DOCTOR TRANSIT

For
Frank Hill
from his friend
Isidor Schneider.

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By

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BOOK ONE

DOCTOR TRANSIT

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

Spring had soon softened the city. The pavements yielded under the steps, and the walls of houses were bending. The city, out of the shell of winter, emerged with a skin young and tender, and all things journeyed within it with livelier strides as if its flexibility had made it spacious.

Once out of the house, John too found himself loosening. His knees became blunt; his shoulders lightened and his mind, which had been compact a few moments before, crumbled pleasantly.

Up the street he saw through the narrowing walls of houses as through the bore of a funnel the brown and young green of the country. The city seemed to be draining out into it. He felt himself flowing.

Were there others flowing with him? The same feet still hammered the sidewalks, but more gently. The anonymity of the crowd was its welcome to him. It was a pilgrimage. John mingled in effortless fellowship—a thousand voices saying "John" cordially, and the call lingered in the bland air.

A freedom, hesitating and innocent, went out

timidly under this benign coaxing of the spring. And this freedom was his youth which he had chained with the knowledge that twenty-four had come upon him.

It broke the husk of encysting ideas. Peculiarly it made him suspend the discipline he had waged over his senses. He felt them rising unchecked, liberated by the same spirit that was hurrying the world back into life, that was brandishing a distant green banner in front of the funnel holes of the avenues.

Desire slowly soothed him by directing him too upon a simple purpose.

He watched the women walking in the street. He watched their sheltering, houselike motions. He was in the crowd now because it was half full of women. It afforded him a turn at a gathering that was half a gallery and half a bazaar, where he could admire and with his eyebeams handle.

Before he could see the faces of the women he watched their movements, knowing, by the degree of grace, their measure of desirability; but he was restive until he could look into their faces. When in a knot of the crowd they escaped him, he felt sharp chagrin. Yet every time he peered into a woman's face confusion muddled him. He did not know what he expected to see but it failed him in the faces. They became defensive as his look boarded them. Perhaps what he searched for was recognition. As he approached they seemed to hail softly "John," but when his eyes reached their eyes, a mys-

tery came in between them; and he would pass the faces, one after another, aggrieved at their incognitos.

But it pleased him to think that there were so many women in the world. John even had the courage to feel that there were women who might like him because he was thin. These women would ignore the robust men. "No, you are too gross," they would say to the sturdy men; and they would walk over to John and take his arm and walk away with him; away from the strapping fellows.

A warmth of pleasure to which he was unused filled John, and in his usual, foolish, strict way he caught himself up. "Indulging in another day dream, John," he said to himself, sarcastically, and the warmth was chilled out. Women, who, as he had passed them before, were soft and friendly, became hard and even unreal, and it seemed to him that he passed them at very regular intervals. "They are like the bars of a railing," he thought, "and their faces are little, blank decorations, like the heads of railing bars." And this brought on the inevitable revolt against the despotic senses that drove him so unconditionally upon their errands. And he knew too, that to wait for "the ideal one" was a tactic of evasion.

To outwit his tyrannous passion by sudden compliance he resolved to reach out to any woman, to announce himself hymeneal in fundamental terms, to bespeak one, not with words but with the touch of

two fleshes, drawing her quickly within the arc of understanding, with the untemporizing embrace of rape.

§ 2

At perhaps the decisive moment, he overtook Mary. The very familiarity of her precise steps intoxicated him. He took her by the hand with excessive cordiality, and his "How are you, Mary?" in his explosion of relief, was almost shouted. Mary returned a confident, acknowledging glance. In it John saw the recognition, the instinctive complement that he had missed in all the other eyes. He rejoiced with the crisp activeness of relief, frisking around her. Mary was mildly disturbed.

"You are suspiciously gay today," she admonished.

"Don't blame me," retorted John, "there is magic in this day. I walk with polished senses. The atmosphere is so clear that everything down to the horizon seems to be marching, and in new uniforms; a freshness keener than scent comes off everything."

Mary smiled. "Thank you for describing it so nicely—I feel it too. It made me restless and I thought a walk in the country would help me."

"We will walk together," said John.

He took her hand and danced her through the streets.

"Fine shines for a scholar," she said.

"Fine company for a nun," he replied.

So exaltation went with them into the fields. After years of formal acquaintanceship they discover each other. Their embraces are almost physical vouchers of their reality; they kiss to identify themselves.

John was ravished with happiness and relief. He took each step more audaciously than the last. He had considered love-making as not for his arms and lips, looking on with matter-of-fact resignation at the arrant antics of other men. The huge consciousness of functioning maleness swept over him and he felt as broad as earth.

Sunset in the air clothed them in further glory. To the afflorescence of John, Mary countered a placid contentment. With subtle diligence she directed John's transports. They returned to the city, John rampantly, Mary serenely, in love.

§ 3

A warm confusion hovered over John in his half sleep so that he felt astray under his own ceiling. The oblong of the window was a block of unfamiliarity. He was strange to himself. His body was stuffed with palpable reminiscences of Mary's woman's body. He tried to shame himself to dismiss the fleshly memory, but his usual, competent abnegation was unequal.

While he thus lost sleep, trying to reorganize himself, he saw Mary with accurate vision, sleeping well,

having accepted the new element in her existence, and calmly postponing all necessary consideration of it for her leisure. In her absorbent woman's flesh the caress had sunk, naturally, like darkening sunlight.

In the morning John somewhat recovered himself before his books as an old soldier might be sobered by the sight of his campaigner's uniform. He told himself that he would close the incident correctly by romance, and return to his study, to work harder after this indulgence.

Mary rose, and as if taking up a matter dropped for a few moments, considered sedately, through the automatic business of toilette, her status with John. She must examine her man, pluck at his characteristics, discover his directions, test the anchors of his habits, to see whether, and to what degree, life with him would obstruct or maim her effort. "John," she concluded to herself, as she did a final button, "is a neutral man and cannot stand in the way. His own tastes will prefer it." Her orderly blond face composed itself; and as if in corroboration, John's feet knocked in the hallway.

As John came up a profound security waved over her. She listened to his steps and they had the comforting, unsure adjustment of something foreordained. It would not have mattered to her in the least, had she known the assurances within which John had armored himself.

"I will come," he had warned himself, "like an invader. I will take what I need and depart. I

will be a plunderer, not an immigrant, absorbed through the naturalization of marriage, into this woman."

He swung the door open and strode in. But his strategy of confidence lasted only up to the amused inquiry on her unsurprised face. He saw sunlight on her gold hair. With ineffable majesty her bosom, tyrannical as suspense, commanded her. Her moodless face glistened with well being; a decorous suffusion of pleasure went into it upon his approach. She rose tall out of her chair and gave him both her hands.

Her invulnerable poise uneasied him. He drew close to her as simply as a boy and he took her hands limply, and stole a meek kiss.

When his frenzy returned, her impassive acquiescence worried him. At times he simulated violence, and with calculated abandon hugged her to see whether any transport would win a cry. Her patience offended him, and he taunted her,— "Next time," he said, "I will bring you the latest novel to read, while I embrace you, so that you won't be bored." She made no reply.

They ate together quite domestically. Pleasant to have each other's company at a meal. Love could not be different from the breaking of bread; it would be a breaking of bodies between them, a different repast of the flesh.

They went out again together into the country that called to them across the length of the city. They walked over ground lit with daisies. Birds cut

through the air with little jars of sound. Insects danced.

"Who says the city is busy and the country placid?" said John. "Man sees himself in the manifold mirror of his city and is bewildered by the twitching reflections. The spinning of the images appears to him a tireless activity. But he has not the unyielding rush of plants, the exultation of the sunlight, the haste of birds and insects, to measure his own movement against."

The stir of life that he thus noticed communicated itself to them. When they had heated themselves with walking, they rested under a tree as spacious as a cloud. John put his head in Mary's lap; he looked into her quiet eyes and felt her to be no more involved by him than the tree against which they mutually rested. The thought of possessing her lightly went further out of his mind.

They passed, almost wordlessly, from mood to mood, as if their emotions were clandestinely in conversation.

From a storm of lovemaking in which John would load his senses until they could not endure another touch, they would look at the indifferent presences about them, too busy to heed them. Near them the road from which they had stepped ran on like a canal. The green that it dissected lifted up tough grass islands; bands of it crossed industriously like bridges. This heave of "inanimate" life won them like a spell. "To differently keyed eyes," said John, "the flower could move visibly upward out

of the ground and 'animate' life would appear static."

They talked, but the words sounded like anti-climaxes; they recollected anecdotes, habits. As if the denuding torment of love left them shadowless Schlemiels, silhouettes in a world of over simplified dimensions, they summoned the past to fabricate a recognizable background for them.

"——being so good in history, it was natural that the teacher should——"

"——I was only a child—chubby—everybody called me dumpling——"

They felt feeble and irrelevant then in this solid show of nature. Every straw was a horn through which life blew a lusty breath; the most plodding insect, in this scale, bent to each infinitesimal movement a gigantic strain of energy. Mary somehow belonged with all this, her bright cheeks, her cornflower eyes, her ripe hair, were touches of relationship; but he, sallow and angular, shuttling between frenzy and torpor, did not fit.

"Damn you, John, forever doubtful, forever feeling out of place!" he said to himself. "Of course, you would rather be back in your hole at your book. But you cannot go back, you must surmount this woman so that your return will be through a circumnavigation. Proceed, John."

But how easy it was to deform his desperation into a redundant tenderness. Aloud he worried over Mary's hand scraped by a thorn, over Mary's skin slapped by the noon sunlight, over Mary's dress

crumpled by his tossings, over Mary's feelings so idiotically beset by his importunity.

No wonder Mary smiled; no wonder the smile pitied, patted, excused him.

It was no different when they got up to unstiffen themselves and walked. An unassailable ease reigned in Mary and estranged her from him. Was she sure of herself, or him? She walked on as if there was nothing more normal in the world than a loon-witted lover at one's side, as if every convulsion were programmed.

Yet in spite of everything John was enjoying himself. It was happiness to be so intimately ridiculous before her, to win from her an unimportant confidence of her childhood, to walk, an agitated comment, beside her unruffled calmness, to picnic with her in a meadow under the gaze of cows, who looked on with interminable understanding.

Meanwhile the sun was going—was a golden fan behind which smiled night's Moorish face. Stars spiked the sky. The currents in the air, as if night blew them from peaks of the darkness, were faintly chill now. With a devotion that surprised him, too, he put a coat over Mary, and the buttoning was like a fanatic ritual.

"I love you, Mary."

"I love you too, John."

§ 4

And very simply it had all happened, so simply that it left consciousness behind, and for a time it

was only a rumor that was ripening slowly into reality. Mary had kissed him as she said it, but with a routine dip of her lips; and her face again contemplated an exact and punctilious future.

When he was aware to the full of what had happened, astonished doubt wrestled in his mind with his festivating senses. She loved him; but how did she know? And what would loving him mean? Would it mean marriage? Would he immediately have to give up his pleasant solitude and live with her, night and day? Could there somehow be love without the machinery? What a bloodless lover he was to so enchaos his mind when it should leap with fervor. The great lovers never spent themselves so fruitlessly. After they had had their fit of love they considered consequences and perhapses. He was cowed by his own success; so accustomed to failure that he could not recognize this triumph awarded him, and was dishonoring it by investigation.

When Mary stood unpinning herself in her own room, she too found herself involved in a struggle between two feelings that warred for her. A satisfaction that seemed to come from frightening physical hinterlands, streaming out of the very marrow of her body, applauded her marriage. An army of nerves celebrated a victory. But the tradition of her mind fought this tradition of her body. Her girlhood resolve to live unmarried had survived adolescence; it had turned from a natural, young shrinking into a determination to submit not even a

portion of herself in mutual service to another. Yet she knew, and the knowledge oppressed her, that her life could not otherwise fulfill itself; John was her opportunity to have fulfillment at least self-expense.

She drooped into bed, and it oppressed her to think that soon she would not sleep alone, that a man's body would divide the peace of sleep, would move toward her uncouthly between the sheets.

But fascination burned from the very covert of the thought. The primitiveness of being grappled with by a man ravenous for love possessed grandeur and drama. She clasped her arms and shuddered; a brush of nerves made her feel a hand moving up her arm, already wielding her shoulder.

Not once came John into her mind. In her thinking, her marriage would solve the problem of all men; as it would have to. She had thought it out so.

Women there had been who lived freely from man to man, but unless they were placed in special situations, were empresses like Catherine and Faustina, this freedom meant the narrowing of their lives within the drunkard's circle of intrigue. For a man might love casually, but a woman could not. She had laboriously to keep herself ready. She had practically to provide all the setting for the play, to stage manage it, to coach the hero. Lovers were tailors robing her in new passions, their love limiting her more effectively than marriage, even though

her love experience gave her much wisdom and exaltation in its breadth and variety.

§ 5

Across the city in a room acrid with books, John stared at his bed as though it had been hauled out of reach. When he did finally lay himself in it, it received him ungraciously, tickling his skin which grew more wakeful the tighter he shut his eyes. He had not been able to solve his riddle, but he knew what its solution must be, and he tried to brush away the fret of it. He tried to summon voluptuous visions, to have Mary beside him, white and warm in the cool dark. But he could not even physically reconstitute her in his memory. He could not find her in any shape in his mind. If after, with main strength of memory, he had recalled a feature, it faded in the time it took to supplement it. He abandoned the trial. A troubled sensuality took its place, recollections of lascivious situations, scenes from the stage, descriptions from books, anecdotes, and a squalor of small encounters. With the reality of Mary fled, the reality of woman had escaped too; she was back into mystery; he could touch her only with the obvious blows of laughter and obscenity, just as a foreigner is approached with taunt and reviling. In the midst of a heavy dream he fell asleep gradually airing in rest the rankness of his nausea.

A blight of bad weather befouled the morning.

The grayness of the sky enabled John to sleep longer. He awoke late. A spitting rain swaggered out of doors. A taciturn light of day pressed against the window and added to his dullness. His limbs felt soiled and crushed as if his body had been stuffed in some littered corner.

Getting up was a hard climb upon consciousness.

Marriage morning meant the last day that he would live in the pleasant usage that after many years he had worked out for himself.

He would leave his cleanly little solitude; he would quit his smooth routine of, in their way, fastidious actions; of eating so, and sleeping so, and existing in their ordered niceties without the disturbance of any other being's habits.

He would leave them forever; he would leave his precious solitude in leaving his room, for the room was its body. The room became very dear to him. He became nostalgic. The various articles within it, the very shadows that they made in the morning light, tugged at him and made parting grievous.

His room had never felt so unalterable, so personal to him. He wanted to remain in it, and forget everything else. He looked back upon it as an exile might. He was already a fragment broken from it and rolling into a new order. He was glad of the rain outside.

So a wet man knocked at Mary's door, with rain in his eyebrows and on his face and hands. It was just like Mary to oppose so masterly a contrast, a dryness of fresh laundered cloth, of powdered cheeks,

of a level smile that had traversed the driest plains of feeling. A little daintily, Mary took his rain-fringed coat and hat and then faced her guest with kindly reproach.

"You should not have come in this rain."

"I could not come soon enough," replied John half honestly.

"If you waited the rain would have stopped. I think it will clear in a few minutes."

"We will have so much more of the clear weather together then," said John with forced lightness.

"I have a feeling, John, that you purposely came in the rain as a kind of display."

"To display what?"

"To quiet possible doubt by this to-boot of devotion."

"Unfortunately I am too simple for such subtleties. All I know is that I tried to sit down to read and couldn't. I tried to set my table in order and couldn't. The realization that sooner or later I could come to you diminished everything else, and I had no patience with the hours in between."

"You know, this could be read from an old book."

"Not all the things that were in the old books are done," replied John.

"But we had decided that of all the superstitions of the past, the superstition that love existed or was necessary was the worst."

"Yes, but we had also admitted that of all the superstitions it was longest lived because as mirages

of water were most frequent in a desert, images of love would appear most to the lonely."

Mary rose. She went to him and put her hand on the back of his chair; the act, performed in all quietness, was like a conscious signal of conclusion.

Not because it needed to be said, but only as the sole part of the marriage ceremony which she recognized, Mary said: "If you want to marry me, are you certain that our marriage will not interrupt my own self-development? For a woman is by nature, and a man only by a woman's wish, involved in marriage. If the man joins with nature against the woman then it is almost impossible for her to save herself, for then her own womb becomes a hearth in which she consumes herself; but if man joins woman against nature then it may be circumvented. I am marrying you in the belief that you will help me."

And John, conscious of the ritual, made his response: "I believe that you will rather complain about my indifference than about my meddling."

"I think we know our own minds about this marriage and are both eager upon the same terms," said Mary.

"So we may set about it at once," returned John.

They covered their excitement with this pretentious nonchalance. The attitude clarified their intention but did not lessen their ignorance about the life they were entering; it did nothing more than smother under a hasty resolution the discomfort of

John in quitting his old life; it did not dull their anticipation of the sweets of marriage; in spite of their abstract familiarity with biology, they ran youthfully into romance.

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

As they were walking to the City Hall a friend accosted them. He was ebbing news. "Do you know," he cried out, on the same breath with which he greeted them, "Dr. Transit has come to the city?"

Mary and John looked puzzled. "Who?"

"Dr. Transit, the old magician scientist. He is settling down in the city."

John remembered him now through a footnote in a book he had been reading, and Mary through recollections of intellectual gossip. For both of them the memory was a disturbance.

"He is not very welcome, is he?" asked John.

"No. There was talk of barring him," replied the friend.

"His views make him an intruder," said Mary.

"More than an intruder," agreed their friend.

"There may be necessary intruders," said John.

"Necessary intruders? How?" asked their friend.

"Oh, imagine a man and a woman sleeping together and someone breaking in to tell them the house is afire," and John bit his lips even as he said it, wondering why his mind had betrayed him in this.

But their friend noticed nothing. "Dr. Transit is building his own house. There are only two others with him but the three are building it with wonderful speed. They dug quite a deep foundation. There are besides Transit, a woman and a very thin man who is thought to be his assistant. It seems certain that he will settle here."

"No harm done," said John.

"Oh, but it does make you feel a bit ticklish to be so close to a devilishly clever man like Dr. Transit."

"I begin to feel well disposed towards him," said Mary. "It was never a comfort anywhere to people to have an unusual man around."

"He is probably nothing more than a popular fable," said John. "People like their own kind common, but those they are not in touch with, gods or demons."

"It's more than that," said their friend. "You will have many another talk about Dr. Transit."

"No doubt," admitted Mary, at the same time disengaging herself and John from him; and the friend went on to shout his news elsewhere.

He left Dr. Transit with them like one who has brought a servant or a helpful policeman to his friends, and goes off satisfied with his good deed. John and Mary kept Dr. Transit between them; their conversation continued him.

His place was that of the great thinker who with the nearly worshipped tinkering of Science might

mend the kettles and cradles of the world; only to them he was a spectacle to amuse rather than a presence to make uneasy. Eventually they came, half in banter,—for they knew that the answer existed in them, in their love, in the portion of life that civilization had bedizened with glittering irrelevancies but made dull to itself,—to discuss whether Transit could help stave off the threatened depopulation of the world.

From that they drifted upon a discussion of the reformer who had advocated a universal ruin of civilization, which he called a disease like the plague, since it was affecting the race with sterility. He would have gangs rip up the tracks of the great railroads, drag piers loose with all their shipping, burn all aircraft in their hangars, split telegraph poles into kindling wood and smash the wireless stations into junk, slash the tight coils of the dynamos, the curious brains of industry that concentrated and distributed will; and the most necessary of all, pile up every book and printed sheet in the world,—anything that might help another human mind to reconstruct civilization—and set fire to the heap, men to sacrifice their lives in keeping the pile together and seeing that the last scrap was burning. The result would be such an overwhelming, suctional loneliness, such an unmitigable solitude that men and women would leap upon one another to beget the solaces of children, and sex would again be reduced to that hygienic balance between pleasure and

use, the disturbance of which had made humanity a prey to universal neurosis.

