business. Price's remark was not admiration in the friendly sense, but it did contain the cold professional respect that one expert feels toward another working at the opposite end of the law.

Ben Price was not one of those noisy detectives who fill a case with self-advertisement. He had once brought Jimmy in, and he knew very well what kind of man he was hunting. Jimmy was no clumsy yeggman blowing safes wide open with too much powder and too little intelligence. He worked alone, used uncommon tools, did not touch anything unnecessary, and left a place looking almost as if the steel itself had quietly decided to give way. That was precisely why Price took interest. Against a common thief, routine would do. Against Jimmy Valentine, a man had to understand craft, patience, disguise, and the exact habits of a professional who could pass in decent clothes for almost anything he chose to be.

From the outside, Jimmy's return to crime might have looked like proof that the warden's advice had fallen flat, that prison had done nothing, and that a safe-cracker remained a safe-cracker until caught again. But the truth at this stage was simpler and harder. Jimmy had gone back to what he knew because it was what

he knew best. The State had sent him out in bad clothes with five dollars and a railway ticket, while Mike Dolan still held his key, his room, and the hidden panel in the wall. Reform had been recommended to him in words. His old life had been preserved for him in steel. When a man is met by hunger on one side and by his own perfected tools on the other, sermon and craft do not begin the race equally.

So the first movement of the story closes with two professionals once more on their proper courses. Jimmy Valentine, newly pardoned, fed, dressed, and re-equipped, had begun to write his name again in opened safes across three states. Ben Price, reading that signature in steel and torn metal, had taken up the trail in his own quiet way. Between them there stood, as yet, no love, no small town, no shoe store, and no new name. There were only skill, habit, memory, and pursuit. The world had turned Jimmy loose, and Jimmy had answered by becoming once more exactly the man Ben Price remembered.

Part 2

One afternoon Jimmy Valentine and his suit-case climbed down from the mail-hack in Elmore, a little Arkansas town set five miles off the railroad in black-jack country. He looked then like a healthy young college man on holiday rather than a cracksman moving between jobs. As he walked along the board sidewalk toward the hotel, a young woman crossed the street ahead of him and entered the Elmore Bank. Jimmy looked into her eyes for one instant and forgot, as the story plainly says, what he was. In that moment the old life did not argue with the new one. It simply seemed to step back, as if love had struck him not gradually but all at once.

He did what men in small towns and in stories often do after such a meeting. He stopped a loafing boy on the bank steps and began asking questions, paying for information with dimes. By the time the girl came out again and went on her way, royally unconscious of the stranger with the suit-case, Jimmy knew that she was Annabel Adams, daughter of the man who owned the bank. The boy also noticed Jimmy’s watch-chain and kept the conversation moving in the profitable

direction of more dimes. What Jimmy had intended before reaching Elmore no longer mattered much. He now had a town, a bank, a girl, and the beginning of a reason to stay.

So he went to the Planters' Hotel, registered under the name Ralph D. Spencer, and began at once to invent himself into respectability. Leaning on the desk with easy confidence, he told the clerk that he was looking for a place in which to open a business and asked particularly about the shoe line. The clerk, impressed both by the clothes and by Jimmy's smooth manner, answered eagerly that Elmore ought to support an exclusive shoe-store very well. No such store yet existed there, and a capable man, he thought, would be welcomed. Jimmy said he might stay a few days and look things over, adding that he would carry his own suit-case because it was rather heavy. That last detail, innocent in the hotel clerk's ears, carried within it the whole steel weight of Jimmy's former profession.

But Ralph D. Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine's ashes, remained in Elmore and prospered. He opened a shoe-store, secured a good run of trade, and won the respect of the town. This was not merely because he was clever in deception. He seems to have become, in outward life at least, genuinely useful, agreeable, and industrious. People liked him. Small towns do not always forgive strangers quickly, but they do know how to value steady success, pleasant manners, and visible effort. Jimmy, under the name Spencer, gave them all three.

Socially he prospered as well. He met Annabel Adams properly now and became more and more captivated by her charms. A year later the transformation was complete enough to satisfy even common sense. Ralph Spencer's shoe-store was flourishing, he had won the respect of the whole community, and he and Annabel were engaged to be married in two weeks. Mr. Adams, the plodding country banker, approved of him thoroughly, and Annabel's pride in him nearly matched her affection. He moved among the Adams family and among Annabel's married sister's family as naturally as if he already belonged there by blood.

That success, however, did not erase Jimmy Valentine. It forced him instead to decide what would become of Jimmy now that Ralph Spencer had become a real man with a real future. One day he sat down in his room and wrote to an old

friend in St. Louis, asking him to meet him at Sullivan's place in Little Rock on Wednesday night. He said he wished to wind up some little matters and also to make the friend a present of his burglar's tools, a kit worth nearly a thousand dollars and impossible to duplicate cheaply. Then he wrote the sentence that proves the change in him had gone far beyond mere disguise. He had quit the old business a year before, he said. He had a nice store, was making an honest living, and was going to marry the finest girl on earth. He would not touch another man's money now for a million.