"Nothing could be won by that," John said. "The effect of civilization had at first been the increase of population. When the maximum density had been reached and even before, civilization which had been in its mechanical aspects a mass weapon, came to be, as in all other of its aspects an individual weapon; and, through the perfection of communications, began to break up the mob."

"While this proceeds," complained Mary, "the position of woman grows more anomalous; for, in spite of the removal of the social expressions of sex difference, she stands baffled before the untransferable function of maternity, her inseparable incubating system which like all useful things clamors hollowly for service."

John did not reply, because his mind was inhospitable to impossibilities and he would not understand a discontent that could never be appeased. "You can make such adaptations to this circumstance as will tend to minimize it; and if women carry it on for generations, ignoring the function, it may be bred out of the race." But he did not say it, and his silence undertoned her words with an apparent sympathy and was accepted.

They were at the City Hall, and they came in to register their marriage. The slight formality irritated them and when it was over, in wild relief, they scrambled out arm in arm. On the stairway they

saw that they were alone and at once ran into each other's arms until, on their way down, an unforeseen door turned out an interrupting personage, and they became paralytically stiff with dignity.

They had prepared a room for themselves. Although all that passed between their anticipated love pleasure was a fatiguing bate of time, they felt it a sort of unstated payment of debt to propriety to prolong it. They even had the martyr impudence to astonish some friends by paying them a jaunty visit during which they exhibited a charmingly transparent imposture of casualness.

They then catapulted like spent elastics homeward and with a deafening tremor of muscles were bedded; and were made aware as are all lovers eventually who live in the comforting illusion that bodies are motions and that sex is merely an ecstatic impetus, that on the contrary, bodies are the balks of motion, have a complicated fleshiness, are lifted out of vulgar proneness for the almost deliberate spasm of crisis, in itself no nobler than any other spasm, and inferior in intensity and duration to the architectural delirium of drunkenness; and drop down again in ensuing prostration.

§ 2

For a time all the irritations and the bluntings of familiarity were forgiven because of the exquisite preciosity of their love; which palled. They then

set about the task of reducing triteness to habit. They faced what had confronted them from the beginning, the commonplace of living together.

Mary was precise and orderly; John was sprawling; Mary liked conversation and company; John disliked it, saying that the finer animals did without it.

John had a nettling way of comparing himself and by implication, others, with animals. He perhaps might have resented another man calling him a dog, a sheep, a fox, a pig, a wolf, or a rabbit; but he named himself these, over and over again, with all the approval of repetition.

When he would come home of an evening with a volume on the probable incandescence of stars or the project of paving principal streets in mosaic he would reply to the sarcasms of Mary:

"But, my dear, I merely investigate everything; I pass like the dog who sniffs every hydrant, stoop, wastecan, cat and human shankbone that he rambles upon."

No set-to between them failed to end with the usual ominous "on the disability of woman," and Mary taxed John with it as if he were culpable; as if the fact that he was the presumptive father of her unborn children, for whom, whether they were born or not, her body prepared itself, made him responsible for everything womanish, that kept her from being all that a man might be.

On these occasions John never failingly offered the

irrelevant comforts of evolution. It was apparent, he said, that woman was repudiating her maternal function; this persisted in, would lead to the development of some new and better balanced scheme of reproduction. John had an irritating contentment with this solution, which he applied to other human dilemmas. He had once decided that in some future evolutional development man would develop scales on the nose and ear tips against the frost and thereafter felt it insulting to Destiny to wear ear muffs.

Having given his bit of comfort John would edge into his room and hover at the doorway until he felt he could shut the door without offense.

Some drops of the acid of martyrdom had trickled into Mary's nature; and the very quietness of John in his study made her feel that secretly, John, too, recognized his responsibility and was really hiding from it. It became her present goal to wring from him such an admission and whenever she could she engaged him in these discussions.

Because of her grievance her conversation became oratorical, a lecture. She would say, with trained passion, "Our instincts loathe suffering; our pity is a compromise between logic and loathing. The ancient fanatics, witnessing the squalid functionings of women, gave religious tone to their loathing, denied women souls and deprecated all dealings with them. No wonder thanking formulas existed in which men announced their gratitude to God for not having made them women."

John would answer, "It is not loathing but a sign of jealousy. The importance of sex which is found in the dark earth, which is the calculating root that feeds all the flowers, fair or foul, you women instinctively understand. In your advanced sexual specialization you have a mastery that needs no assertion. While man remains an amateur in love always, woman is possessed of a fundamental natural sophistication. She is able to be an artist in the most inevitable and most decisive activity of life. That is why fewer women than men engage in the compensating arts with which men relieve their uncomfortable sense of futility when they are not making a violent and vindictive reductio ad absurdum of the whole business of life by a war."

In the momentum of his argument John would sometimes fling out into a declaration (Mary placed it in her accounting against him), that he would be glad to exchange places with her. He would be more of a woman than Mary. He would bear children; he would prepare his body for its gruesome hospitality.

One day, meeting this declaration with her usual laugh, Mary warned him indifferently, "Be careful; you have heard of Dr. Transit."

"That is why I make the offer," said John magnificently.

But at the same instant both of them felt remorseful as though an undemarcated boundary had been overstepped. For after the experiments of Dr. Transit in sex transference had become known, they

had, in instinctive fair play, smoothly kept from talking about him, avoiding the very mention of his name, feeling that it would implicate them; although all the world, belled by all the apparatus for indiscriminate publicity, was ringing with it.

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

Dr. Transit. . . . .

Looked at up or down, the street in the suburbs goes straight on, flatfooted to the horizon. An endless narrow park of curbed greenery ridges it in the middle. On both sides small houses sit on neat lawns, with placid porch laps. On one an old man is prattling toothless stories, his memory as gapped as his mouth; on another, a sick man is feeling his flat muscles; on a third, a young woman is watching the sun over the roof of the house across the street and wondering why anything has happened; on another a door opens, a red-eyed face ducks out, ducks in, and leaves a streak of petulant amazement. . . .

Through this street the news has traveled of Dr. Transit's arrival.

But to begin with the beginning, which is very hard with Dr. Transit, for he had no ascertainable beginning—who was his mother, and who was his father? And Transit at birth confounds tradition, for there is no doubt as to who his father was, or only a small one, but as for his mother, there is no one to venture to say.

Some believed that Dr. Transit was a synthetic

man; grown out of manufactured protoplasm. Scientists declared that, granted that a protoplasm had been made, the most that could have been done with it was to make it grow, and the probable result would have been no human being but some new form of life, very primitive and hardly that of a man, which compressed billions of years of development in the germ cell. Most men winked their eyes and slapped their thighs, and said scientists before this had condescended to the humble, proofless but ever edifying experiment of fatherhood. Transit's mother might have been a servant, a girl pupil, a colleague's widow, a perverse street woman——

Busybody imaginations, working in the anonymous collaborations of gossip, had constructed a perfect story.

A woman loved Transit's father, a scientist. She enabled him to enjoy Arcadian interludes from his strenuous routine of experimentation. She came and went in his laboratory as freely as he but, with the sympathy of a Heloïse, knew how not to be in the way. Observing his unhappiness over his failures at man-making, she determined upon a little deception to restore his brisk heart. She decided to have a child. When her time was upon her she encouraged him to concentrate with all his efforts on his manikin. To help him (she said) by leaving him utterly alone to his work she went from him for a few months. Her faith stirred him, and while the woman swelled out to her delivery the scientist, working feverishly, made a number of important discoveries.

The woman came back hiding a boy baby. On the day that the scientific birth was scheduled, the woman put her child into the chemical egg—amiable woman giving her man, by sleight, a share in the reproduction of life, not conscious even of the ironical rebuke it was.

Stories . . . stories jump to Transit like bits of iron to a magnet; perhaps because he was so polarly opposite to stories, so monotonously simple. Whenever his name came into hearing, his strange face awoke among the stories, like a baffling prisoner under escort—his little, apocalyptically bearded face with eyes perfect and brilliant, outthrust efficient nose, solicitous hanging ears, thin upper and thick under lip as if to symbolize the gentle lip of speech, the gross lip of feeding,—a synthetic face.

Suspicion seemed justified that he was a chemical product, with a retort for the mother womb, engendered by a scientist who perhaps had gone insane with grief when he had succeeded. There is a curious manuscript extant. . . .

"Great God: I have refined and exalted earth to prove its earthliness and that only life is divine,—your incomprehensible gift. I writhe in my laboratories in an ape dance of desperate imitation of your serene creations. Not in emulation, O Lord, not in mockery even of myself, for there are no greater and lesser blasphemies, I know,—but for the ecstasies of my failures. Oh, how exultingly I triumph when my chemical lives expire on the threshold of existence; when my plasms organize themselves in rigid,

memorial frustrations. Mine is the happiness of following all the mad and seducing quests of disbelief to find belief at the end."

The manuscript was torn from the hands of a mind-broke man, who ran through the streets of the city pounding his chest and bellowing: "I am The Resurrection and The Life."

He died in an insane asylum. He died angrily demanding an opportunity to turn himself by a crack of lightning into helium so that he might soar off the earth.

When the laboratories where he was reported missing were searched they were found to be a complete and careful wreck. In one of the rooms an infant was found. It was contentedly suckling a rubber nipple leading to a liquid baby food compounded in a large jar bolted down to the table. Its body had one curious and notable feature: it had no navel.

His colleagues had been inclined to dismiss the matter entirely. Being a thing phenomenal and therefore inexplicable, it was decided that the prodigy need not trouble the heads of busy scientists. The child was classified as a monster, as though his stemless belly was an offense; and after people had had their fill of titillated wonder they forgot about it. His colleagues had been envious; they poohpoohed the assumption of a chemical origin quite willingly, and encouraged the public imagination upon more palatable suppositions. For most people the unaccountable kid became a romantic little

bastard, left by a woman the scientist had debauched, as her subtlety of revenge.

Anyway, after a short and worrying existence in an orphan asylum, the child troubled the public mind no longer. When Dr. Transit appeared, only a few remembered the incident.

. . . . . .

Give a cripple a crutch and earn an extra heartbeat; take a blind man by the hand, miss a date and walk with an angel's exhilaration on the toes for five blocks after; play child games with an idiot and feel superior in the soul as in the mind; the world, as both Mary and John agreed, is reconciled, perhaps even pleased with abnormals, as Fate provided pets, to feed, and kennel and stroke. How hugely impatient it is, however, with abnormals who bring help, who exceed man!—too just Aristides, too noble Christ, too wise Galileo, too beautiful Helen, too mighty Samson, too eloquent Marsyas.

. . . . . .

"Did you ever wonder what kind of a boy Dr. Transit might have been?" asked Mary.

"No," said John, not quitting his book.

"I think," went on Mary, in a tone that left it to the hearer to have it soliloquy or dialogue, "he must have been a very tormenting boy, smarter than any of the other children; out of jealousy they must have played tricks on him and he must have hated, besides despising, them. I imagine that he could

stand up against them all. I can see him doing them some very savage, as well as cryptic injuries. They probably caught him and made him tear pages out of his own books, or lick their shoetops, and beat him every time in the bargain, only to be victims of a more than balancing revenge."

"He may never have had a boyhood," said John.

"What do you mean?" asked Mary.

"Well, when I can honestly feel that he isn't a fake, I sense him as having been the same all his life."

"The same, yes, but through a definite growth; even inanimate things have growth through the transmuting touches of the various other contents of time. But, of course, he had a boyhood. I would know whom to cast for his part in a play; a thin undersized thing, vehement and unsportsmanlike; he would be the one to butt the fat boy in the stomach and get away; to suggest a trick on the teacher that would bring punishment severely on the most popular boy; to stagger, sick with loneliness, yet gloat with very hatred over any boy that might chance to join him."

"——and then," burlesqued John, "a sweet, yellow-haired girl came into his life; her lips instructed him in the perpendicular, whereas her principles, as neat as fresh laundry, covered him from the chill of the bog from which she had just lifted him. 'Be mine,' he says, 'and I will be no more dark and gloomy, and a traitor to my human destiny——' "

"Autobiography?" asked Mary.

"——but," John went on, "she hesitated. She feared this man; she left her rescue incomplete—and he became a scientist."

"That might be just what happened," said Mary.

"Oh, probably he never knew a woman."

"Sooner or later Transit will seek a woman," said Mary.

"Good luck to him," said John.

§ 2

Every day now they were speaking of Dr. Transit; like a tune revolving in the head, he came round and round again and they were helpless to stop their tongues.

The world was talking Transit—his rehairing bald men, his transmuting metals,—he had perhaps impudently slapped himself upon the jelly called the public mind, and it quaked with terror and hope.

At one time or another the vulgar impossibilities, with dreams of which the imperfectly suppressed panic of people eases itself, were caricatured by Transit's realizations. More sinister than Diogenes who invited Athenians to hang themselves on his tree, he seemed to be calling to suicide the hopes of the race.

But while the world talked, Transit kept himself contemptuously apart. He was never seen to leave his strange house and he allowed no visitors except those whom he admitted practically for experimenting upon. When they left him they were singularly

uncommunicative. Men from the newspapers domesticated themselves on his doorstep, uselessly. They wrote interviews in which the venom of their disappointment bloated the phantom they pictured. If his hairs were actually live wires, his eyes actual gas flares, his forehead a slab of ice, his teeth demon fangs, his chin a Judgment day gavel, he could barely have met his descriptions halfway.

"Myths," said John nervously.

"We must interpret the myths," said Mary.

§ 3

Transit made the old young by an astonishing method of accelerating metabolism in such a way that the complete turnover of vital material made in seven years was accomplished, instead, in seven days with a minimum corruption by the senile atmosphere of the wornout tissues. It was true, however, that the new youth was somewhat unripe and brought with it an often disconcerting alteration of personality.

However, he had a perverted taste in his benefactions. In the few instances in which he freshed a man with new youth, he picked a tottering ruin, an old villain who had not even distinguished crimes to his record. Honorable old men dignified and respected, leaning on their good names as on staves, he passed over.

To protesters, Dr. Transit retorted with malicious logic, that good old men would find eternal youth

in Heaven; and it was simple charity to keep the wicked on earth as long as possible, and out of eternal damnation.

He treated no virtuous victims of accidents. "Accidents," he said, "were the brutal brandings of Fate; he would not blaspheme, by making any effort to nullify the thus clearly manifested decrees."

He rejuvenated a little band of rakes so that they were again about, strolling with glib feet and mincing canes, uppish mustaches and twirling tongues. They painted hairs on their bald crowns and swaggered their cigars like phallic symbols. Indignation ran high against Dr. Transit; fathers of virgins, husbands of Lucretias, acted as though Transit was releasing a plague of virulent adultery upon the nation. Transit explained that to keep from a debauchee his sole utility, and that in an age when asceticism was a disdained virtue, and Loyola a discredited Saint, was too lofty a wickedness.

In his transmigration of matter, when through transitional stages of energy, he led substances into remote avatars, Transit won hail as the final discoverer of the philosopher's stone. But he made no general largesse of synthetic gold.

Transit refused to share his knowledge. He made no reports to the scientific societies. Every patient under his treatment was first subjected to an operation which temporarily paralyzed the memory lobe of the brain, inducing a localized aphasia from which he was restored with a complete hiatus of experience.

All his records, filling heavy volumes, were in code. Once a pair of self-sacrificing young chemists stole them and achieved a baffled martyrdom thereby. They stole the books, but while they were turning the pages their fingers began to itch, to swell, to grow painful, to break into ulcers, to rot greengloomily; amputations; Dr. Transit arrived commiseratingly, leaving his house voluntarily for the first time and healed the unwhittled digits.

This event alone held a match to the animosity of the people. The response of society was rumor. To subordinate heroes, to smother radiance, to break the legs of speed, to confuse the haughty monosyllables of virtue, to daintify beauty, to spoil luck,—these are the missions of society. It became holy to stultify Transit. The attempt died of its own futility with the one achievement that it succeeded in making it generally believed that Transit was insane.

His very wisdom hung so precipitously and dangerously over mankind that in self-protection it might have made a move of annihilation. If Transit had been more human and gracious there is no doubt but that he would have suffered the obvious martyrdom.

Nevertheless, society was served by this ferment; it helped to stir humanity out of the stupor of tolerance into which it had fallen.

The variegated wonders of the times had made hopeless any settling or sediment of belief; tradition had long ago passed from the earth; the

stately monuments and ruins had been surrendered to disintegration with a callousness paralleling the veneration with which they had first been salvaged.

The feeling that possibility was legitimacy prevailed and brought on a strange fatalism, a fatalism not of resignation but of indiscriminate expectancy. If a thing could be it was justifiable. Thus kinslaughter, incest, cannibalism, pederasty, all that was monstrous, gruesome, disgusting to the sense of former times was condoned.

This atmosphere of jaded allright encountered Dr. Transit's formidable revisions; in the end, the stagnant patience agitated under the insult which Dr. Transit's eccentric independence put upon it.

Everywhere there spread a great weariness with Dr. Transit. The world wanted him to die, as ages before it wanted Napoleon to die; civilization seemed to have stopped in a torpor of crystallization around the prodding fact of his existence.

The world picked him for its scapegoat. Weedy stories smothered his anonymity. Whenever a woman disappeared, whenever a strange sickness seized a body, whenever an unseasonable weather came, hysterical people demanded a march upon his house.

Once a lightning storm of thrilling violence played histrionically over the center of the city, stretching its immediately shiveling, futile, white-hot arms in every direction; once a shadow, so huge that only aerially were its contours seen, moved portentously over the country, obscuring whole cities in its

march, and nothing was observed which might have projected it outside of the indifferent aeroplanes droning in the clouds.

He avoided hospitality; when he was forced to receive visitors he was said to wreak astonishing revenges. The guest dipped his spoon into fine looking dishes, which soon disclosed their subtle cook by fomenting into acrid gas. He would be asked to stay over, and would be unable to refuse through dread of Dr. Transit's anger. Shaken by his bomb-bubble meal, he would tepidly follow his host into his room and almost forgive him on seeing the neat decking of the bed and the airy film of the curtain, a room sedative with dim walls indistinctly plaided with a pattern of redundant, sleepy squares.

So alas, he would lean back, in perhaps a trifle apprehensive luxuriousness, and then sloo-o-o the walls begin crawling; the mild pattern overrun by a monstrous filigree of purple dragon claws; dramatized by a writhing and struggle of designs. Gruesome men with splitting bodies hang themselves on unstable trees, ponderously vaulting over precipices while gigantic animals leap from the thrashing foliage and deploy themselves in the snarls of death battle; over the fantasmal field a mist of aching colors play, splashed with sudden crimson rosettes from spurts of blood and streaked with green and yellow corruption.

At the same time noises stream out; whistle of whipping tails, whir of wings, click of teeth, clapping of windows, incisor sounds of pain.

While he stares in quivering horror, covering his eyes from it and rattling his knees in legless flight, the ceiling suddenly bulges, the floor shuffles, the grim walls caper, rectangles become trapezoids, windows distend and contract like tormented shoulders and his scream coils over him as he shakes off imminent, engulfing collapse.

One guest broke a leg in a desperate jump through the window during this ordeal of crafty intimidation; another became afflicted with a chronic shudder, a body-long tremor coming upon him at every jar of the humdrum.

Transit's most amazing scamper was his vacuum journey. He sheathed himself in a complete vacuum that needed no containing boundaries. Think of him the core of an amazing transparency four feet thick, promenading terribly through the streets. It slid onward with the sly agility of ice; it lightly struck men and vehicles aside. Missiles that were aimed at him in retaliation were halted and gallantly ricocheted upward.

He never used it again, declaring that invulnerability was nullifying, a species of death, since it could so completely capture oblivion.

So he gave rise to a literature sufficiently reinforced with generalizations of phantasmagoria to have made a Testament.

§ 4

Opposed to these holiday miracles there was the diurnal miracle of sex determination which Transit

was practicing at the time John and Mary spoke of him in a desperate lull of their habitual quarrel.

Mary had seen him once leering out of an open window of his house so steadfastly that he had looked like a caparisoned skull and she was certain that a spirit coldly dissenting with humanity was harbored in his harsh head.

John had never seen him except in caricatures, which had only succeeded in presenting a face touched with a mild lunacy. He was disposed to consider him as an interesting abnormality.

John had always had a captious equanimity which his solitary life assisted and which caused him to think of men with unusual or profound tragedies, men with pedestaling achievements, men with towering injuries that lifted the lips of their wounds to the horizons, as a remote order of people engaged in these spontaneous and spectacular performances, for the benefit of simple people like himself. Accidents and disasters, or humorous things like elections and new laws, he regarded as divertissements in the great show around him. It was hard for him to think of Transit with anything but the indulgence of an entertained spectator.

To others he spoke of him deprecatingly as one might speak of a stage magician. But with Mary he had hesitated, half out of a chivalrous fear of disquieting her, half out of an uncomfortable feeling that she would thereupon begin to disturb the easy squalor of their present mental relationship, with her sharp nicety to trespass upon the cherished disar-

ray and shake and air old attitudes, and brush from them the warm, fleecing, flavoring dust and lay them quiveringly clean and precise.

Some people, according to Mary, believed Dr. Transit to be a spy catapulted in some unfathomable way from Mars which was perhaps preparing interplanetary campaigns. Others were certain that he was the synthetic son of the mad scientist. Mary herself believed that he was a remarkable chemist who had been carried too far out of human orbits by his speculations but not far enough for complete freedom.

There was only one way in Mary's mind of managing him; by setting up, so to speak, the intruding orbit of love, by which, through its tangents with earthliness he would make a precipitate and final collision with humanity.

John's laughter lunged out. "Oh, presumptuous woman; sex makes man an automaton to you; you know the button that brings him to submissive convulsion. That is why your puppet can do only one thing for you. The more varied and resourceful and complex a man is the better you think for a woman to run him. It is the principal and most dangerous vanity of your sex."

"Perhaps it is a vanity," replied Mary, "although I have no pride or confidence in it. Jerusalem, which had no soldiers to send against Alexander and sent old men, did not prize age above soldierliness. But an indirect method can be found when the obvious, direct one, is impractical. The suc-

cessors of defeated Xerxes subdued Greece with bribes; by tactful adulteries with two Roman generals Cleopatra preserved her kingdom; with physics and geometry Archimedes nearly defeated the Romans at Syracuse; the Sabine women ended a battle by throwing babies between the two lines.

"Since there are no scientists to cope with him it may be that Transit can be taken by a woman. In the mutual and continuous service of sex, an atmosphere of companionship would become fixed, the confidences sequential, and the time would arrive when, perhaps undeliberately, even against her will, in one of those crises of personal conflicts or collusions, which even the most casual human relationships lead to, his identity with human beings would be shamefully established, and the length of the leash, by means of which he frantically eluded them, shortened."

"It's a fair explanation," admitted John, "but why should you think that he is vulnerable there? It seems inconsistent that a man who lives armored against life in other ways should, so to speak, wear no codpiece. Why may we not believe that as he has probably reduced all his physical life to some unobtrusive routine, he has perfected some technique eliminating the office of woman."

"Zeus, I believe, got a headache after he tried it," retorted Mary. "Sex is sumptuous; a man may eat like a Pilgrim and sleep in a room where the walls pinch, but he must have his love personal, environmented, luxurious, for the whole function is the di-

version of excess. The life that is otherwise perfectly coördinated has its unruly moment in this. Woman has child-bearing to take up the excess; man has adventure, and without adventure, that is, without maneuvers with a woman, sex is frustrated rather than satisfied."

"Why should we believe," asked John, "that he is as yet unsupplied with a woman? Or he may even have soberly considered the consequences of leading a dedicated life equipped with such an irrelevant and garish laboratory, and abolished it by the tactic of Origen."

"If he has a woman already," said Mary, "which is more likely than your alternative, (since by the time our monster could have planned that, he would probably already have formed some habit or entered some sentimental relationship which made him look upon such a release in the same soothed way that young people look upon suicide—a resort for the future) if he has a woman already, it means that she has not been of the quality for this enterprise.

"Before Cleopatra there had been a succession of courtesans, moody maidens, mistresses, casual paramours, booty women and parallel wives who had made love, for Cæsar, a succession of pungent but available adventures; it was Cleopatra who brought a passion so versatile that it exercised all his generalship and diplomacy.

"Well—forget these pinches of history; but I do believe that man can be baited, and countered, or at least more troublesomely diverted than he is now, by

some unmovably punctual creature who will first reduce him to a close equality of interest, and then by her arrogant and unassailable ignorance of any other motive or activity of his life, warp and bend him back to commonplaceness."

§ 5

John began to be careful about crossing Mary.

Like many husbands, soon in his married life, John asked himself: "What's the matter with my wife?"

She was growing thin; little hollows were digging themselves silently in her cheeks; she did not move about with the bounce that was her maiden habit. There was no heart in her voice. Lately, she sat too often at the window, her back to him, groping into indifferent distance.

"Have I done anything?" Poor husband man, flogging his memory for a confession.

"Have I left anything undone?"

He could think of nothing important enough to make a reasonable human being shrivel.

"Damn marriage," said John. He resented this suddenly grown sense of responsibility for another human being, having all his life before, sidestepped responsibilities.

"It'll work itself out," thought John, with the compulsory optimism of the desperate.

He dug his hands into his pockets, rolled them into fists, and in this manner punished the circum-

stance which so disheveled his composure. He walked through the streets, a surly oblivious bumper in the crowd, so grim with worry, so aimless, that he might have been a symbolical figure.

He came home at last, dropped himself on a chair and watched Mary. Seated, she wilted; standing, she drooped. What a faint "hello" she had given him.

"Mary!" he cried out in alarm.

"Yes?" replied Mary in a mileaway voice.

John delivered himself of a great blurt of anxious speech, mixing solicitude about her digestion, ending,—"don't keep anything from me, Mary, please."

Mary looked up at him with offended eyes, and in a voice made robust again by anger, said, "Oh, don't feel so responsible. You have done nothing and forgotten nothing. You have been, indeed, a good husband and that is better than if you were a bad husband. The trouble lies in your being a husband altogether. If you could remain my husband without my being a wife, I might be happy. But that being absurd I will have to stay for a while, that hypochondriac person, a young wife. Time, I am certain will help, will bring something to conciliate me. In the meanwhile don't think of it—and don't speak of it."

John naturally could obey neither command. He thought minutely of his waning wife. And his anxiety was so palpable in his face that it spoke for him when he kept silence, and led to many discussions in which poor, worrying John tried hard to

be self-possessed, cheerful, and as objective as if he were discussing a project for a new highway.

Mary was too strong to suffer seriously in her health. The fulfillment that she sought in her life was not attainable in any condition, but it was natural to blame the frustration on marriage. Her chief satisfaction now was to put John on the defensive.

Their discussions about Transit had taken the place of the usual masculine-feminine disputes; partly through John's maneuvers.

John had a smile, so regular that it was part of his features; it accompanied no movement of his eyes or slightest other gesture to point out what occasioned his good humor; it was a smile without motives, no especial graciousness to company, or comment without words. In sleep the smile lay, warm and comforting, like a blanket end. This solitary, idle smile endlessly exasperated Mary who resented its aimless mockery.

Mary's growing thinness, by baring her great bones, only emphasized the great strength of her body; and her thoughtful quietness the preoccupation of her mind. Mary's face rarely even for a moment withdrew its expression of concerned thoughtfulness. Even laughter was not boisterous in her mouth and marched out to stately rhythm. Her hair hung watchfully low and lustrous. Her glances had no obliqueness, her eyes were gray, slow and perpendicular. Down her steep throat so

whitely impassive and independent, this foster mood descended in the brooding shoulders and profound breasts. The restraint of her waistline had a touch of anxiety in it, the great hips had a herding motion; in her walk the hands were open and patient, ready for tasks; the feet direct with a resonant pause as if both a shadow and an echo waited under the heel while the toes pondered step by step.

But they had married out of a belief and great confidence in the similarity of their temperaments.

§ 6

One morning Mary told John the latest news about Dr. Transit.

He had taken a male puppy and turned it into a female puppy.

John frowned transiently.

"The fairy tale up to date," he sneered, and proceeded upon his inevitable digression. "People must have their fairy tales. Transit becomes Merlin. I prefer the less reeking magic of Paganism, when men generously admitted souls to inanimate things, to the vulgarized Christian miracles. The metamorphoses of the ancients, when they no longer believed in them, were delicate and artistic; they were accurate conventionalizations, whereas the miracles and martyrdoms creak, fit only for the mob. Instead of mettled soldiers and sunny lovers, the tear-wealthy alms-giver and the rear warder became models for gods; whimpering Magdalens,

lepers, blind men and forsaken, became the concerns of God."

Mary looked at him in slight rebuke.

"Well," returned John, "a little perversity is good for the story. I retract Magdalen and a widow or two. The fact remains that the mythology of science is taking the place of Christian mythology. It's another turn of faith in a world that has seen many. Love of miracles survives any system.

"How recent has its need of awe found satisfaction in the fear of the 'superman', through that most monstrous and pompously grotesque Order of the Latter Day Giants? Even today, let a man thumb his nose and people will shrink away, afraid that a superman is stalking them.

"The scientist is now necromancer and saint. Too many of them like it, foster it with all the solemn nonsense of a secret order, cultivate the cheap thrill of atmosphere, the indigent applause of the surreptitious. They want to get ordinations as the new priests by furtive, unwatched assumptions. I don't think Transit of that type, so, I'm not the fish to be caught by any little, wriggling, baited mystery like that—pooh! a miracle——"

"You ought to know," said Mary, "that's just what you'd rather have him do." With shrewd savagery, "you'd rather have him an entertaining, brain contortionist, a man who juggles with the same stupefied leer, a bird and a crysanthemum. When he threatens the invulnerability of sexual fixity, you show the panic of the scared, 'Out upon you,

mountebank!' you shout, 'Go back on the stage and pick turnips out of top hats, but don't dare to tie up any rabbits on my pajama strings; I won't allow it.' "

John winced, and his staunch smile wizened into a sneer. "Mary, you are a perfect woman but you are cancerously possessed by one idea."

"One idea suffices nearly everybody. Your one idea is to reduce the corporeal life; your kind has made living by proxy possible; as far as human actions are concerned you are a dilettante; you have in the realities of hot-blooded life the bad taste to be satisfied with the second hand."

"I shall take some Eau D'Hercule hereafter, my love," said John.

"I don't believe it would do you any good, my dear. You mustn't interrupt me. What I wanted to add was that I desire to enlarge my physical life. I desire more activity; I am personal and wish, using myself as radius, to make wild and gaudy circles—the whole length of my personality—but my breasts flap, my pelvis is unwieldy, I am dragged down by an untidy organ that sprawls inside my body."

"Oh, but there is self-enlargement in motherhood," said John.

"If the deliberate sacrifice of self as food and eggshell for a new personality is self-enlargement. The cells to which a woman gives her abused hospitality have no more relationship to her than the cells in blood oozing out of a wound. Maternity is

the sufferance of periodic and drastic parasites; it is a species of martyrdom which women are reconsidering; many are rebellious; but they are embarrassed with the cluttering apparatus of sacrifice."

"You are a bit melodramatic, Mary. You are casting reflections upon your fine powers of exposition. Assuming that this is a disability I cannot see how a woman of your intelligence and resourcefulness cannot encroach upon it by ingenious strategies of compensation; the one-footed can——"

"Admit me a cripple!"

"I admitted nothing," shouted John, "organs tommytwaddle! Wear a breast band and loincloth and you will be as trim as a man who has to undergo the same swathing if he wants complete bodily freedom. What do dancers do, and the surprising girl athletes who are nosing the men's records——"

"Only nosing them. There are women's records because their standards are admittedly lower. The girl dancers, besides, are different from the men; they are fulcrums for levers of arms and legs—men are catapults."

"Half true! Women have motions that are their own. The very breasts that are to you such pallid embarrassments are to some women two added limbs; the great lap—its very receptivity is motion; it is a theater— And what do you mean by your sultry blasphemies against motherhood? It is no diminution. It is the natural provision, I insist, for the enlargement of a personality. All this is a mere outburst of annoyance at having such a thing

chosen for and nonchalantly assigned to you unconsulted. I believe that the curious greater maturity of women over men is due to the drastic experience of motherhood. I should want to undergo it myself."

"Of course," said Mary retributively, "hermits are notoriously patient with fleas."

CHAPTER FOUR

§ 1

One day Mary took up her hat. By her solicitous fingers John understood that the occasion was unusual. She posed crucially before the mirror, plucking out misfit attitudes and slipped threads of appearance. When she had satisfied herself, with a quick gesture which swept her into motion, as a conductor's baton which has silenced and now summons the music, she stepped away from the mirror and walked out of the room, each step an authoritative notification.

John's pretense, as usual, was reading, soon forsaken to scout over the covers.

He had a theory that women's actions found betrayal in their dress. For a rendezvous, a woman would make herself inconspicuous; wearing clothing that would have some of the neutrality and expediency of a nightgown. No, it was not an assignation, for Mary had dressed herself fancifully with a speculative fervor.

She had put on her blood-drop necklace, of secretive rubies that made dignity sinister; she wore with it the sheath of cloud-blue cloth that made her flesh distant; the tight drop of her girdle, metallic and

resonant with a guarding click of links gave her an appearance of entrenched readiness; her pantalets were of green velvet heavily etched with tracery trimmings in maroon thread and had a lace ruff over each knee of the same embroidery work. Her stockings were maroon sheer silk, with a clock as bold as a spur. The shoes were black, broad-toed, a salute of firmness. Her hat was small and defiant, pale blue; its only decoration a frontal, silver rosette, the bravado of an insignia, made it a helmet. This was certainly not a trysting dress; it was accoutrement for battle. He ran to the window to watch her as she went out.

Why should he be disquieted? Supposing Mary were bent on an assignation! Having lost its biological eminence sex had become a less embarrassing plaything; it lost some of the savor of conspiracy; some of the ceremonial spirit. Constancy was not now a virtue. It was an apathy, an uncouthness. . . . It had been in a tone of defense that John had often explained to Mary that he was too occupied with the mistresses of his shelves to have time for any other. Now he was troubled by an uncomfortable sense of being perhaps anticipated.

He tried to remember the men of their mutual acquaintanceship. There were surprisingly few to think of, and most of them had been left after the marriage like friends at a pier.

There was not one of them with whom he could possibly associate an intrigue. One was ugly and heavy, with a gapping mouth; one was sly and

tangling with hands like faces; one was brisk and irritating with a familiar nose; one was silly and suburban, with a vast, razed brow.

No more unlikely than the women they knew; one with tortuous eyes, a saturnine coquette; one with meaningless breasts shoveled under squalid shoulders; they all occurred to him, each one outthrusting a principal unpleasantness, making him feel offensively beleaguered.

He turned to his book again but without compensation; by dogged reading he foisted upon his occupied mind an unhinged photograph; for a minute he succeeded in desperate attentiveness to it, but his unease twisted him around again to the absence of Mary.

In a sort of revenge as well as an escape he shook himself into deluding activity and dressed himself for a street sortie. It was late afternoon and fashionable people were promenading on the avenue. The taps of the canes with which women accented their petulance reverberated against him; he looked upon each present face, obvious, empty, a form letter with vacant lips for the signature. He averted them awkwardly.

The sun rode the sky like a jockey in gaudy livery; the houses gulped with gathering windows, solitary cars swam by, impersonal like meteors; the feet go on tart and tapping, trousers, pantalets, the swings of hands.

A friend greets him. "Hello, John." The friend has a voice mechanically affable like a phonograph.

"John, this is Patricia,—Patricia, this is John." He subsided with diminishing syllables. He grappled with John's shoulders and smiled abrasively.

Patricia turned upon him with calm quarrying. She was blond and knew the effectiveness of fair skin; her breasts were low and a straight bodice left a slab of tacit marble; one arm hung loose, conscious of the lure of immobility; she leaned on her stick with the other, making of her lowered eyes a parapet; over them piled shrill, yellow hair—over the small dammed forehead. She laughed sluttishly with garish mouth and the lure ended. Brusquely, almost savagely, he unclasped the man's arms and thrust them in a committing disdain upon the woman. He heard them discordantly retreating; and he went home noticing the mild delirium of nightfall.

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

When he returned home he found Mary moodily sitting at a table, a comical fall of head and arms and shoulders, the sinister dignity collapsed under a melodrama of despair.

John hailed her, despicably gratified at what he saw was discomfiture.

"I've been to Dr. Transit," Mary said finally. "He is an astonishing man." Her eyes spat at the recollection. "He refused to transform me," she said, her indignation reducing her to naïveté.

"Well, I must confess gratitude. You couldn't expect me to relish losing such a pretty wife," said John, with expanding amiability of relief.

Mary went on, ignoring John, emptying herself gradually into the room, grateful for its loyal silences.

"I came up to his house. You've seen it, the house with the ghastly green brick, like some unconventional mausoleum. It is three stories, but when I stood on the stoop it seemed to me that it was short and lonely above but seemed to bore very deep into the earth; vibrations of some sort rapped on the soles of my shoes, and I heard confused sounds, in-

audible like the toneless voices of a dream. I was irritated by it because it seemed to me a pinch of claptrap, the placing of an elaborate piece of scientific bric-à-brac, the way people stand up a condescending statue in the vestibule.

"I knocked at the door and I believe I never had a more joyous laugh than when the sound reverberated in a great clamoring of gongs. The door opened but I could see nobody behind it. And I laughed louder because the obvious miracle of an electric lever appeared to me too much for sobriety.

"But I found myself in what was only a vestibule, had no visible doorways, seemed to be a completely dissevered cubicle of space—even the door by which I had entered had disappeared. Light seamed its substantial darkness from a single sea green lamp of lucifern which waned spectrally over the wall. I stood on a literally uneasy floor; every now and then an embarrassed convulsion flayed it. The rugs heaped a monstrous disguise of luxury over it.

"There was a clock there, but it puzzled me until I realized that it was going backward, the day starting at twenty-four hours. I found out afterwards that Transit believed that life had passed the meridian and that clocks should therefore be run backwards.

"Even in this tiny room—although it had vagaries of shape which afterwards I found entertaining, spasmodically magnifying and dwindling it—the walls were not quiet but had an iridescence not of color but of design.

"I determined not to be frightened, and sat down, making myself comfortable, but expecting the chair either to collapse under me or vault up with me. But it remained firmly and loyally wooden and chair-like.

"It was many minutes before my patience overcame the hostile waiting of the presence behind the walls. A sudden, beetling voice, seeming to unbend from the ceiling ledges complained:

" 'The master is busy.'

" 'I shall wait until he is ready,' said I in accommodating tones.

" 'You disturb him,' said the voice, and I was satisfied to detect a pitch of irritation in it.

" 'I won't take much of his time,' I insisted.

"There was a silence again for a moment but the voice seemed to have left disfigured cadences. I could hear them babbling around me, growing in volume, a froth of sound as the seething echoes redoubled. It made me uncomfortable rather than terrified me. The distraught floor now felt like a huddle of backs and shoulders turning heavily; the voices seemed to choke up from them and had a sharpness as of pain. It was unnerving to seem to feel under your feet a sobbing thing.

"Gradually the sounds stilled. The floor with one nearly capsizing tremor subsided. I felt relieved and imagining that I was under observation, I did my best to appear unconcerned, looking with trifling eyes upon the walls and their grotesque ornaments which changed continually, melting into fantastic

beads of drip, softening into massive, symbolic globules, hardening and drying and opening up strange mouths, nostrils, eyes.

"And suddenly four doors occurred at once, not doors in the convenient sense of hinged swinging panels, but four desultory openings, a circle, a triangle, a crescent and a square.

"The effect was terrifying in a way. Until then I had not known how cooped up I had been. The sudden surrounding expanse, as revealed to me in these geometrical vistas made me giddy like one walking on a ledge with grim depths below.

"I could not determine at first who it was approaching me. It seemed to converge upon me through all the four entrances together, although it was undeniably a single being,—so complex are the illusions or perhaps the unfamiliar presences of reality which Transit uses in his childish teasing of his visitors—in expectation that they are all children.

"It was a relief to find the person a woman.