The letter went further still. After marriage, Jimmy wrote, he intended to sell out and go West, where there would be less danger of old scores being brought up against him. Annabel believed in him, he said, and for that reason, if for no other, he would not do another crooked thing for the whole world. The letter matters because it is not addressed to the law, to a clergyman, or to Annabel herself. It is addressed to a man from the old life who would understand perfectly what it meant for Jimmy Valentine to surrender that famous set of tools. It was not only a promise of reform. It was the practical disposal of temptation.

But the old life was not done with him yet. On the Monday night after Jimmy mailed that letter, Ben Price drove quietly into Elmore in a livery buggy and began to learn what he wished to know in his own unobtrusive way. From the drug store across the street from Spencer's shoe-store he got a good look at Ralph D. Spencer. Then he said to himself softly, with that dry inward tone proper to a detective who recognizes his man and a complication at the same time, that Jimmy was going to marry the banker's daughter. The remark contained surprise, doubt, and calculation together. Ben Price had found the cracksman, but he had found him standing in the middle of a straight life.

The next morning Jimmy took breakfast at the Adamses'. He was going to Little Rock that day to order his wedding suit and to buy something nice for Annabel. It would be his first trip out of town since coming to Elmore, but more than a year had passed since the last safe job, and he believed he could venture safely now. After breakfast quite a little family party went downtown together: Mr. Adams, Annabel, Jimmy, Annabel's married sister, and the sister's two little girls,

aged five and nine. They stopped first at the hotel where Jimmy still boarded so that he could fetch his suit-case, and then went on toward the bank, where his horse and buggy already waited to take him later to the railroad station.

At the bank the clerks welcomed him gladly, as they always welcomed the good-looking agreeable young man who was soon to marry Miss Annabel. Jimmy set his suit-case down, and in the bubbling high spirits of her happiness Annabel picked up his hat and then his case, laughing that she would make a fine travelling salesman. She was surprised at once by the weight of it and said it felt as if it were full of gold bricks. Jimmy answered coolly that it contained only nickel-plated shoe-horns that he meant to return and that he was saving express charges by carrying them himself. The lie came easily, but in that bright family circle it had a different quality from his older lies. This one protected not a crime in progress, but a dangerous remnant of a life he meant to bury.

Mr. Adams, proud of the bank's new vault and safe, insisted on showing it to everyone. It was small but modern, fitted with a patented door, three solid steel bolts moved by a single handle, and a time-lock. He explained its workings beamingly, while Ralph Spencer showed the polite but not too intelligent interest suitable to a shoe merchant. The two little girls, May and Agatha, were delighted by the bright metal, the clock, the knobs, and all the shining mystery of the machinery. While the family stood there in this harmless inspection, Ben Price strolled in and leaned casually on the railings, saying to the teller that he wanted nothing and was merely waiting for a man he knew. Thus all the lines of Jimmy Valentine's life, old and new alike, had at last been drawn into one room and brought to a point where they could not much longer remain apart.

Part 3

Suddenly there were screams from the women and a violent little confusion among the shining steel and polished wood. During the proud inspection of the new vault, no one had noticed that May, in the spirit of play natural to nine-year-old girls and disastrous to adults, had shut little Agatha inside the vault and then

thrown the bolts and turned the knob exactly as she had seen Mr. Adams do. The old banker sprang to the handle and pulled at it in one dreadful instant of disbelief. Then he groaned that the door could not be opened, because the clock had not been wound and the combination had not been set. Inside the dark vault the child began to scream wildly in panic.

Agatha's mother gave way at once and beat upon the steel with frantic hands, crying that the child would die of fright. Suggestions burst out uselessly from every side. Somebody talked of dynamite. Somebody else ran to the door and back again as if speed without knowledge might help. Mr. Adams, trembling and grey, said there was not a man nearer than Little Rock who could open that door. There was not enough air for the child, he said, and the terror alone might throw her into convulsions. In the midst of all this helpless agitation, Annabel turned to Jimmy with her large eyes full of anguish but not yet despair. To her, nothing seemed quite impossible to the powers of the man she loved. She asked whether he could not do something, whether he would not at least try.

Jimmy looked at her then with a strange soft smile, one that seemed to gather all the tenderness and all the loss of the moment into a single expression. He did not answer the others. He spoke only to Annabel, and what he asked for sounded so odd in that hour that she scarcely believed she had heard rightly. He asked her to give him the rose she was wearing. Wondering, but still obedient, she took the bud from the front of her dress and placed it in his hand. He slipped it into his vest pocket, laid off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves. With that one simple act Ralph D. Spencer vanished and Jimmy Valentine stood there in his place.