"But if I had expected a woman I would have looked for one, thin, wraithlike, capable of fuming escapes. Instead she was a gross, completely unbecoming pale woman—a fat woman who looked haggard.

"She was dressed loose and dirtily, a wrapper of faded colors much trampled at the hem, sprinkled with scabs of old stains. She was more repulsive, more discouraging, than the circus his maimed walls performed for me.

"I let my eyes cross over her into the disclosed room, a lavender emptiness—the dimmest of light, the luster of fadedness, a worn dusk. Afterwards, I could see crouching close to the wall as tortuous as a carnival railway, an ungainly stairway; near it were two large posts, standing upright, their ends outreaching vision, suggesting gallows.

"The place was full of the absurd hulks of unpleasant odors, prowling in the room, pungencies, stinks, nauseas, little garrotting suffocations, sicklinesses leaping or slyly circling, according to their kind.

"Again the woman told me that the master was busy and could not see anybody. I told her it was on a matter of vital importance that I was here and asked her to speak to him again for me. There was a genuine terror in her face. To save her a fright I determined to go up myself. I started through one of the gashes in the wall; the poor creature darted out her hand to stop me and its fingers put a blunt, greasily lingering touch upon my arm that was like a thick-skinned blister.

"At my escape the woman began screaming. The explosions of her voice spattered my steps with horror. It was a snarl under goading; a whine of complaint, a gasp of pain, a call for help, and above all a terrible protest of innocence, incoherent and convincing.

"There was at once a ramming, impatient stride above, and then I saw the absurd dwarf mincing

down the steps,—with mild footfalls indeed when he saw me. It was Doctor Transit.

"He grinned again as I saw him once before, holding his apt head out of one of his monstrous windows, snubbing the world. He got over his surprise quickly. His hairy little face mastered its chagrin and became utterly stultified in a contemptuous courtliness.

" 'Welcome, Madam,' he said to me, while he stamped his foot to the woman as much as to say, 'stop yowling, you old cat!' for she was maintaining her complaint in ragged whimpers.

" 'I have built my house,' he smoothed over, 'entirely to suit my uncomfortable tastes. I never dreamed of welcoming such a guest. We must go upstairs; this is no place for you; I have my little gases at their exercises here, and there is always haze and odor left. Follow me up the steps please; you will at least find a seat there.'

"I followed him up. It was like corking up to the surface from depths of water, so clear was the sensation of being again in a habitable atmosphere.

"I experienced a spasm of astonishment on my first tread of the upper floor. A brush of light swept over everything until I realized that there was no ceiling, no roofs, that I was in an unlidded vat roaring with the daylight. Up, up immensely grew the walls plastered white, carrying their expanses like adornments, interrupted here and there by turret-like little rooms, held by buttresses and, crowding

around the uneven windows, with haphazard staircases, all the same harrowing serpentines, climbing the walls.

"In the center stood the attentive smokestack, its mouth stretched over the cornices. Around its squatting base led a conduit rail sometimes leaping up several feet, sometimes stumbling to a few inches from the ground, garnished with small, spiteful mouths, unevenly, which spat jets of cool water upon the air. I wondered how it was that Transit had not thought of putting down its mutiny, for in the light, as if in defiance of the tedious ugliness around it, each upheaval of the water carried its orderly and prismatic rainbow. To so noticeably circumvent Transit gave me a feeling of congratulatory deference to this amazing fountain. Even without their iridescent arches the crystal pulses were jarring notes of harmonious beauty.

"In addition to the fountain, rash flowers leaned out of the boxes hanging from the bricked side of the chimney. High in the wall one could finally see the supports and rolls of canvas of an emergency ceiling.

"He puzzled about me a minute, waiting for my surprise to become obsession.

"Then he pointed to an armchair with shrewd gallantry. The arms curved together in a sort of frustrated clasp. I did not notice it when I sat down, but once in I had an affrighting sensation of being caught from behind. I writhed out of it, then

blushed at my first discomfiture, and reseated myself.

" 'It's a tight fit,' said the little beast, 'let me get you another one.'

"I insisted, of course, upon remaining where I was. I had nothing to say for several minutes, weighted down with the unfamiliarities and monstrosities of the place. Many things had caprices of invisibility, fading out of sight and reappearing suddenly. The whole place was a vast prestidigitation and the astonishing magician sat beside me twiddling dry fingers, waiting for the compliment of wonder, or the involuntary flattery of fear.

"There was a long laboratory table in one corner, so busily full of apparatus, that the top looked like a city. One oddity of equipment was a glass man, hollow inside, and with the under lip outthrust for a spout. Up to the hips it was filled with a fawn-colored emulsion.

"Along the side of the chimney, in a deep groove so carefully hidden it escaped detection, ran the bore of a periscope. It reflected upon a large magnifying mirror a panorama of the street.

"Every now and then the house trembled and consciousness of sound rather than audible sounds throbbed in my ears.

" 'Experiments under way in the cellar,' he explained, 'nothing to fear.'

"I began abruptly, tired of this etiquette of wonder. My errand was stated easily enough in a few

sentences, but he urged me on to tell him more and more until the colloquy became almost a confessional; maliciously justifying himself with the plea that science was helpless without data. He found my description of you quite entertaining, and had a genuine male response, a suggestion that a change might be good for my erotic health.

"Sitting there beside me, his stunted head whirling centrifugally around an expression of waiting abandon, he had an arch absurdity that saved him from his misfit dignity. The strutting confidence, symbolized in the pivotal way he sat on his chair, was the gesture of Napoleonic vainglory.

"We had some conversation. He seemed to be convinced that life was doomed to destruction and was eager to talk about it in the belief, I suppose, that it would cause me disquiet.

"According to him the temperature range in the universe was several thousand degrees and our range in it less than a hundred on the lower half of the scale. Under different conditions, on other planets, life might exist adapted to a different range of temperature.

"There were bound to be changes, some catastrophic and sweeping enough to break off the excrescence called life. Whether our race would be able to accommodate itself to them he was uncertain, but he thought not, because humanity had some time ago stopped making adaptations to environment. Through science it had changed the direction of

adaptation. It was adapting nature to man, making no enlargements of himself, but giving his energies to fit his environment to himself, in all the contractions and expansions demanded by his desires; but he was paying dearly for this laziness, for it atrophied his powers of adaptation; when a final catastrophe came man would be helpless.

"Sex is leading us to ruin, he believes. It is a habit which the race has become powerless to break itself of. Life adopted it at first as a kind of sedative to relieve the pain of fission. Like the compulsion of a drug it keeps man ruthlessly poised upon his craving, rushes him frantically upon a satisfaction, strokes him lightly with the ease of exhaustion and drags him back. It has got in the way of the promised progress, of the evolutionary roundabout, that would have made reproduction an incident rather than an incentive to life.

"Since this was his opinion I was surprised to hear him call the equality of the sexes an innocent subterfuge. For whole cycles, woman has been taking over the masculine rôle of the aggressor, for biologically, the sex which adorns itself is the aggressor.

"Woman's movements are unconsciously attempts to end this anomaly. It has been recognized for everything but this. Looking around for motives and objectives, women have made the easy mistake of interpreting men's officiousness as power, and their aimlessness as independence, and reached out for both.

"In such ways he would divert all my leads when I tried to make him talk about my transformation. There was no eagerness in his voice, no quiver of proselytism. He was not concerned with having me believe what he said, because he was not anxious about his theories, had no doubts about them. He offered them as mothers offer romances to their children to guide them away from embarrassing demands. The unction of priests discoursing on sins, as described in the classical comedies, was in his fluent and entertaining irrelevancies.

"Persistence betrayed him to me at last. I had made an impression upon him and he sought to retaliate. He sought to present himself before me in a mental raiment so dazzling and resplendent that it would bring upon me the tickling paralysis of astonishment.

"Every change of subject was a change of clothes. His sensational utterances were the fence-leaping, the pantomime of recklessness that the young man keeps in anxious display before a woman. The gravity of his face sometimes, when, for instance, he prophesied the precariousness of life, was as laughable as that of a young man confessing to a girl fanciful family disasters.

"He is not much over forty. A hard, gnarled tenacious youth is upon him. He is small but he gives a persuasion of overcoming power in the bulbs and contusions of his muscles. He appears to be bodily an incessant vigor, and his hair, shaggy, and hinting determined roots, gives him additionally the

appearance of toughness. He looked at me over debating eyes. He seemed undecided whether to return contemptuously to his deliberate mysteries or sacrifice a portion of his fastidious isolation for the bargaining sociability I presented. He could not determine. I suppose he meditated a retreat but before he could organize it I had implicated him in the tactics of a flirtation. The exigencies of his campaign made him give up the other problem.

"He is not a bad philanderer. At present he is the most interesting man in the world and that of course gives him an advantage. But it hardly balances the discredit of his face. The face has the disinterestedness of a finality. There is something alien in it, ulterior. It does not interest as a human face; it appears to be a distinct creation. To love him a woman would have to begin with a morbid and insinuating curiosity.

"He had this look without a single abnormality of feature. The pupils of his eyes are like large drops of photographic emulsion; he has a well piped nose; cheek walls slightly fissured, lapidary lips open intent upon short white teeth; a meaningless juncture of chin.

"It is to the eyes and lips, the most mobile of the features, the most directly responsive to the will within, that we look upon as guides to a human being. I have never seen eyes that gave me such an impression of a glance hurtling from a great distance. I never saw lips so apparently useless. With its

shroud of beard the rest of the face was like a frayed shadow.

"Well—you seem amused. I come to a point blank like this—don't grin, I am not telling a funny story. He refused to make a male of me, but he is ready to turn you into a woman."

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

Mary ended more abruptly than she had prepared for. Its suddenness was an attack upon John who was listening in placid contentment with his insignificant smile napping upon his lips. It struck a composure from John and drew an "Oh, that's very kind of Transit," from him.

"Of course," said Mary, "he will change me too, not immediately perhaps, but he will come to it."

John said nothing, but gnawed his nails. A mild sort of panic disorganized him. His mind alternated between "damning" and "tommyrotting" the whole business, since it was so hard to tell whether it was more nuisance than joke.

Mary swapped into a man! Strawbrooms of mustaches growing on the white lune of lip, a shallow monotonous chest for her full rhythmical bosom, a gruff on her cool sloping voice; Mary collecting pipes or books!

Silly! Metamorphoses should be left to mythology, the stars, grasshoppers, narcissi, myrtles, streams, and Circe stampedes; a pretty face to turn divine creativeness wayward; the same plague that overcomes poets.

Transit a god! Transit a little windbag blown up by the gratuitous puffing of the wonder cravers. Transit transforms man and woman; men into cuckolds perhaps (an ancient and honorable transformation), and honest, oldfashioned, chaste women, who snored in bed, into sleepless Lady Lets.

He would stop it. He had rights in the matter. Poor Mary fooled into drinking off a potion. Perhaps there would be violation by surgery. There must be no meddling with her tender womb, the dark hub of their relationship; no jape of knives. How sweet she was, a field windy and tender to graze upon; an unparalleled bedding with an obvious dream for furnishing; a catapult pointed at ecstasy, with a parabola arching heaven and earth—at night always she lay, divorced a period from her tyrannical ipseity; she did not move away, no chill of otherwhering on her skin; she lay noble beyond dignity in the shelter of her body, his body; breasts and belly familiar as lips; buttocks like cool cheeks; so close that relative space, annihilated, gave them the range of infinity. Strange—(his mind leaped sideways)—art, too, intense like love, had no patience with dress, and prejudice, about parts of the body. Art had been intimate like love.

Mary must not undergo this gruesome and indecent martyrdom.

And he! Mary said the Doctor wanted him first! How speculations of lonely moments come to haunt with the grotesques of realization! If he were Mary —well, he had often thought about it—if he were,

he would become sensibly and wholly a woman; cultivate femaleness, burnish the breasts, drag men into her, with the arms, with the invisible umbilicus that tied all men to a truly female woman; there would be joyous conception and easy birth and reverent mothering.

The old fakir and his paltry magic, chanting floors and cinema lintels! A piece of giggling nonsense—ha! ha! ha!—laughter solved everything; laughter was evident on the trap jaws of the sphinx; laughter joined in the struggle of heresy and orthodoxy and annihilated both; a good laugh would haul Transit back to a useful laboratory where he would be put to work making toilet preparations, new temper steels, and new explosives.

§ 2

He was not aware how gradually his own smile had become pronounced, a leer, lividly white and crescent like a waning moon at dawn. He could see Mary see it; he watched her eyes fill till her face seemed to burst in a hiss of breath, and bright rays of anger. He saw it by the clutch of her hands on the table—she was like a flower explored to the sweetest depths by an insect with stings—passion swayed her and sounded within her.

"Why do you grin like that? I have no smoker stories to tell you. This is an important thing for both of us. The change will at least furnish you with a sitting body for your sitting mind, a nice,

warm body which, if you wish, can be brightened up according to convenient poetic craftsmanship, metaphors for the breasts, lips and belly making this animal thoroughly domesticated—antiseptic as well. Cover her with the disdain of clothes and the pursuing perfume of mystery till she comes to transcend her use, like carved utensils never used. You will have your chance at this sort of thing."

"I'm willing to be serious, but there are times when the only seriousness can be levity," returned John.

Nevertheless John's smile was dislodged.

Mary shrugged her shoulders; seemed to wave a chill into the room with them; took her hands from the table, joined them together in her lap, locking herself up.

John clicked out of the room, seeming to walk entirely on his heels. He sat down and waited for the blizzard in his head to die down. Mary had suddenly eluded him, a word blasted a huge depression in their polity. How far away she had dwindled; a marriage was an opera glass that saw people unnaturally close; tip the glass—distortions, kakoscopes, vertigoes, inaccessible truth. Oh women! to whom mystery is a commonplace—there are such strange rebellions among them, the settled and depended upon, like cows running wild and braining themselves against walls. It was remarkable how the human capacity for discontent never found limits—the fatal envy of the pyralis, burning itself on the emulated wings.

He pulled down a book in a confused effort to be philosophic, but it gave him no help; he went back to the door, looking longingly on the soft, unaware shoulder of Mary. But the face she turned to him was Medusa.

He drew back his head quickly in unhappy offense, like someone drawing in his face after a slap. He sat down angrily and remembered a day when he had resisted changing his library furniture; and in conjunction a man whom he had once seen, arguing with a policeman who strode on, his hands on the man's arm and his nose on other things, leisurely ignoring him. Why should he feel so helpless in the pull of Mary's resolution—beckoned to, patted if he was docile, strapped with the leash if he revolted.

And there was danger in it. Transit undoubtedly was inducing people to act as his vivisected dogs; it would be lucky if the scars were symmetrical. If chemicals were used besides, which could overstress the vital organs, there was danger even if he succeeded.

"Mary," he called out, "Mary, darling, please listen to me," using the words as a costume for each step with which he reëntered apprehensively the other room, "I am objecting to it on account of its dangers. Transit has no scruples about using a pair of human beings for his experiment; if he injured you internally the accident would be nothing to him; he would clear you away like sopping up a spill. I am afraid, darling."

"Oh, if that's all, you needn't worry. The test has already been made; and if it hadn't been, all you need is to be there. He'll make you forget all your fears."

She stood so certain, so unbewildered, it crowded him with malice. He must do something to upset this aplomb; he wanted to seize her, unravel the easy embroidery of her hair, tear into disorder the straight lips, jar the peace of her brow, crush her bulwark shoulders.

But he went back again to his room leaving Mary as regular as ever; if he had believed in mauling images, he would have had her in India rubber, and would so desirously have mixed her up that no contortionist could ever undo her. He laughed resentfully, thrusting away the slighting grotesque.

He would take a glass of whisky to shake him out of it.

§ 3

He did not see her the rest of the day. But his pride could not hold out a full circle and he sought her the next morning. She had gone.

Bitterly John followed her.

Long ago he had followed his mother through streets that hooted and grimaced just like this, as full of drudging automobiles and people's legs. Space has such a callousness, could make so little of bluntly colliding with him; he was annoyedly pushing back the streets. He alternated between a smooth

hurry like wheels rolling on and on by his ridiculous gravitation to Mary, and a lagging brought about by questions in his mind which stopped him short as if they were physical obstacles.

How long to get there!

He stood aware of a wall and window.

What was its wonder? Steps to climb up, uneven but serviceable, oh, yes, the green; rain would turn it into a huge moss ball; its inept naturalness did make it appear like some monstrosity of vegetation. What queer gorges of taste; and there were the diverting windows, solemnly playing with perspectives—the dissipation of a young architect.

How uncomfortable these steps to turn around on. They were contrived, it seemed, to expedite you, in or out. Turning around on the landing almost threw him on the gutter—the vehemence of that little, crooked angle!

No houses round about; Transit had himself to himself. For neighbors he had the skulking, desolate, empty lots.

It had no sounds, this house; perhaps it had rotted green; no cautionary hysterics of the house dog; no jingle of rhyming feet, no throat noises, no cricketing of talk; no decoy silence; an illusion of mystery. Well, he would yield——

And supposing Mary was not there? His hand stopped; the thought numbed it like a blow on the joints; what a fool he would make of himself—and what if Mary were not there, couldn't he have it out

with the old nimbus—laugh at all the "miracles?" It was the necessary vengeance for the indignity of being tested by them—Mary or not Mary (where then could she be?)

——Goes——

Ah, the little corridor, the color screen walls, the witching wave floor.

"John! John! John!"

Such a prostration of his thrill!

"Come right up, John," Mary's voice peremptorily.

She was there after all.

§ 4

He hardly had time to regard the immediate thrust of the apertures, the sulphurous dimness of the gas room which mumbled with mild explosions, the reeling of the staircase, a drunken grasshopper elongated by its leaps.

Splitting the haze, reaching the cramp-twist of the staircase needed pilotage; one could not enter another's labyrinth unguided; idiocy, the whole business,—it would be better, maybe, to turn and clear out.

How coolly familiar with it all, Mary was. Her voice had the connotations of possession.

So she expected him! knew he was coming! could call out to him unconcernedly, a tame animal who didn't forget his tricks. She had anticipated him.

He felt diminished; he was not as he wanted to be, as all men want to be, an austere conundrum. To be easily unriddled was a disastrous simplification; it had the indignity of forcible undressing.

And here she was, wreathed in serenity, acting so transparently the mistress of this pedantically marvellous house. It was indelicate.

Mary appeared, a definite animation unwinding the staircase, her stately figure and deliberate steps making it out for him in the tenuous gloom.

She was dressed as before, only with the important change that she wore a fillet of gold chain, with a sultry fire-blue sapphire in the center of it to cynosure her forehead, to give her too perfect majesty a tongue of barbaric dissonance.

"Come right up," she said.

He obeyed slowly as a sign of resentment, feeling paltrily pushed and pulled. When he was on the steps she reached down suddenly and kissed him deliciously, taking his hand in another caress.

A disabling pain of anger stooped him. All resistance vanished, all stubbornness, and he was overcome by a parallel docility. Step by step he followed her, led by her triumphing hand.

Visibilities dodged around Mary's legs and as he too emerged on the strange roof floor he felt himself dreaming ruins; the ridiculous unceilinged walls wore a character of irrelevant immensity; under their ironical heights he felt twinklingly reduced. The sky, which he seemed to see like one lost in the barrel of

a telescope, seemed snobbish over its prestige, was haughtily and perfectly blue.

§ 5

After leading him up, Mary held him for the moment of introduction before the gnome, Transit, who benignly stroked his beard. She led him to a seat and walked away herself, becoming suddenly divorced and concentrating his loneliness upon him —a cheat, a cheat—opposite him the eyes of Transit. He was betrayed.

He postponed looking at them with difficulty, evading their compulsion until he could think over and dwell upon it, tenderly, with the brooding that satisfied and let fresh blood, like picking on the scales of new wounds,—this treachery.

He had unbuttoned himself to Mary in everything. And had been her bread and her butter, her punch and her rarebit according to her moods. He had let himself be allotted as she wished. Now she was gaming with him, an inconsiderable possession. To think that once they had held hands, looked on sunsets and moonlights together, that she had praised his essays and he had praised her essays, that they had promiscuously amalgamated their diverse beliefs, preferences, and phobias, for a time at least; that they had vacationed at the red hills and had had sentimental days, flower picking and looking at the sky, and gravely ecstatic nights when, practiced like a ritual, love seemed to involve great profundi-

ties; that he had digressed from ambition, crumbled out of his fingers certain fragmentary friendships, and disowned dear custom, that he had let himself be lessened continually for her insatiable explorations and be inconvenienced by her mania for putting him in order while she wandered about as bare and aimless as sea ice!

And now he was here, through her sleight, bored into by this hairy devil's eyes.

——Eyes that were garrulous. Transit did not talk but John saw on those eyes enough speech, a stratum of sarcasm, impertinence and interrogation. He seemed to be in conspiracy with his infernal, ceilingless room and the captious furniture, and the malevolent shadow of the chimney pot. Mary was right. Transit was unquestionable; that hard head seemed too authentic, that brow too precise, those nostrils too keen, eyes too well directed. Before them John clouded with embarrassment; an unconfidence of his nerves dragged down his hands and his feet, started sweat all over his body—unfealty for which he loathed his skin. It was necessary to say something now.

"This is top hole," said John, punning weakly, indicating, by gesturing a deformed circle, the whole room.

There was no reply; the silence was now become his responsibility, the echoes of his words reverberating in it.

Transit continued to look his insolent questions. Mary waited, her hands patient in her lap; she

seemed tall and in her repose almost inanimate, carved by her absorption into an idol. He too felt taller than usual, attenuated and nearly lifeless, exhausted. Only Transit, compact and undergrown, his hair like smoldered rays, crude, animate face, seemed alive; darting knees, playing brown roots of fingers, eyes, they rang and pointed like deliberate challenges.

John spoke again. "I dropped in to find out how you are getting on with Mary, doctor. I hope you have dissuaded her from her preposterous wish."

"I beg your pardon, 'presumptuous' wish," said Transit, ending with a private little laugh.

John laughed too, an easing laughter that uncramped him. He felt made a comrade of. It did not seem strange or alarming now to be changed even, provided it were done under the anæsthetic of good fellowship.

"Well, then," he said, "it is presumption; only I am so accustomed to spare Mary's feeling that I have developed a cautious diction in statements that concern her. I was certain you would dissuade her."

Transit puffed forward in his chair and gave didactic nods of his head. He said, clocking off the sounds, "I am opposing it—as strongly as I can —but the lady says—that it has been your wish—to undertake—a similar transformation. You have come—I presume—for that?"

"He had been talking about it to me all the time, doctor," added Mary promptly. John slumped; not

visibly; he remained seated with no perceptible dislocation of his head or his arms, or crumpling over at the waist—for minutes. He was in a strange half faint, capable of action but not of willing it. His senses were awake; the sun, greeting, dwelt kindly in his eyes; its lighting of rainbow tapers over Transit's maundering fountains were not lost upon him, were even the better and more closely seen; the venomous focus of Transit's face dug into him; voices marched accurately upon his ears; the occasional spray, tapped upon him by a visit of wind, smarted on his skin; the prick of roof dust rankled in his nostrils; he was alive by the evidence of his senses; but his mind was caught for some minutes in a jam in which there was a mere, feeble brandishing of the arms of consciousness—astonishment and resentment.

§ 6

In the gradual unclogging he noticed Transit and Mary together talking scantily, but a collusive smile upon their lips. They had become a gauntlet for him.

"It is not a difficult process," Transit was explaining pontifically. "The obvious thing would seem to be amputation or grafting. That's the patchwork method; it would succeed only in making a travesty of our designs. The real technician disdains such crudities. He understands the evolution of organisms and he knows the life of the embryo

which gives him the clue he needs. He knows that up to a certain point male and female embryos are identical; that after it the female embryo fills out but the male embryo undergoes further differentiation. This differentiation happens to be a simplification. The sexual organism of the male is a simpler one than that of the female.

"The body, as we know, has recessive and progressive tendencies. Atrophy and tumor are their pathological expressions. And their mental manifestations are well known. To turn a male into a female it is necessary to initiate these recessive tendencies; an agency operating upon the male organism and driving it back to the complexity of the female is applied. The treatment requires a month or two and is accompanied by very pleasant sensations, a kind of vague reminiscence that is felt as a soothing of the whole body, a stroking of the memory of the individual cell.

"The process is reversed in changing female into male. A very strong stimulant is applied and the sensation is that of a painful exhilaration. It requires great steadiness of nerve. The tenseness of a race takes hold of the body. It takes less time and the subject will need recuperation, while the other, the developing woman, will need the immediate consternation of a love affair as an arrest.

"I tried it first on a stallion, then on a bitch. The stallion had sired remarkable racers, and the bitch had littered a very select breed. The stallion is now

a very prolific mare, and the bitch has become a savage fighter.

"I was not satisfied, but turned to human beings. My housekeeper was my watchman before and it was a very capable trick to have turned him as you see into a more useful servant. A sweetheart of his undertook the test next; she turned into a robust young man, and has joined the aero. My poor housekeeper never heard of him again; she has had a difficult time getting lovers and I turned alchemist once to help her. I have promised her as an eventual reward for good services to restore her to maleness."

John listened torpidly, while he saw Mary craned forward, her head oscillating on her froward neck.

John had no fit remonstrance to cope with Transit's mechanical precision. It had condescension in it, the tone of a doctor explaining his remedy as a politeness. More, even than in most men, there was in John the deference to another's certainty, the hesitancy at disappointing another's expectation. He was evidently expected to undergo metamorphosis and he had no strength, he realized with panic. for resistance.

§ 7

Transit, in the meantime, hopped from his chair, trotted to the stairways, whistled. An incalculable head appeared, the hair like a soot, then a face, gaunt, expressionless, with botched red eyes, an

ashen mustache limp over tepid lips. "My assistant," explained Transit turning discreetly to his guests.

He spoke rapidly to him and the face disappeared.

"He is a very capable fellow," commented Transit, confidentially, returning sprucely to his seat, "but he is much too sentimental about chemistry ever to be successful with it. One does not win a mistress without some simple disregard for her prejudices, in this case, the so-called, natural laws."

Shortly afterwards there was a basso mutter and a tremor underneath them, a few dull detonations.

"My laboratories are in the cellars," Transit notified. "They go down very deep and are constructed to keep disasters to themselves. The chemicals now being mixed are very volatile and they hurrah like this when they escape."

John sat down. Silence, menaced like dangerous darkness. Yet he could not speak. His throat rattled emptily. His head hung, an executioner's business. Something was to be done to him. The suspense congested him like a plaster cast. Over his despondent limpness a quiver of indignation crept as he saw Transit and Mary at wit-tilting, Transit's face hot and eager led by an obsession, Mary, trap-still. She shocked him. He had never seen her so lurid; leaned back, she was spread out like wares, her keen eye over it, her laughter hawking it. What for—what for? Her hair was a dance, her eyes were drunkards, her mouth was a cage gate ajar, out of

which flew birds with uniform commentary, her bosom a consistent, inarticulate language of indiscreet charm.

It was evident that Transit's contemplation had become unscientific.

"I shall never think well of you, doctor, if you don't tell me the names of the chemicals you are using."

"But you wouldn't know them, you insatiable. It would be just as well to tell you the names of the craters of the moon."

"If the moon were our conversation, I would want to know them; I would forget them soon afterwards, but to give a completing touch to the conversation—very much like wanting glasses brimful even if no drink is taken—I would insist upon knowing it."

"I am not accustomed to dealing with women. I have never been in such a desperate predicament before. I feel like someone plucked remorselessly—my poor dingy feathers, bits of knowledge that have grown upon me in my studies, you take from me; they are one day adornments to you, but it will take me a painful seclusion to grow them back; in the meanwhile I warn you, I am fast becoming as bare as Adam."

"In that state, being a woman, I would find it easiest to deal with you."

"I have no doubt of that; and your words are dangerous for they accuse me in my first deflection from myself. I thought I had left love to those who

deify beauty, that face of nature to which they are most accustomed. I left it to them as I left behind me brotherly sunlight, the theaters of meadows, the oracular birds, the beaming flowers.

"I have left it all for this. Here chemistry is not casual as in nature, producing with equal purposelessness an earthquake or a new flower; my world is gray, dismal, simplified and simplifying; in it chemistry has a purpose.

"The evolution of events is no more charming than the evolution of animals, as the historians prove with their smutty causes of all the fantasies of revolutions. I have been so immersed in this task of disclosing the monstrosity of each thing, the fat loam worm striated under flowers, the gruesome gases of growth, the snouts of love,—in reducing all beauty into its primal capacity, and above all shutting out the lavish, high-spirited, beautifully gestured variety of nature, barring all my doors against its loveliness. I have made use of nature magically so as to make my science spectacular,—I too. In the same way girls are made use of in restaurants to embellish tedious, theoretical pleasures.

"But it is good sometimes to entertain the enemy behind fortifications; it is a truce in which captive information is exchanged. That is one of the reasons why I harbor you. I pay the sacrifice of turning at your first entrance into a cavalier. I go through the difficult ritual of chivalry, a man's refinement upon the neighings and nuzzlings and leap-

ings of sex, and laughter has come back to me. I have taken to the primitive commentary upon the cheerful inanities of the world of jokes—this is your office in the present hour of my existence—and I know your motives. Your eyes are pointed and resolved; their clemency and abandon are light veils; your smiling mouth has a straight and unwincing and unformulated resolution, over which your smiles make entertaining, but too obvious, tableaux.

"And with it all, you remain serene and slow, your purposes do not disfashion you and this is the very pith of your powers."

"I won't answer anything until you tell me these chemicals," said Mary with whim.

"I promise."

"And you must answer my question first."

"What is it?"

"Whether the old astrologers and black artists were like you, and why there was always some woman who broke their earthliness."

"The only magic that ever existed, is the eternal magic that makes a frivolity like your mood so potent. I think of it now as the explosive of emotion. I have promised you the formula. Tell me what you will do with it."

"Do with it? Nothing. What could I do with it? I don't believe I want the formula at all. I want beside me a phial of your transforming liquid that I may have the satisfaction of knowing that I can change my sex if ever I want to, not that I will ever

want to in all likelihood—look at poor John who has talked about it for years, collapsing in its presence like a boy at his first proposal. I would want to have the comfort of knowing that I have another resource in life like the aristocrats of antiquity who always carried poison with them as an alternative to circumstance."

"I don't know what to do," uttered Transit slowly. "You have disabled the measuring sense that I have always had with which I could equate events and necessities. I feel light, frivolity seems to be man-size and insistent, instead of foetally small, as it always was with me. I want to play, to make you laugh, to start the wonderful triumph of the nervous system over the body to which men and women lead themselves with due ceremony."

Mary laughed, her voice immeasurably enriched.

"Go on, go on," said Transit. "Let it dance on my face, this soft-footed laughter; it is the noise of caresses and I welcome them now."

§ 8

The macabre countenance of the assistant interrupted their too exquisite and arduous colloquy in which, at the end, Transit bunted around Mary like a blind puppy, while she, with the contemplative regard of all women confronting ardor, the serenity of a closed ova among agitated sperms, remained tranquil.

The skinny arm of the assistant held out a tiny bottle which felt vibrant in the hand and emitted a morose glow.

Transit took it; he held it up—he was very pleased —he smiled toward John. He seemed to have a warm feeling toward John for being there.

As he approached John his head seemed to be making a detour, reaching him in advance of his shoulders.

"It requires five injections," he was saying, "with a five-day interval."

There was a spell in the slow step, unwavering arm, and the diagonal leer of Transit. It had a panic-striking fascination to John; he watched the trouble of the liquid with inquisitiveness partnering with terror.

John was not aware that with automatic obedience he had held out his arm and that Transit was pricking with a hypodermic needle; in the moment of realization he essayed to pull it back but his effort wounded itself in a shudder that littered his arm; there was a sensation of loafing in the distended vein, then a vertigo which he intercepted by half lying in his chair, the wind brewing in this vat, intoxicating him, the walls growing muscular, and wrestling with spaces; it was not long before he had lapsed into a sedentary and speechless delirium.

"It will not last," was Transit's reply to Mary's anxious face.

He went back toward the staircase. Mary sprang

with him; she took him capably by the arm, laughed into him with the easy cajolery of a sweetheart; and the harrowed head of the assistant, reappearing, she commanded him through Transit whom she prompted with nudges and laughter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

In the following weeks the newspapers had a sensation. Transit had been seen on the streets. Incredulous eyes had watched him hurtling, green satchel in hand, on circuitous feet.

A ripple of nerves pulsed over the city. What was his business? Transit had never broken his seclusion tamely, like a burgher lifting bedclothes in the morning, or naturally, like a chick opening its shell. Some monstrous fate walked on his feet and clapped warnings. The alarm had issue in an aldermen's meeting, and a sort of vigilance committee of scientists,—pyramids of heads truly imposing but easy to walk around.

Yet, for once, Transit's purpose was not unhuman. He had left his house purposing to do some injury to Mary. He wanted a glimpse of her, to trap her with an antidote, to have an opportunity to retrieve himself. She had played so elaborately at promises with him; he had sought for sequels. He felt confident that she had not left him entirely. The thought of her made his house uninhabitable to him.

And now all the supercilious moods of the natural and human persons around him that he had given his

attention to, only as an annoyed neighbor, affected him; the freshness of the wind, the whistle of a man walking in a street a long way off, a curl of laughter, wisps of moonlight, bird builders, satirizing his walls; and having thus temporarily become oppressed with a consciousness of them all, the volcano of common things in whose shadow he had sat, heedless, had suddenly erupted.

Twice he had made his pilgrimages of revenge. The first time he had not even reached the doors. He was driven off by the inquiry of children attracted by the novelty of his appearance, his packed smallness, the bird gait which made his head oscillate with the alternations of his feet, his starting, short, stiff beard. At first they investigated, leaving yards of vantage between them; they made faces at him and called him names, one inventive little man uttering them, and the rest repeating; they grew bolder and pulled his coat tails; they jumped behind and knocked his hat over his eyes; they pulled his beard.

And Transit was helpless. He did not know children, the actual growing young of humanity. He had rarely seen any, had no memory of childhood of his own. They were so active and impromptu, they swirled around him like flows of water, occurred suddenly like animated hurdles. Such bitter, bright little faces! They appalled him; their bodies had all the versatility of small dragons; they were different from men and animals, a terrifying intermediate creation. He had managed to evade them at last through the intervention of amused passersby. But

when he had reached the house of John and Mary, he saw three children on the stoop. They looked questioningly up at him, one got up mimickingly; their glances sharpened,—and Transit turned and fled.

He walked deviously the second time, shrinking in every time he heard boyplay on the street. He got to the house and knocked vigorously at the door; there was no answer. Scathed with anger, he levered open a window and climbed in with nobody to interrupt him. Silence greeted him with its ironical resonances. Through the still rooms he walked, calling out through his teeth.

He left an incidental evidence of himself. As he turned around he had seen himself unexpectedly in a mirror; his face, twisted with chagrin, anger, concern, had become as poignant as any decrepit human face. Infuriated, he hurled a wooden box at it; the sudden fall of the glass, with the jangling as of a single peal of a multitude of unattuned bells broke open the crust of his indecision. He sped down, but the sound boiled in his ears.

§ 2

At that moment, Mary, as random and nondescript in clothing as in sex, was being danced by a train to a hotel in the country; the officious rhythm furnishing her with an accompanying violence for the delirium of her turning body.

In a large coat and limp hat with a dripping brim,

she sat muffled and outwardly still, a puddle of humanity.

Unseen, she sat in the corner and wrung her hands in sheer frenzy of menaced coherence as her ordeal shook and unfounded her.

The train screamed; she screamed voicelessly in unison. But soon its even speed, and orgy of land swallowing, and scenery, sucked in through the windows as through mouths, soothed her; the monotony of intensity was like the irresistible transformation she was undergoing.

§ 3

At that time John was in the street walking. He had remained in the house feeling his impulse of resistance weaken and only the prod of a supposed indignity disturbing him.

He had stolen out for a moment to walk sleekly and incognito in his ambiguous clothing.

He laid his steps slowly and lavishly, filling them with time, taking breaths as though they were tidbits. The promised grace of good feeling had come, a placidity like that of old buildings in sunshine. Days lengthened without eking out the torpor of dailiness. The interest and importance of small things seemed to grow while ideas and movements scattered out into immensity. The consciousness of the body, as of a house, a cultivable area, a fallow, primitive, and independent entity came upon him.

Books were beginning to surprise him; they as-

serted a competing entity with their choice of three worlds and different drama. Sometimes they appeared mildly foolish like children telling stories and surprised at inevitable discoveries. There was something familiar in nature to him now; earth felt more companionable, flowers less estrangingly beautiful, birds less immigrant. And rhapsody and wonder and enthusiasm palled out like night lights in the midday.

He came back and lingered at the door; it was lonely but he was helpless. He knew what he would do,—order a dinner from the caterer over the telephone, sit down and read meanwhile out of one of his little-touched volumes of fiction, until the food came, loiter through the meal, resolving through the chemist sense of taste the ingredients of each morsel and relishing it the more for the analysis which sauced it, and linger over the eclair of which he had grown fond.

After that— In the old days he would have retired to the library and added some notes to his investigations on the downfall of civilization—but he had given that up—it had become so remote in interest as well as in time— He would write a letter to Mary, a long letter describing to her that just as he had anticipated the change was agreeable; he felt already so much securer, so much more fundamental and rooted; he was not now as he had been, uncertain of existence, walking about with strength-pulsed hands and feet and no task to set them to. After the

novelty of the change was over, he would do better work than ever.

He went in, involved in the darkness for the moment, as in a cloak with many folds. When he had put on the lights, he had a sensation that someone had been there. His foot scattered pieces of glass, he saw the mirror with the blot of rayed emptiness, a spirit of annoyance overcame him, then a sudden surge of fear, and he screamed.

The scream was a woman's.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

Mary renamed herself Marlowe. Marlowe was a young man of medium height with a fair face and yellow hair. He was slow in gait and phlegmatic in temperament and thick of body. His voice was soft and slurring but straightforward without the hover of humor over it. A warmth on his face like a smile, but not wholly a smile, gave a radiance to it. There was unconscious swagger in his walk, the swagger natural to a hale animal.

John became Joan, a tall, thin, dark woman, timid and restless. Under any disappointment her face would dim so with pallor that she would become ghostly. In animation her face would have a soft glow like olives, and her eyes black in the pupils like agates, and white and glistening like shelled balls of onions; and her hair would be dark and alive like a shadow on moving water. On those occasions she would appear insidiously attractive, her slightest word would sound Sybilline and her merest gesture the expression of some hidden activity.

Marlowe and Joan met at a place agreed upon.

They fell in love promptly and confided to each other that the transformation had been worth the

difficulty and disappointments, already acknowledged, if only for the new love that it gave them. Tall, thin, dark women appeared to Marlowe like characters out of books, strange, stately, and mature; the blonde women were incongruously young to him, yellow hair was a sign of racial immaturity; blonde brightness was infantile.

And Joan doted on fair men. They seemed to her strong of the earth. They were plain speaking as wind. Dark men, to her, were of the indoors of shadows on walls. They were the prematurely old by racial life, the sitting men; they were thin and cricket-gaited, being accustomed to corners; staleness was always on their smell; they were devious like all those who knew the use of doors and corridors. Their eyes were dark like rainpools under eaves. They spoke well and cleverly, speech not being blown out, like other puffs of breath in the open, but bandied and caught and trained between the shuttling walls.

§ 2

Marlowe and Joan lived in a little house standing above the stones of the shores of a calm wide lake, which lay at the foot of graceful, cloudcollared mountains, like the collected trains of a circle of ladies. A resort house from which ran continuous music faced the house on the opposite shore; on its busy lawn the eternal twos could be seen clearly in the thin air, walking and lounging.

All this fervor and pell-mell that they saw opposite was a satisfaction to Joan and Marlowe. It was a keen accentuation of their arranged solitude.

On the paths about them, every now and then people passed and hallooed and they hallooed back without invitation. Their own journeys into the woods were secret, but a memory was begotten with each that grew like a child. On the lake, their boat carried them not only over water but over a Time, buoyant and perpendicular to them.