He spoke now in the short hard tone of the old professional. Everyone was to stand away from the door. There was no excitement in him, no wasted movement, and no explanation. He set his suit-case upon the table and opened it out flat. From that moment he seemed unconscious of every eye in the room, unconscious even of the detective leaning beyond the railings and of the girl whose faith in him was about to pay the price of truth. One by one he laid out the bright queer tools in swift exact order, and as his fingers moved among them he whistled softly under his breath, just as he always had when at work. The whole

room fell silent and watched him as if under a spell.

Then the steel began to answer him. Jimmy's favourite drill bit into the door as smoothly as if the metal had been made for that very purpose. His hands never faltered. He shifted tool after tool with the old mastery, listening, measuring, pressing, and turning in that absorbed, intimate way only a great craftsman of any kind can show. The difference was that this craft had once belonged to burglary and secrecy, while now it worked in broad daylight before banker, family, clerks, detective, and bride. Ten minutes later, breaking even his own burglarious record, he threw back the bolts and pulled the door open.

Little Agatha, almost collapsed with terror, was swept at once into her mother's arms. The crisis broke in cries, tears, thanks, and confused movement all around him, but Jimmy did not wait to be praised or forgiven. He put on his coat quietly, as though the matter were finished and required nothing more from him. Then he walked out from behind the railings toward the front door of the bank. As he went, it may be that he heard a far-off voice he once knew call "Ralph," but he never hesitated. He had chosen his act and accepted its cost before the first tool touched steel.

At the door a big man stood somewhat in his way. Jimmy recognized him at once. There was no point now in pretence, and none in running. With the same strange quiet smile still on his face, he greeted Ben Price by name and said that the detective had got around at last. Then he added that they might as well go, because he did not know that it made much difference now. The words were not bitter. They were the tired plain speech of a man who had chosen to save a child and, by doing so, had surrendered the respectable life he had spent a year building.

And then Ben Price did a curious thing. Perhaps he saw before him not the safe-cracker he had once hunted, but the man who had just thrown away marriage, name, store, town, and future rather than let a little girl die in a steel box. Perhaps he measured, in his own way, the meaning of that sacrifice and judged that the law had less to do there than something deeper. Whatever passed in him, he looked at Jimmy and answered that there must be some mistake. He said he did not believe he recognized him. Was not Mr. Spencer's buggy waiting for him? Then

Ben Price turned and strolled quietly down the street.

So Jimmy Valentine's reformation, once only hoped for by a warden and doubted by a detective, was at last proved in the only way that mattered. He had not become honest because prison advised him to do so, nor because a new town failed to know his name, nor because business happened to prosper under a false one. He became honest when the moment came in which he could keep safety only by standing still while a child suffered. In choosing the child, he gave up the last refuge of disguise and let the law take him if it wished. That was the act by which Ralph D. Spencer ceased to be a fiction and Jimmy Valentine became, in truth, a changed man.

Hearts and Hands

Part 1

In one of the coaches of an eastbound train, a very pretty young woman sat alone, dressed with that quiet elegance which seems natural rather than arranged. There was a self-possessed ease in her manner, and yet she was young enough for her face still to hold that clear brightness which belongs to people who have not yet learned to distrust pleasant surprises. When the train left Denver, two men entered the coach and took the seat facing her. They were handcuffed together. The arrangement itself was enough to draw every eye in the car, but the contrast between the two men made it still more striking.

One of them was handsome in the broad easy Western way. He was tall, smooth-faced, and well dressed, and there remained about him some trace of youth, fashion, and social confidence, though his face just now looked a little tired and a little forced. The other was glum-faced, rougher in dress and feature, and carried the air of a man accustomed to harsh duties and little speech. Yet because the two were fastened together by one steel chain, the first quick judgment of the passengers would naturally have made the younger man the prisoner and the darker heavier one the officer. Appearances, however, were not prepared to keep their places quietly in this story.

Scarcely had they settled themselves before the young woman gave a little start of recognition. Her face brightened at once, and she held out her hand with the warm frankness that comes more easily to women of good breeding than to men. She addressed the younger of the two by name, calling him Mr. Easton, and reminded him that they had once known one another in Washington. The sudden meeting pleased her visibly, though almost in the same instant her eyes dropped to the handcuffs and came back again with a puzzled delicacy. She was too well mannered to ask bluntly what the situation meant, but she could not help seeing it.

Easton answered with a slow smile that seemed meant to carry the

awkwardness lightly, though it did not wholly hide embarrassment. He took her hand and said that he could never mistake Miss Fairchild. Then, in the quiet polite style proper to train acquaintance renewed, he asked after her family and spoke as if nothing in his condition could possibly interfere with the ordinary forms of society. But he coloured a little and glanced once or twice toward the handcuffs, which had already become the central fact in the conversation whether anyone named them or not.