In the boat Joan lay opposing a hat brim to the sun and dwelling with secret pleasure on the wave of muscles on Marlowe's arms that crested and spent with every pull of the oars, for he sat in the boat nearly nude; on the massive chest with the two sinew-plates of breasts which looked to her as beautiful as might the studded breasts of a woman to a man. The two remained there, mostly in vagrant silence, while the hills drifted by and clouds dreamed in the sunlight. Small green islands, just large enough to sit together upon, met them like companionable wayfarers; coves on either shore stepped back with smooth buff beaches like naked feet rising out of the water, and seams of stone running up the dark hills like ankles.

Each day ended, atop some hill crest, secure like a turret, with a marsh like a moat underneath; evening hissed among the trees; the sun fell away like the last spin of a coin. They watched the piling of the shadows of the West, fir-dark, like gloaming for-

ests or maw-dark like looming cities, the silhouetted trees, nude, bathing in twilight, the casual break of stars, like swimming heads; they awaited the slow climb of the moon, near and speculative, its calm light, its Absalom adventure among the branches, its sense of companionship, of a great and unsolemn warden, too distant for intrusion but near enough for safe-guarding.

Then Joan would stoop motionless upon Marlowe; perfectly still she would smile while he would gather about her, head and shoulders, knees and arms. Her flawless peace on those occasions bewildered him and made him reverent, and suffused him with a tender sense of responsibility. She seemed aristocratic and aloof to him then, her surrender a graceful and unpresumptuous condescension.

In this way they enacted the first months of their new existence up the steps of repletion.

The difficult and fatiguing continual vaulting to the pinnacles of their temperaments ran down gradually; there were slow descents, levels of habit appeared. In the saturation of companionship which they had undergone in the mountains the thrill of strangeness had ticked out; their fervor had dried under the heats of their impulses.

The dark somnolence of Joan was no longer misread for sphinx sleep, her moods no longer were communications from strange territories of existence; her jests were no longer kiss bites, but mere violence.

Her mystery was no longer of the sky nor of the sea, but of the over-familiar and irritating fog. This evolution became abrupt when they returned to the city.

Marlowe took, with revel relish, to social life; bowed up the formalities with such fidelity that he seemed to bring to it a touch of improvisation. He fatigued Joan with the social obligations he put her under; his slow sedate vigor, like a tree growing, irritated her, and his few straight words without adventure, compliment, drama of exaggeration, or the intrigue of a lie, bored her. He was a clod.

Joan wrote poems and patted little pale paintings and peeped into the newest idle mind pacifiers. Marlowe knew what this meant, but decided to put it to some work, and made the paintings and poems and latest conversions of his wife, a social asset, pastries for the sweet tooth of parlor talk.

At first it had been difficult for both to remember of themselves before the change; the new impressions were not yet assimilated and they shut out for a time all that had been before them. Piecemeal, then, the old life returned to them; first clues, then the geometrical multiplication of associations gradually completed their memories. Neither had any impression of differences; it seemed a change of milieus merely.

§ 3

It was largely sentimental adherence to professions made before, that decided Joan upon her fling

at maternity; she thought of maternity now as a self-fulfillment.

The intention made Marlowe furious. He saw it as a piece of sentiment which Joan had no right to indulge herself in, because of its involvements; or even a deliberate piece of spite.

In derision, he alluded to the "Increase and Multipliers," the strange sect that followed an old forgotten precept of a hounded tribe of nomads who needed to breed for self-defense. Their hideous regimen had made monstrous shes of the women, all belly and milk bags, and the men slinking and shy, eking out their comparative idleness with disgusting fantasies and ritual of their paltry devotion.

Thus Marlowe added incentive and in time Joan answered him contemptuously with the looming under her bosom. "We should have Transit here," she said sometimes, "to make it a boy for us," but Marlowe replied only in a fling of his head, as though he were ready to stone her with skulls.

Joan remained indoors and wrote poems about the child within her apotheosizing flesh.

The orgy ended upon the child bed. The whole dream of creation, using a swell of flesh as a metaphor, ended in nausea. Anæsthetized, all her agony was mental, and this violation of her body, the breaking of a bone, the tearing of ligatures, the bleeding and the after birth craped her with pitying disgust; it made her think of the gutting of chickens. Gradually as the soreness healed, the flattening of her body, like an emptied purse,

brought her a profound torment, cold sneering frankness of nature—reminder of her destiny and her function.

She had borne a son; she held it in her arms and it whimpered; she held it to her breasts and its cry ebbed in a gurgle. It recognized her only through its necessities; as it had done in the beginning when it had hidden in her womb, and piped her with the umbilicus.

§ 4

Joan's breasts were full, and that was all her motherliness, a pair of badges on her chest. The infant took a long time to become recognizable. The little red body voluble, its human egotism untempered by experience, and truculently fierce, filled the house with callous intrusion. A dull, animal sense of responsibility kept Joan about it, but she felt unnaturally unfit; no knees clumsier, no arms so loose hinged. She secured a nurse to do the mothering for her and felt comfort in her efficiency; it seemed to her that it would have been terrible if she had been so efficient herself.

Even with the nurse in the house the presence of the child was a trespass, worse than that of a ghost among suspicious people. Here was a little body so fragile that the slightest touch would scrape a cough out of it, or scratch a rash over the flimsy skin; and so enduring that it could resist and survive shocks that were dangerous to the full grown, demanding constant attention, demanding it by

the mere agitation of its presence, demanding it in the lustiness of its terrible tyrannous voice.

Joan felt more than disappointment in the experience. She felt humiliated as if chance had been willful in the occurrence. Mothering was almost purely a physical function; she remembered the conditions of the mothers in the dim past, who had complained that when the physical necessity was outgrown the children scattered; and all that was left them was an elaborate mother etiquette which not only the children were required to observe, but the whole race as a means of natural compensation. Every time the child cried, the sound leapt at her like an accusal and the strain of it told upon her. Why had she tried the experiment?

The time should come when man like some insects should specialize in queen mothers. In the remainder, mother characteristics would be latent and sex would be a calisthenics.

Joan rejoiced when the child reached its third year. She sent him away to an institution which had all the recommendations of "modern" and "scientific" to quiet the conscience. Joan, however, did not make this apology to herself. She despised the place, believed it would be a prison—ineffectual of course since childhood and youth have the jail-breaking principle. In doing it, however, she broke a resolution she had made when the child was still within her, and when she was occupying the interval till its birth with plans. She had determined then to rear the child herself.

Now the days that intervened before the child's birthday, were too long, and the day before, the longest. In the morning when the school car arrived, she gave the boy an apple, and pushed him into the arms of the attendant because he whimpered. But when she sat alone, she wept; she did not want the boy back but she felt that her last reliance was gone.

§ 5

Joan tripped to the country and tried to rest and smooth herself out again. She settled in the same place where she had dreamed with Marlowe. But the hills were shriveled, the lake sunken, the lawns jaundiced. The house opposite emitted its usual hilarity but with harsher grate of summer-pleasure-mechanism. Even the air moldered, the odor of a decaying world; the morbidness of the fir green brooding over the hills, the hectic sunsets, the trivial stones stopping at her feet, the languor of the sunlight. She feared collapse, but in time her body rallied; the place regained a little of its old magic; she ate with her palate again.

Marlowe came to bring her back. Experiencing a short reminiscence of their love she was urged still further to a return of health, but even in the midst of it the sturdy, untroubled, inevitable body of Marlowe made her hostile.

She came back to the city marred by an indecisive longing; for a time she warded it off with work

upon a symbolical painting accompanied by a poem; she knew that its return was inevitable, but she ordered her longing upon these digressions.

Both poem and painting gave on the same subject. They were made to illustrate each other; each called Maternity. A woman was shown, nude, stretched out upon a crucifix; her hair was parted in the middle and made two ropes, which were knotted behind the post, binding her head back closely to the rough wood, and leaving the brow wide and smooth like a gravestone. Her eyes shamelessly published her joy in being sacrificed. Her hands were not fastened with iron nails to the cross arms, but her own fingers had been hammered into the wood. Her overburdened belly fell not down, but inward, pressing her most heavily against the beam. On her breasts instead of nipples were lips; and the curves were young cheeks, and folded, contented eyes creased over them. It was the resurrection.

Marlowe hated it and remonstrated, running out whenever she showed him the picture or recited the poem. Joan felt half satisfied.

§ 6

Since childbirth Joan had brooded over her body with indignation. She resented its slavish adaptations to its use, she resented the week of lassitude when the unused ferments of maternity drained out;

she resented her drooping breasts,—if she could only beat them into muscles! She resented her thick calves and her toadstool kneecaps; she resented the wide, stationary arch of the pelvis and her woman's ball belly—the thin arms——

Some women were serenely unconscious of them, forgot them, or minted a currency of metaphors upon them; or wrapped them in layers of cloth which symbolized them as suavities, litheness, delicacies, hauteurs,—as crispnesses, fragilities and abandon; and women were thus statues, normal under covers and kept for covert solemnities of unveiling.

What use had it been to crop hair and wear trousers? In the old days life had been a harmony, the exquisite and ethereal that had been assigned to her by convention as "the charm of woman" had been the compensation for the crudities of parturition. Women had all the graces of portals, publican here, episcopal there, but welcoming; women then had something to welcome men for—a need. Now all women, said Joan, were discontented, chagrined. For having uncoupled all the links of law and thus stood next to man, in equivalence, with orotund acknowledgment of it from him in statutes, and having sat in all his chairs and wielded all his tools, and copied all his habits, woman found herself with no other disabilities than those of her own body, which could not be annulled or smoothed off with a politeness. The rebellion was reduced to herself and her helplessness, her standing with numb arms and mute

lips and de-destined feet, made her unforgivingly angry with man whose possible superiority never seemed so admissible.

Joan felt this malice of her generation; it was difficult for her to remember that she had been a man once and had not felt, not gloated over that superiority. And now, every time she sat down and heard Marlowe humming, contented rubbing of vocal cords,—or watched his motions glittering with energy, she felt jealous and injured.

How-de-do, how-de-do, how-de-do, how-de-do, a monotonous bird; this was Marlowe's call, arrant and grotesque and while she sat in dudgeon, others responded, came with a flap and a doodle, his compact body as vulgar as a sparrow's, hopping here and there, pecking at imaginary restraints,—a doughty yokel.

Her sneer fell upon him, sometimes like wind aiming under his clothes, a chill to be shivered out. Generally he was oblivious, his look silencing, evading, never-minding; sometimes he brandished back a grievance, but usually he mended all by overbearing her with love, in which, by the sheer necessities of the situation, she would have to be passive.

Upper and nether shall they be; coming and waiting shall they be; sower and farrow shall they be; all the metaphors made and to be made, charged into one, and while Marlowe slept at her side, easily, like a man unburdened, his nose to the window, his hands spread out in a clutch of space, his breath placid, the metaphors almost made her maudlin.

§ 7

Easy sleeper thou, sleeping dreamlessly; animal, —that mentally eateth and pisseth, and leapeth with the freeness of a wind; machine of the will of nature that instincts make to go like keys and switches; possessor of the earth, who needeth no chains of the intelligence wherewith to bind it to thee, who liveth in the thoughts and made refuges of the troubled great, as unquestioningly as birds in the eaves of men's houses. Thy breath is a hymn of beatitude; thy face, would it not have been chosen for a god if other animals had achieved the looming greatness of man, as we have chosen animal faces in the careless awe of youth; for hath it not upon it utter assurance that signaleth the lordship of life? Thou liest not like others, hugging thy sleep, crouching from awakening, moving and crying in the night because thy dreams do not dissemble. How I hate thee for it, that even in sleep seeketh no other world, hath no restlessness; if there went into thy feet a longing for a steep and unknown place, if the tortures of the mind had broken thy face, if thy head got a snow from altitudes of meditation, then wouldst thou be beautiful to me, and passionate, more beautiful than in thy heedless repose, more passionate than in the commanding desire wherewith thou electest to use me as a hunger or a storm might; even if thou wouldst be less noble, less wise, and less happy, thou wouldst be more as I would have thee, more as I

would be, could I but break thee open, and put my desiring in and discontent thee—

Joan, panting in the desert of night, waiting for the upspout of dawn.

§ 8

At all meetings of women's clubs which Joan attended, women pondered their sedition. Those who laughed at it and did not even feign patience with their disabilities, but forgot them instead, stayed away; but there were enough of the others, sick and gnawed creatures, overnerved, hectic, declamatory, and, in the mass, heel baited followers of movements. Such meetings assembled hysterics, gave them a place to have a fit in, as one might seek a place to promenade, or smoke or nap in; solemnity and giggles made company, flirts came to them as to an armory; one did not inveigh against man there but against necessity and existence itself, alleging bias to Creation, ventilating dissatisfaction anyway and discussing semi-scientific proposals for lacteal atrophy, muscle stimulus, menstrual regulation, and similar alleviations of femaleness, which in Joan's mind jostled the memory of Transit,—yes, Transit, although probably, that little lump of perversity would have a memory of his own to jostle him out of access.

His green house, forbidding, kept her thoughts there; she would have to face it some day, let the

sky pave the street, and people be shaken out of windows and the moon rust in the sea, and walls dance May dances through the parks; she would have to go eventually, and magic like any other phenomenon could become ordinary.

Another thing had kept her back; the boy. The matron brought him regularly to see her and he looked alluringly filial with his bright kissing lips, round cheeks and serious child conversation; the circumstances of the birth, once so imposing, became an irrelevancy, a detail out of place; she loved him eagerly, and although she knew the love might be continued, she felt a reluctance to having it changed from such dependence that she was the creature of the child, to the anæsthetic balance of maturity. Mother love was a reliable luxury. It deferred her visit to the green house.

If only Marlowe, who for a time had reduced Transit to play, had taken advantage of the opportunity to learn the formulas; both had kept the remains of the liquids he had given them, but they had gutted out in the little bottles. It was very ridiculous to have thus left themselves ladderless for a return, but there was no benefit in regret which was only a curdle in resolution. It was no time to remember anything of a failure, except in what it had been successful. She would have to do what Mary did, before she became Marlowe. Before the necromancy of the vindictive little magician, play the simple and vivid necromancy of sex, become Circe, a duenna and street-Eve.

§ 9

"Marlowe," she called one day, "Oh, Marlowe, I'm going to Dr. Transit."

She wanted the encouragement of his objection.

Marlowe was in the garden and stank of fertilizer. He was bent to the earth, and, being all in khaki, even his hair having a browned appearance like khaki, appeared like a very mound of earth, and he was crooning over and over a couplet, addressed promptingly to his plants:

"A little rain and a little sun
Will bring up the flowers one by one."

The ashes of noon sunlight sifted over everything.

"Won't you tell me about it later, dear?" drawled Marlowe fingering a dark stem.

"Yes, fool," she answered, and rammed the door.

"Worm, toad, snail, vegetable," she called him. She saw him industrious, self-sufficient, luxuriating in the sunshine that would have shriveled her, familiar with manure, earth, roots, insects, birds, and the capacities of water. He was clean under his crust of loam, made a perfume of dung, was fresh in his rind of sweat.

Joan walked up and down, up and down, with furious steps.

Outside Marlowe was anathematizing the roots.

"Split the worm and split the stone
Earth is for the root alone."

She could hear him scratching with the rake and could see the muscles sliding on his back. Dark and firm and brown was his skin, over which the bleached hair waved radiantly.

He came in at last, washed himself, sat down to make a meal. Joan glowered upon him, he seized her hand and pulled her over to him, and kissed her plangently on the mouth, and holding her, sang,

"Meat and drink and sleep and love
Fill life's cup, and a drop above."

"Animal," she called him, releasing herself.

"You are angry with me," he said. "You shouldn't be, I am not mooded for it."

"Live and love," sneered Joan, mimicking him.

"Why not?" asked Marlowe, in his methodic way. "That is the rule of existence. One of the poets you are so fond of said himself, 'Life and love, with the resulting march of generations, is as much a rhythm of the universe as sunrise and sunset, the year and the month.' "

"Don't you dare quote any poet. It would be a forgery. You can scrape a barnyard, or a stable, but don't meddle with poems."

Marlowe smiled. "That's no jam closet you're locking on me, mother."

He made no other reply, save the unconcerned crunching of food between his teeth.

Joan went out, as from someone physically easing himself.

In a while Marlowe, still clucking over flavors and fragments, met her in the doorway. "Well, Joan," he said airily, "anything important to ballast a light-headed man?" But Joan had found a vista from the doorway which lulled her sore senses and from their sleep her mind, like something freed, strode off alone.

Finally Joan tucked herself indoors. Marlowe held himself up by an effort, sulked off, stamping out his reproaches into the garden, where night, wan like a convalescent, peered through twilight.

§ 10

Transit hovered.

From day to day Joan postponed the eventual journey.

Marlowe that had been Mary had proved Transit sensual, capable of holiday in spite of his work. She rehearsed her journey to him in many elaborate toilettes.

The widest pantalets of all to hide her poor calves sturdied for further motherhood, a trencher cut out of the bosom to serve her breasts; a fall of hair to make her face a more authentic improvisation, and all her dignity, a lure of dignity, to flatter the trapped.

But when she saw the glass and saw her reasonable, earnest face, the venture became momentarily too melodramatic for undertaking and she was overcome with nausea of futility. If only she could rave

into the mirror, poison her eyes with frenzy, wean the blood from her cheeks, haunt her lips till they curled like defending animals over her.

Marlowe helped her. He made no lip protest, but he posed and anxiously led his discontent up and down before her; little rebukes of hands hanging, scuff of feet sententiously withdrawing, resignation, anxiously performed on the shoulders. In stillness, he slowly erected himself in a monument of disapproval—this was a continual incentive.

The sequel served it even better. As Joan still delayed, haggling with inevitability, Marlowe became half confident that her mood was turning. He said nothing, fearing that out of sheer contrariness, seeing his confidence, she would enliven her resolution, but his cleared smile announced it. He gave her big stolid kisses, and embroidered their supposed peace with an endless seam of his flowers.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

She recognized the morning of the day when she made the venture. It occurred to her as she slipped finally out of bed.

"So it must be today," she said to herself with surprise. It was a bad time; she had not slept well, pestered by a hovering dream in which she had been clasped by a multiplying image of her boy like a house in ivy. She would be dull; the day's headache was already clubbing her temples. The vitality necessary for self-command would be lacking. It would be a great effort to hold up a spindling smile on her face against the drag of her weariness. It would be an effort to talk. She would breathe small, because the lobes of her lungs leaked sleep. Yet she knew that she was going. She took a fortifying drug, adulterating her energies with a vehement stir of chemistry. In spite of it, dressing was listless; her clothes clotted her; the gradual structure of toilette rose unattended by her.

She was surprised when she had finished to find her dressing made the very effect she would have hunted had she felt more vigorous. The yellow flares of the pantalets triumphantly swathed her

legs. A double gold cord ran up from the ankle along the inner thigh, like a special sinew. The sash wound abundantly like a frieze under the balcony of her bosom where her half-bared breasts sat fanning themselves like shy girls at a window. It was a success. The well placed rouge spots for her hectics, especially under the droop of hat, wiped a shade of decadence over her pallor.

When she had eaten, she rested and reflected. She would be a fool to go today. She looked out of the window. It was shining a broad noon; she ought to sun herself and let the rays cauterize the night infection; the next day she would be ready.

Yet slowly she remobilized herself, the routine of dress appearing more spectacular the second time because more deliberate. Then she walked out. Marlowe, reading on the porch, was astounded, was pulled half out of his seat by her appearance, and remained suspended until the gate clicked and she was on the road, the bags of her pantalets filling lavishly with sunlight, and moving in alternate spills away and away, smaller and smaller till where the road bent.

Joan walked leisurely. The day soothed her and the weariness wore out of her under it as though the light were a comfortable bandage. Her mind ran out to all her surfaces; her skin became intelligent, responsive, and as she walked on, kept her in communication with all that was and passed about her; the gutter tunnels sidling against the curb gave her of their slyness, the trees were persuaded out of

their attitude of tranced immobility and spun about with foaming green skirts, ballet dancers. She could see them; she saw the houses too, stepping back, the roofs dipping curtsies, the pruned trees and the pillars of hedges; the birds playing in gangs claimed the street; she drew in the earth scent, bound in flower perfumes as in bright ribbons; she felt the flight of insects, and the sky flowed on——

Could Transit's magic equal this; she with charms in her respirations and wands in her fingers; there were moments when things were so consummate that they dazed her and she walked, all things swerving together and parting before her with a stamp of the sunlight on their uniformity. And could Transit have made the walk of ten minutes so long and complete an occurrence, a day within the day, certain to stride memory, the pattern of all walks.

The sight of the green house in its devastation of bare street was a collision she had not prepared for. The whole walk lay broken off before her—nothing of sun, stroking wind, trees pirouetting—she was back in the slack of getting up, her throat drying.

§ 2

The house leaped at her, her head reared back as she tried the doorbell, all the bricks pealed to the pressure, the clangor razed the silence, opening a charred din as over flat walls. The door gave way suddenly, hooting on the hinges. She was in the corridor. The itching floor humped and groveled.

The walls staggered under their nightmares. The candles writhed. The voices hanging from the ceiling, crawling out of the cracks in slow hunting words,—she was familiar with that, yet it was strange, the power it had over her. She could not afford too many shocks like that on her nerves. She felt her fingers dribbling, her feet clench. No, she could not spare such an expense of nervous force.

Her breathing shook her right and left. The dimness oppressed her eyes. Then the doors blew out. It was like a violent awakening. She got up, the headache loading her temples. The same woman was there, a body emerging from the floor, engulfing; baling gestures; the same denials, the same terror, the same scream; only this time, she reached the stairs and barred Joan with butting head and fending arms. Transit capered on the traveling stairs—smells fumed about her as if invisible people were living untouchable and swarming lives. Transit's voice railed down.

"Get away, sow."

And the bulk rumbled off.

Transit, suspiciously dainty, added another contortion to the epilepsy of the stairway by bowing from it, a short, backing obeisance.

"Thank you," acknowledged Joan, genuinely grateful.

The battle always came like that out of its suspense, nakedness out of gallantry, white snow out of murk. She was not ready, she knew as she walked

up. It did not matter. Up here the light again enveloped. It was the same day, the day of the walk that lay strewed behind her, as with still knees she boosted herself above the traps of the staircase; the same wind, dog-waggish, snuffing at the walls, leaped and licked her. She could touch the blood rising in her, slowly scaling her cheeks.

Did Transit recognize her? She should have decided beforehand what identity she should have chosen for herself. She believed quite without derivation from any thought of the matter that Transit hated her and Marlowe.

Transit's rabid eye was upon her; it overflowed the etiquette of the introduction. Transit looked older, tougher even than before; wilder and wilier and smaller; the stiff hair suggested brittleness at the tips. He was more dangerous.

"I have heard, Doctor, that you have changed a woman into a man. I don't know who he is, but they say you have done it and I want you to do the same for me, because I am confident you can, and I don't think there's another woman in the world whom the change would serve better, because I have not only wished it all my lifetime but I feel that if I were a man I could better support and sustain life than I do as a woman, and you cannot imagine how grateful I would be, how happy you would make me, how infinitely obliged I would be to you, if you did it for me, because I am wretched and unhappy now; I have been on the point of suicide for a long time and nothing else can help me, I know, to re-

gain happiness—rather, I should say, to gain it, for I have never known it yet."

She stopped, exhausted, amazed at her unprepared fluency, happy that it was there, blurted out.

"Madam, we met when you witnessed that transformation," said Transit.

So that was all up. The little devil had a good memory. She felt hopeless and again a shift of anger checked her.

With feline patience Transit walked slowly before her. What she said did not matter, she was already fatigued and could push no further against his refusal. He confounded her so easily with little questions. Certain things one takes on faith, undiagnosed, so when her statements were so waylaid by queries, she had a sense of being attacked, of being dealt with discourteously.

§ 3

Even her breaking down angered the little doctor; it was not enough nourishment for his revenge, which had become rapacious and howled in him, as she could hear in the snarling and bitterness of his words.

Lifeless, her body waved before him. As sensation drained out she remembered, obscurely, the similar emptying that this very body, when it was John, had endured on its similar errand. Her head hung and her hands fell pendulating heavily in a small arc. The sunlight could hardly help her now, the

fresh morning staled; in a few minutes the day had creased and cracked and even her indignation could not rear itself and had to wait until it could be alone with her in a recuperative level of solitude to complement her disappointment.

She stood there and waited shriveling in the suspense which ate at them both. There was an end to the conversation, yet both did not desire or admit the end, and they watched the silence run over them like water.

Transit spoke finally.

"And besides," as if in return to an abandoned argument, "think of your child. He is already in an anomalous enough position, having a mother who should have been his father; and now, this mother that bore him would be taken from him by another trick. There is little enough in the family relationship to-day, but the boy has a right to his parents whatever prenatal antics they might have played. I do not know much about children, but I suppose it will be quite a loss to him."

To Joan it was a deliberately planned, added screw-turn, calculated to set her wincing; Transit paring from the events another scrap of amusement, a shameful diversion, even if it were scientifically intended, an observation upon the reaches of suffering.

She made no reply but stood as before; she must have been very pale then, and when she was pale she knew that she looked repulsive, and the knowledge hurt her exquisitely; she shrank under her hat but

he was looking from beside and underneath cunningly.

It had been a stupidity to have come here on this day; the morning getting up mood came upon her again; the lassitude weighed down to exhaustion, the headache prodded to convulsion. She was unable to make a reply, unable to stir with even reflex action, and hanging like an empty lining caked with hardship, the strength oozed out of her; ineffectiveness held her hands. . . .

§ 4

A tumult clotted her brain, and the tumult swarmed about a flow of pain where her head had struck. As her eyes saw again, swimming out of the liquid darkness to the still uneven surfaces of consciousness, she was surprised by the placid breadths of the sunlight and the familiar shapes of the wall, even by the face of Transit, which was certainly changed, having become awed and solicitous; even by the draughts of air that had a flavor now—the flavor of homeliness. All was pleasing in spite of the pulse on her head which radiated warm pain.

She was gathered into the arm chair in the midst of the sun, and the water drying coolly on her forehead. She felt calm now, and cheerful, as if a storm had detonated the sultriness of this contact and left her quiet and eased; her limbs and all the wholes of her body felt disjointed still, fragile but appeased.

"I will leave you here," said Transit almost diffidently, "you will feel better and I will bring something to strengthen you."

She nodded docilely and watched his head thrusting down commemoratively with each step. She stretched out, luxuriating like someone awaking clearly and freshly. What an extraordinary day, where dingy interludes and bright intermissions, buzzing as now with an inner revival, interspersed a weary play, of an actor who knew his part and one who improvised dispiritedly.

Presently, after an interval in which she had recovered, Transit reappeared. Reclining is feminine, and she was forthwith aware that she should not have taken any other attitude; and with it that the blood was back in her face, and she felt caprice on her fingertips.

Transit brought her a glass of cool wine. "Delicious," she murmured, enriching her voice in depths as a color in shadows.

"But, you might have brought me something for more than revival."

An easy smile shed over her lips; her whole restraint was dissolved; a new status administered the meeting; she stood on a wieldier plane now, and her body was relevant. She laughed up at him commandingly. Little surges of repartee; in her dark soul full of mysterious cruelties, bubbling up in a graceful eruption, innuendoes, masked in intricate personal shadows, paused and performed like carnival clowns; a purl of conversation, a jaunty con-

fessional, in which approbation was sought and not a revision, ran about her.

In comparison, Transit's crypticisms were like rejected machines, a change had come; the swoon had turned him sentimental—it had ended the fake of a tilt of dialectics and begun the belated old relationship of man and woman. In the interval in which she had gone away to put off the costume of an ill cast rôle and had returned a woman, she had been restored to her power.

§ 5

Transit danced.

Transit boasted.

Transit stopped and considered himself, felt himself with his hands, saw again the peaceable eyes, and danced and boasted.

Some tight nerve on the curious, packed body of Transit had snapped and he seemed to be unraveling himself before her; sometimes a puzzle of arms, sometimes a stiff assumption of legs, sometimes a torso contained in a lap. It ran up to her and kissed her and patted her with harsh defiling hands. Sometimes it brunted with frenzy her calmness.

"I could stop this in a minute, get myself out of this mess so easily," he foamed, shaking his fist at her, and again throwing himself to her unperturbed cheeks.

He was unhappy, even furious.

And he danced and boasted——

Danced on his toes and on his palms when he

squatted before her, and on his shoulders with his muscles when he stood still, a small bulk of motion, led on by wild eyes——

And he boasted of his chemical achievements, or enslaving a woman to his genius, who had died gently to his unspoken behest; of his strength, of his subtleties, his cynicisms, his awareness, even of his travels, and his raising of the building, his altogether aloofness from all women——

And Joan lay back, silent, smooth, yessing, taking without gesture—a mirage, the perfect and necessary opposite, the enormous darkness that needed to be fecundated—the woman.

She was not an individual, not a single woman, not a person; she was all femaleness, waiting enormously like naked loam.

No words, no sounds, no talk of hands, only she lay there and her appearance flowed silently from her, dropping like a noiseless cataract and winding and drowning him; she needed no brightness, no sheen of cheeks, no strokes of tête-à-tête.

Talk appeared to be a rescue; he talked to the point of confession; he became unguarded, loose and maudlin in desperation of talk till it became dangerous for Joan too. He was ultimately talking, not to her, but to himself.

She was startled by the changes of his face when, with all the intensity of a man reporting a powerful impression, his cheeks and eyes would become livid with first understanding as he twined simultaneously into auditor.

He said he was losing hope, his passion for investigating was shallowing; some indignity of change was impending.

Even his habits were wearing out; it is a terrible thing to find oneself abandoned by old habits; to find the body, mutely and cynically instituting a change, uncontemplated and unsuspected by the mind; he no longer smoked as he did in the morning, and he no longer read the same breakfast books; he was walking in different directions from his wont; he was changing the scale of palatabilities.

At the same time, with dismal symbolism, a crack had opened in one of the walls.

Most depressing of all, the deserted, disdained, neglected desires and commonplaces of life had suddenly resurrected in him; what he had enjoyed so long finally had begun to oppress him; he was cloyed with loneliness. Undoubtedly it was a sense of failure that drove him to this frantic rightabout. He even questioned whether it would not have been better for him to have cultivated philanthropy, to have worked for the benefit of humanity—as if there could be benefit.

There came over him wistful wishes of paternity, housefuls of children, husbanded out of many, many women, loved all uniquely in independent and isolate conjunctions but bearing his children in a heap. Very young men had dreams like that, as the animal snuffing carnal contacts encountered the baited cages of domesticity. More than that, he was, most awkward of disasters, slowly losing, or, more truly,

censoring his scorn for all humanity in a great unsatisfied desire for their applause, approbation.

His solitude was stale; he wanted conversation, jests, whisks of feet, pops of laughter, bubbles of appearance, collisions with walls and men, tea-tepid life, solvent for crusts.

Catching himself before these speculations:—A black dress coat and white tie with the medal of the National Scientific Foundation under the lapel; he stirring ripely within and under them, creasing them in moody bow, fixing them in a perpendicular while he surrendered pompously over the rostrum, revealing his discoveries; being whipped by applause; the whip snapping and crackling; men calling him to visits, introducing him to round, red wives, to filmy, iridescent daughters——

What of it—he would still be in the van; their wreaths could corrode his back parts only——

But they made him timid; shadows of these eventualities stalked him; he felt finished; he had to whine for readmission into their world, not having been able to construct another habitable world for himself.

He did not know his own origin, but he doubted now that he was a synthetic man, a great scientist, a defiant and free thought. He was just anybody's bastard, earthly, fantastically troubled by the strains of preservation and multiplication. He had been frightened by children—so outlandish they were to him. He could tell a curious story. Yet

now he had become tender toward them and mystified by them. It was the sign of dissolution.

Becoming acutely aware of the extent of his confession, he stopped suddenly. He went clumsily downstairs. He was gone a long time, but she knew what he was about. He would return to her with the precious concoction.

Curious—Marlowe, when he was Mary, had gone through the ordeal of this meeting with such an inert conviction of the horror of Transit; she had said that only morbid curiosity could make a woman receive him—but Joan shared none of this horror; Transit, now, was a restored figure, a sad man, a baffled magi returning from the ideal simplicity to the coarse complexities of life. She felt no shrinking to his touch; her skin leaned toward his compassionately.

§ 6

A perfect night succeeded the perfect day. A lucid darkness blew down upon them in pure descent from a sky clean of clouds; the wind blew it down with a breath limitless and undefiled; they met, gathered each other with fresh arms.

It was at that moment that Joan realized how remote and separate they were; above their touching bodies which appeared so inconsequential now especially as, liberated by ecstasy, the whole design of them seemed to have been accomplished and the bodies cast aside, their thoughts reached futilely for union.

Transit was so far away; everything was far away; existence was for the time in dissociation; she lay stretched straight out and her own feet wandered from her.

At first Transit did not speak; the darkness had rendered her body entrancing; its whiteness flowed in the buoyant, rapturously commentating dark.

Then he had slipped away, a separation whose mere distance of inches was no clue to the tremendous and final parting it was, to drag off his weariness. From his seclusion he had begun to speak slowly, and sparsely.

"I have made one mistake," said Transit.

"You are lucky," said Joan.

"I mean one serious, vital mistake," said Transit with a hint of irritation in his voice.

Joan responded with a deferring silence.

"I have taken my earthliness too little in account. Perhaps it is better for a man of science to be a man of the world, a courtier and a public figure like Aristotle and Bacon. The hermit, of necessity, resorts to visions, turns his science into a black magic; it seems inevitable.

"I have always had the absurd notion that I had not been born out of a transport of flesh, but out of a transport of mind incarnate—I believed that I was the synthetic man——

"Because of this I felt that I, if no one else in the world had lived so, could be completely incarnal and unhuman; that I could do without social contacts and chiefly without woman. I rejected ambition,

ambition which comes from gregariousness, half a wish of the finer-minded to win a sort of loneliness in leadership, half a concentration of crowd longing, a climbing on its face to be gulped down by the crowd in the gulp of popularity.

"I felt that scientific discoveries were all too tainted with the consideration of human use, one of the most discrepant of all irrelevancies, and I determined that mine should not suffer this digression.

"I knew sex disturbed man, enforced the lifelong intrusion of partners, entailed upon him an unnecessary campaign of search and accommodation. I meant to avoid it—and had—until the woman, now the man, your husband, came. Her coming won, for all the sidetracked activities and emotions of my life, a raider's admission. I did not capitulate, so much as scatter down in complete disintegration.

"There have been enough of men who have escaped certain of the obligations and commitments of the formal sexual union; that was not what I wanted. A life of indiscriminate sex entails as much spending of energy. The emotional demands of a variety of relationships, the new courtships, the approach to dissolution, involve one as fully. I tried to eliminate that. I had no success.

"Much earlier, I had succumbed. It was when I tried to construct a woman, in the faith that the man, who I supposed was my maker, had created life; and stimulated still more by the myth of Pygmalion,

which I believe is the survival of the memory of another such creation.

"First I had the design of creating only a body, headless, a monster capable only of sex, a complementing organism without any interfering grace, sensibility, intelligence. I could not keep my purpose pure, however; the body I planned became a beautiful body. Each animal you know has an exaggerated reactive power to special colors and shapes; man has a weakness for curves, can be struck into ecstatic rage by it—Hogarth called it the line of beauty.

"So my woman went out of my control, becoming sumptuous, every arch a heavy frame of sensuality. I found it necessary to give her a face; grand, serene and impersonal, without caprice, with that curious complexion between fairness and darkness which makes certain physiognomies seem to exist apart, cold as if a wind from another universe blew upon them. It soon became dark and lustrous; each day it grew more distinct, closer, as if implicated by my glance. The eyes became bright and filled with an unconcerned, almost ruthless allurement. The ground which a man, falling from a great height, sees rushing upon him must have the same look. The mouth hung open and still, white teeth carved in it. My project was doomed. I was unable to synthesize her.

"I then learned how to transmute sex. Becoming a woman, in that disguise I might find a justified realization of sex. When I had found the means I feared to use it. I am ashamed to admit these

things; they are my defeats. I once gloried because the public denounced me for planning none of my discoveries for its use. But I transgressed my own principle; I worked on them for my own use.

"Are you bored? I once had no human feelings and was happy; some time ago I would have tried to torture you through terror, or disdain, or even by physical discomfort—when I felt superior to life, and could kick heels at it. Now as you see I am solicitous about your comfort and try to entertain you. Are you bored? Tell me if you are; it will give the knightly stroke to me; I should enjoy the knowledge that the woman to whom I told my most intimate and withheld communications yawned.

"A confession is a magical image of oneself, the only one that has the power of wounding its double with its own wounds. It is the most dangerous gift in the world. I should not have given it to you."

Joan had listened in silence; in reverence and gratitude and in pity, and with such close attention that his stopping left her groping.

"I am so much interested that it is a pain when you interrupt yourself," she said.

"Do you know why I wanted to change you and not that woman, who is your husband?" said Transit after a harsh silence,—"because I knew you would be dissatisfied and she would not. I saw no reason for making contented people; there are too many of them in the world. For the same reason, much earlier I had refused to prolong the lives or restore the manhood of good citizens. With them it would

not be experimental; only maladjusted people questioned and tested the adjustments, and I was interested only in that. At first it had been, I must confess, a mere caprice; but later I realized its motivation.

"When the charming, blonde lady came, I saw that a change of sex would not alter her. But she surprised my weakness and took advantage of it. I never forgave her for it, or you because you were concerned in it with her. She followed a fashion. She desired vigorously because she was naturally a vigorous woman. A scientist hates a useless experiment.

"But you seemed to me ripe for it. I saw you out of plumb with the world, but engaged in some sort of sideward contact with it; perhaps another scientist, or an artist, or a runaway; you had the nausea of existence and the desire of escape through metamorphosis. I am right!"

"You are," admitted Joan.

"You answer so shortly," said Transit petulantly. "I have a feeling that this is not a talk but a ceremony, that I am reading a service and you are making responses. At moments, with you at my side, so quiet and passive, I know you as a prayer weaving hierodule. Then I shudder from you and would drop you out of my bed, feeling suddenly that you might be a mummy or a phantom solidified by my sensuality, or suspecting as suddenly that you receive my body, pressing it as a grape for some other

purpose because I know you have the poor taste of self-dedication."

"I am guilty only of the sin of interest. I did not want you to interrupt yourself," said Joan.

§ 7

When Transit continued the next moment he spoke in another voice; unbodied, it bore, in itself, a whir of distance.

He said, "Life began when change began. All living things are known from the lifeless by their consciousness of change and resistance to change. Religion is the cult of the perfect transformation. Happiness is in change;—and the vivid nine-months of gestation is the joyous portion of life; childhood, the long ending of the final change, is lingeringly left with some stir of this delight.

"There are those who are not content, in whom a cloud of unassociated memories darkens existence, which in the past they have questioned, denied, lampooned in the greatest of satires; they have taught dissension with life; as artists, altering and molding the projections of themselves, as philosophers discussing the changes with the shapeformal phantoms of the new beings, as scientists examining the mechanism. They have let their curiosity about change almost appease their need for it.

"At birth and at death should we look for the secret of change. Birth was never so mysterious to

us as death, for we can delude ourselves that we brought it about. Only to the very primitive is death not mysterious. Death was never a thing that came except by the intervention of the vindictive. Their eyes were too young even to see the progress of life. They had no gods expect evil gods, because they thought themselves immortals, opposed to other immortals. When death came they wondered; and were not even frightened. They left the corpse as he was, expecting that he would come to himself again. When he remained inert they put highly seasoned food before him; they brought out the cunning girls to dance lasciviously under the solemn, still eyes. In the course of time they forgot him; and knew him only as an occurrence of stench and decay.