Miss Fairchild, after the first surprise, behaved exactly as a pretty, kindly, well-bred girl would behave when determined not to wound a man before strangers. She talked first of Washington, of old acquaintances, and of the life there from which Easton had apparently drifted far away. Her tone suggested that she remembered him as a man of ease, leisure, and agreeable position. She said that the East was not what it used to be without him and that people among the old crowd had missed him. Behind the lightness of her speech there was also real interest, for the West, the train, the handcuffs, and the changed look in Easton had together made him much more romantic than he had probably appeared in Washington drawing rooms.

At that point her fascinated eyes went again to the glittering steel. The glum-faced man spoke before Easton had to answer for himself. In a rough but not unkind voice he said there was no reason for her to worry, since all marshals handcuff themselves to their prisoners to keep them from getting away. Mr. Easton, he added, knew his business. The explanation was ready, simple, and entirely sufficient if one wished to believe it. Miss Fairchild accepted it at once, because she wanted to. Her face relaxed, and the whole matter became, in her mind, not a disgrace but a distinction. Easton was a marshal of the West, and the handcuffs now touched him with duty instead of shame.

That change in understanding made her even more gracious. She asked whether they would see him again soon in Washington, and Easton answered with a faint air of sadness that his butterfly days were probably over. The phrase pleased her, because it sounded worldly, modest, and rather brave. Then, turning her eyes toward the window and the great Western spaces beyond it, she said with

sudden sincerity that she loved the West. She and her mother had spent the summer in Denver, she explained, and she could easily imagine being happy there. The air agreed with her. Money, she said, was not everything, though people remained stupid and misunderstood life continually. In those words there was perhaps more truth than she herself knew, for the small scene in the railway coach was at that very moment built entirely upon misunderstanding.

Easton answered as best he could, still with that smile which was friendly enough but never wholly free. The glum-faced man let the conversation run for a while and then broke in with a growl that he needed a drink and had not had a smoke all day. Had not the marshal talked long enough, he asked, and would he not now take him into the smoker? Easton rose at once and said lightly that he could not deny a petition for tobacco, since it was the one friend of the unfortunate. Then he turned to Miss Fairchild, held out his hand for farewell, and allowed the little comedy to continue under the pressure of his good manners. The westbound scenery, the polished girl, the chain of steel, and the man beside him had all combined to give him only one choice: he had to act his part to the end.

Part 2

Miss Fairchild looked at Easton with a softness that the little explanation had made possible again. It was too bad, she said, that he was not going East, though she supposed he must continue on to Leavenworth with his prisoner. Easton answered simply that yes, he must go on to Leavenworth. The words were plain enough, yet even in them there was something weary, as if he had accepted long ago the direction in which his life was now being carried and no longer found use in resisting it aloud.

The rough-faced man then reminded him that it was time to move into the smoker if he wanted his tobacco. Easton rose, still carrying himself with as much easy composure as the handcuffs allowed, and made his farewell to Miss Fairchild. There was no dramatic confession, no protest, and no sudden attempt to tear away the false appearance that had saved him a little humiliation before her. He chose

instead to let the misunderstanding stand, because a brief kindness, even a mistaken one, may sometimes be better than truth when truth can do no good. The two men then sidled down the aisle together, linked by the steel and by the necessity of keeping step.

Two other passengers nearby had heard most of what passed between them. After Easton and his companion disappeared toward the smoker, one of these men remarked that the marshal seemed a good sort of chap. Some of those Western officers, he added, were decent fellows after all. It was the kind of easy judgment people make when they think they have understood a scene and are pleased with the version they have chosen to believe.

The second man, however, had watched more closely. He said that the supposed marshal looked very young for such an office, and the first speaker answered him at once with impatient surprise. Had he not seen the plain truth of the matter? he asked. Had he ever in his life known an officer to handcuff a prisoner to his right hand? With that brief question the whole pretty arrangement fell to pieces. The rougher man had been the marshal all along, and Easton, despite his clothes, his manners, and Miss Fairchild's memory of him, was the prisoner bound for Leavenworth.

That is the whole turn of the story, and it is enough. Easton had been granted, for only a few minutes in a railway car, the chance to stand once more before a woman who remembered him in another light. The true marshal, rough but considerate, had helped him preserve that last little scrap of dignity without asking payment or thanks. And Miss Fairchild, never learning the truth in that moment, was permitted to go on believing that the man she had once known had risen to honour in the West instead of falling into disgrace. The hands were linked by iron, but the deeper link in the scene was made of pity, tact, and the quiet human wish to spare another person needless pain.