"But for others death was the great mystery. They saw failure of footing beat a shapeless stillness upon active and ebullient life; they saw certain clashes make mortal wounds; they saw water break the lungs of companions, and lightnings shrivel them; they saw the leap of lions end with the rending of a man; they saw trees fall upon men, reeling over them and mangling them with the sudden clubs and spear-heads and knives of their branches. These deaths had the clarity and awe of a ritual drama. There were more mysterious deaths that came slowly, mockingly, pitilessly, Fate plying the Inquisitor and inventing the foredeaths of exhaustion, listlessness, pallor, impotence. These dyings deprived them

even of the participation of being victims. To explain them they called up visions of evil.

"Death is an unknown change; progress or regress of life. Sometimes I incline toward those who see in death a transformation into angels; into beings so profoundly older and more conscious (with a consciousness not of senses but of a subtler organ working rudimentarily in us as the flash of understanding), that men are to them as little children. But I can see also a recessive stage. The successors of men, the ghosts, might be dwarfs of men, inarticulate, a lower order. It is certain of life that as infinite as it was, stretching out over the world, in many shapes, floating between worlds, and inhabiting them,—so it was also eternal, laughing from change to change, for infinity and eternity are one.

"For me, no myths are untrue; sheer creation cannot come from men; there are no creations but memories and clairvoyances.

"Salamanders are recollections of life on incandescent stars.

"Do you think metamorphoses are without significance? All religions have had them; and religions have been announced by the people sensitive to change. The turnings include animals, flowers, fishes, and rays of light; angels and devils and shapes, conditions, avatars. You do not desire to be made a man again only; you yearn for the high wings of birds, the wise snouts of animals, Odyssean fins of fishes, the scales of serpents, the crowns of flowers, the mood of eternity. You, you will never be satis-

fied until you haunt death, hover about the inevitable change.

"But you are weak. I know you will not be capable of it; you will shrink from the contemptibly great mystery, death. I have shrunk from it.

"Who is there alive who would dare to do what is necessary? If I gave you my formulas to put into every man's house, you would find them making of it another social convenience. The fools who would advocate the change would be like the fools who advocated divorce. There would be freedom to change sex as there is freedom to change bedfellows. But it would answer no question; it would add another load of convenience to the world; can you understand my reasons? I am not interested in adding a sport to the little routines of life; I have no respect for the pretense of happiness; I have no belief that constant change will end in happiness; but in the lap of motion such as serene, cyclic, change, ceaseless and swift holds out, the unquiet soul may find rest.

"I have dreamt of changing myself into a tree, letting myself fall as a redwood seed and grow deep and high, living thousands of lives, building them around my pith, warming myself with leaves and far snow, and housing birds, serpents, fungus and races of insects. It seemed to me that rooted thus, oblivious of time, the site of cities and strange gardens, spored in me, of the numberless creation of earth, I would somehow know the secret of life. I thought that this was perhaps the reason for a tree's immo-

bility, that containing the secret of life it does not need consciousness.

"I have dreamt of becoming frogs, the change from pisculi to tadpoles and then to frogs seemed to me one of the most fascinating of all careers; still more the butterfly, hatched out a worm with destroying appetite, growing so fast that it gave back no excrement until it was ready for its second incubation. Thus I saw myself, and especially spinning a new eggshell out of my own body, or hairily making a womb for myself, a womb larger than its possessor in which to enjoy my reconception, the pupa happier than any embryo or any mother with happy hands over her bombastic belly, earth snobbish over her fruit.

"You see what I think of change? You see that I cannot award it indiscriminately. But you needn't fear; I will give you the liquid; but you will not find manhood more congenial now.

"If I could, I would heap upon you all the pompous miseries of the alchemist; the tortures with which the enemies of beauty in the Thebaid deflowered themselves; the poisonous, night-creeping visions; the eye-cramp that made mermaids, dragons, sphinxes, centaurs, scarabs, minotaurs, ygdrasils, elysiums, gehennas, the monachal vigil; the beggaring reminiscences of Homers; all the abortions and monster parturitions, the hard labors of the mind, purposely to drive you to death, to explore to the plumb depths the meaning of that change. Such a one is needed.

"Even if it brought a climax of unhappiness, there should be more unhappiness, dungeon deep, law long, soul sharp. The noble life has no more certain condition. A man can be judged chiefly by the extent and the purity of the sorrow he can suffer; less by the transport and purity of happiness he can enjoy. I have been too timid to attempt either. If I left any legacy it would be to the man who may succeed in this; it is not certain that any man can.

"The world is full of those who would make people happy, the ameliorators, because happiness is a fixed harmony, the pleasure of functioning without friction, and is enemy to change. I hope for the day when unhappiness will be followed with the same devotion as happiness. I would have as the ideal figure him to whom no suffering is unknown, who has weathered all mischance, enduring the utter convulsion of pain, the final heartful of nostalgia, the sickliest degradation, the grimmest injustice of disaster. In him, in all likelihood, will be found the greatest hero, the happiest man. The two must go together. The vision of the ascetics was not as much at fault as their procedure which made a shallow paradox of their design, desecrating agonies by turning them into ecstasies.

"I have repeated all the old anchorite errors. I have failed and now I have abandoned even my decision to explore death.

"I will tell you why. The organic being is a vast community of lives dominated by a cohesion akin to

animal will. Death breaks that union. It is not the end of life but the signal that the millions of lives held together may disband and go their own way; they become the prey of still united organisms; the carrion birds peck from within.

"At death sensation no longer is central and conscious but vibrates and is local and millionthly divided. The corpse enjoys the brilliance, the pattern arrays that it saw during life only under the compression of eyelids. Minute lightnings wave over collapsing skies. Drastic motion streams from cell to cell. While to the mourner there is silence over all the body, there are incalculable thunders. Loins and lips are lax, but there is pandemonium, a Cybeliad. Only embalming is death, and the body strives against it.

"It is possible for bodies to revive, to restore their unity, but the effort is too horrible; the body has outlived its unity and has a grave need of anarchy; all the cells would resist the effort bitterly.

"But if one could so saturate himself with this idea, that if his skin were grafted or his blood transfused to the body of another human being, that idea would be communicated to the other, it might be remotely possible. He would have to teach the idea to his body, and the teaching would be a ravaging of his body more terrible than that of any disease; and it would have to attack him like a disease, penetrating him deeply.

"Then at his death the idea would come into oper-

ation. The demobilization of life would be supervised, arrested, reversed. There would be a triumphant march back to life, a march of unbelievable hardships and agonies, but carrying the precious secret as the prize.

"The man capable of such an exploration and discovery would make insignificant all the search and finding that has been done before, except that of the intrepid soul which first ventured upon consciousness. It is difficult to believe that such a man exists. I hoped to become him but I could not do it. It is for me an epochal disappointment. I have found myself unfit for unhappiness, unfit for the rigors of this discovery that I have outlined and I am creeping back to the world where the glow worm chase, called the pursuit of happiness, is in full course.

"Who knows what may happen? I know that I will come bribing the world with my discoveries. I shall be paid for them with the pitiful recognition of what I have so long denied, my humanity. I shall have a liaison probably with some female scientist, who will remember calamitously that her womb is the ultimate crucible. I shall have disciples,—one, an unlovely Heloïse, whose science has been a variant functioning, who will interpret lectures, as subtle parleys of courtship and catch and wield me with matrimony. I will make the habitual experiment of fatherhood, the blind and certain one, and beget my child, with the poor extra advantage of being able to determine its sex——"

§ 8

The dawn had come in the meanwhile. Although she had listened and had heard every word, yet she felt that she had slept too and the sunrise wind which blew faint light over them seemed then to be waking her.

She noticed the face of Transit for the first time. The fringe of hair bristled no longer. It flattened against his face, leaving a strange look of inwardness; the eyes lay back in the sockets, the cheeks folded back and were sucked in, the color was maudlin with the shadows that fill up convexities. It was a pitiable face, grayer than the dawn in which it rose, and as Joan drew it up protectingly on her knees, it lurched into her lap before her bosom.

The mouth opened now and then. It said bitterly, "I am not able to probe with death, I have accomplished nothing."

A wailing laughter gathered in Joan.

She rocked the inert body in the crook of her arms.

Transit slept. The paroxysm of revelation was over. He would rise sardonic and vengeful and chagrined. He would keep his promise but he would torment her with all his resources. She must prepare for it. So, too, the sun strengthened, and grew fierce in the zenith triumphing in its ascendency, forgetting the abashed manner of its rise.

She shrugged up her back to the light. It beat upon her until it seemed to her that her skin smol-

dered. The head gathered in weight. On her thigh finally it had stamped out as from a space of consciousness, a smooth, bare, arid spot of inanition. The numbness radiated. It reached to the toes of her feet which walked impalpably over nettles. It made a paralyzing viper of the sinew which coiled over her hip and this contemptuous resting upon her body, as if she were a casual turf, was symbolic of the other thrusting which was equally wearying her mind. Over her brain lay his confession, his mental repose carelessly taken, heavy and numbing.

All policy had vanished from the thought of Joan. She was conscious of the harass of this burden. She felt no resentment for it; a unique relationship, that could not be repudiated, had come to her, and any complaint would be a betrayal of it. With slow flexing of her body, with reliance upon her hands and elbows, she strove to keep up her strength. Toward the end she tried to gently shake off the hard head. But its long hairs seemed to have become roots; the striæ of her own muscles which she had begun to feel imminent under her skin seemed to be the flat strands of her hair.

He woke redly; the mouth opened, a hot abyss, in which his tongue driveled; his eyes dragged open, exposing red membrane. He took his head off and pain circulated over her thigh. He lunged away into bed clothes; finally he raised his head again.

"Put on your clothes," he said peremptorily.

Sore and dull, Joan obeyed him. She limped to the floor, dragging the suspended limb, then pain-

fully finished a dry toilette, spraying her face a little at the fountains. In the meanwhile Transit had gone down and brought back the bottle with him, and gave it to her in utter, rasping silence. He guided her to the stairs. Even his parting was mute, an insulting bow.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

A blue, blowing crisp night.

Marlowe's gardens, quite bare, rattle dry branches. He stands, potted in his garden boots. His head is bent. Near him a wistful puddle goes mysteriously blank with the last sky light.

A door opens in the house. Marlowe looks up; a succession of door swings, footsteps, a tall thin man stoops out to him from the back doorway.

Marlowe pauses a moment, then his face falls with bitter recognition.

"Good evening to you—Joan,—John—I suppose it is John again."

"It is neither. Good evening, Marlowe."

"What do you mean it is neither?"

"When I left Joan, I did not become John again, but another man. I am not yet accustomed to myself, but I do not recognize John."

"No, I do not recognize John either."

"I am calling myself Jeremiah instead."

"Jeremiah? Why?"

"Half out of loyalty to the J. Half becæuse I am to be a prophet. I am filled with the unquiet and bitterness that makes prophecy."

"You are more Joan than John."

"That is not true. But let us come indoors. I want to look at my ancestors; at the John and Joan."

They walked into the night-filled rooms.

"Never mind the light yet," said Jeremiah, "I called you in because I have not gotten over my prejudice to your garden."

He sat down in a familiar seat at the table. Marlowe sat opposite him, rubbing the back of one hand with the other.

"You were gone two months," said Marlowe. "I thought you would be back sooner."

"You were not lonely, were you?"

"No, it did not matter at first; but people asked for you and it was a burden making explanations."

"It should not have been a strain. You always had to explain me."

"Yes, but the explanation varied; I became tired of saying the same thing."

"What did you tell them?"

"I said you were away for your health."

"That was true."

They remained silent. They were able to distinguish themselves in the dark, but the dark made a distance between them.

"When are you going to marry?" Jeremiah asked.

Marlowe almost unseated himself in his twist of surprise.

"How did you know?" he gasped.

"I am a prophet," laughed Jeremiah.

"You had no right to do what you did without

consulting me. You acted extremely egotistically; you did not care how you upset our relationship," Marlowe defended himself irrelevantly.

"That is not true. I told you my purpose long before I was able to fulfill it. Besides, you should have foreseen it."

"One change should have been enough for you. It satisfied me."

"You are talking like a child, Marlowe. Tell me about your new bride."

"You have no consideration for our child at all? You have stolen away its mother."

"Oh, I don't believe he will miss me. Tell me about your bride."

"Why should I," said Marlowe belligerently.

"Because I am a mature man, a male being fully developed who has not known a woman yet and is avidly interested."

Marlowe laughed carefully. "You know her, you have met her before."

"The lazy, dark girl who sang love songs?"

"Yes, but she is not so lazy as you think."

"Perhaps not. It does not matter. It makes no difference to me whom you marry provided I am able to tell as well as you who she is."

"You don't care whom I marry?" asked Marlowe astonished and hurt.

"No. A second marriage was inevitable. We have had a very elaborate and singular divorce, but it has turned out well enough."

"I am going to put on the light," said Marlowe.

"Oh, there's no necessity for it," said Jeremiah.

"I must have the light," said Marlowe defiantly. "You have always been so fond of dark corners and mystery. You're nothing but eyes now."

"There is something warlike and critical in contours falling into shape. I don't like it. I prefer a world as uncertain as myself; sunlight softens and is a color; this light hardens and is a stain."

"I don't care; I am tired of glooming around."

Jeremiah reached over and put his hand on Marlowe's arm. "Just for tonight," he pleaded, goadingly.

With a shout of suffering Marlowe lunged up and rapped his knuckles against the wall; he found the button and the light flamed down in an inverted explosion.

They were both blinded.

Marlowe looked at Jeremiah closely. "Good Lord, you have changed!"

"I know," said Jeremiah.

"You are taller, are you not?"

"A full inch and a half taller," answered Jeremiah.

"Your face is different. Before it had a withdrawing look, a library look; now it is just the opposite."

"Now it is a searching look; a forward look. It is not a library look any longer. I do not read any more," said Jeremiah.

The light trod upon them; all the shining surfaces added a clangor. Marlowe rose up. He paced

before the doors in agitation. He looked back at Jeremiah with resented helplessness.

"I'll go shortly," said Jeremiah.

At once Marlowe was apologetic and solicitous. "Would you rather stay? There are people coming tonight and I was wondering whether you would want to stand being questioned and that sort of thing."

"No, certainly I don't want that sort of thing."

He took up his hat. There was a drag of conversation, an inefficiency of farewells.

§ 2

Jeremiah walked out of the door with tall steps. At some distance from the house he stopped and waited. Unfamiliar people passed him. Familiar people to whom he nodded involuntarily looked back at him astonished, and passed on quickly. At last the people whom he was waiting for approached. He stood in their way. They were a pair of girls, one formidably tall and ungainly, the other a low, dark, full girl with a plush and luxurious face.

Jeremiah bowed, called the name of the second girl. "I must see you for a few minutes," he said.

She looked away in confusion. "An old friend of mine," he continued affably to the tall girl. "She will join you in a short while. I won't keep her away long."

The tall girl went ahead turning back suspiciously to a certain rhythm.

Jeremiah, holding a fallow arm led the other girl

through a diagonal street. He kept up a stream of talk. "Try to remember me. You should know me very well. We played together even. Your favorites were the French and mine were the English. You liked chocolate and I liked tea in the morning. You have a lovely voice and you sang beautiful songs; and almost always you wore flowers."

The girl trembled as these identifications entangled her. They reached a park and Jeremiah sat down with her. His arms reveled in her softness; he mottled her cheeks with hard kisses. She submitted without compliance and without struggle.

When he was satisfied, he returned her to Marlowe. He brought her in. The tall girl clucked over her. There was a stir of greetings. Marlowe glowered.

"I am sorry I can't stay," said Jeremiah.

He closed the door softly and remembered the aggrieved face of Marlowe. He turned around.

"Good-bye, Marlowe," he said.

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

He walked through the street with the tread of a Colossus. He felt himself starkly tall. The street wrinkled underneath him. He felt at home in the night which was as vast as he; it traversed space in one slow step. He needed no sleep.

He stopped all the passersby. They hurriedly evaded him. The tired submitted with the torpor of the too weary. The nice people suffered him out of politeness. The impatient ordered him off. The timid were suspicious and trembled until he quit them. He found a listener who offered interesting replies.

The man was of solid make. He had a broad rough face, dark and humorous; his lips protruded under his laughter like a fountain spout. He did not like the incessant walking of Jeremiah and persuaded him to sit down. When they walked it was principally Jeremiah who did the talking; when they sat down, the other man.

§ 2

"Have you change of a dollar?" asked Jeremiah.

"Yes," said the stranger, putting his hand into his pocket.

"Aren't you afraid this is a ruse to find out whether you have money and where you keep it."

"That's so," reflected the broad man, taken aback, "but I'll risk it." He took out a handful of coins.

"Where are you going?" Jeremiah asked him.

The man walked close to him and whispered. "I have a liaison with the fourth Caryatid to the left of the Villa Theater and am idling about till the crowds leave and the watchman goes to sleep."

"You still have several hours then," suggested Jeremiah.

"Oh, yes. By the way, you have forgotten your change."

Jeremiah laughed. "Let us see," he said, counting the money, "three quarters, a dime and three nickels; four pieces of silver alloy, and three pieces of nickel alloy for a piece of paper imposingly stamped with a government seal. That is an interesting change; the soul of a dollar, a soul that none of us are able to neglect, has had a transmigration from a printed promise to seven small discs of metal. What do you think of that?"

"That change is too close to the humdrum of life," said the broad man. "It is as normal as a change of food in our stomachs, being part of the similar chemistry of daily affairs. If we try to see it, it blinds us like a membrane of the eye. My change is outside and has not yet been absorbed; but I would rather tell it to you sitting down."

"As you say," agreed Jeremiah, "but not here." He looked about, then he said, "Let me take you to

a bench on which a few hours ago I was squeezing a sweetheart of my husband. Pardon me; it is not clear. I will explain that later. I was squeezing her on that bench. She bent so easily that I had not ordinary molds enough in my mind to set her in. Baby, I called her, and she romped on my knees; queen, I called her, and she enthroned; cat, I called her, and her kisses spat upon me; little mother, I called her, and my head seemed just to be emerging from her breasts; all this in silence for I realized that she could misunderstand words but not gesture. Eventually I became tired of all these possible metamorphoses. It was possible for her to become an infant, an animal, a rank, a mother; but I wanted her to change for me into startling and impossible things. I called her water, and she dropped the arm she had put about my neck; then without hope I called her star, and she disengaged herself from me entirely, and she sat back looking bewildered as though she had lost me. I moved over to her and kissed her as a judicious finality. She smoothed out her dress and toiletted so resourcefully in the grass that I could not resist and kissed her passionately, for I suddenly realized how clearly and simply and tidily women change their moods, while with a man it is a work of confusion. Then I took her back to my wife—pardon me, I will explain later. Believe me, friend, this is all absolutely true. Besides, I will show you in a minute the exact place where it happened."

"I believe you," said the broad man.

"You probably have made very similar transformations of your Caryatid. But you are wondering perhaps why I spoke of my husband and then of the same person as my wife, and your wonder will not lessen when I tell you that I am not married now at all. I have been another man, a quiet man who hid his dissatisfactions with life in a library with the gifted dissatisfactions of hundreds of great minds, reverberating. Then his wife, who is now a man, a heavy blonde beau, took him along to Transit and turned him into a woman.

"That was an extraordinary liberation for him. He was a freer woman than he had been a man. The woman he became was dark; her dissatisfactions were not hidden; they were lamely expressed as caprices and whims, but it was still an expression. Although she was a charming woman, she was cruel and loved suffering even if she was obliged to participate in it.

"But—she is gone—and I am left with no more inheritance from her than if I had issued from her womb, instead of, as I did, smothering her within me. By a series of such transformations from man to woman and woman to man I expect to learn a little of life, at least to play with my dissatisfactions.

"I am just back from a buried existence in the country where I spent a month of agonized becoming man, and another slow, delicate month of recuperation and although I am alert with the sensation of virility I am already wistful for the change to womanhood again which will reveal things to me that

escaped me before and complete the correlation of impressions and appearances."

"How was it done?" asked the broad man.

"If I weren't a fool, I would be able to tell you. But I have an improvident mind. I made no effort to keep for myself this power. It is a chemical transformation. Some active chemical is intravasated, and through the blood acts upon all the tissues. The change is very gradual. The climax is so unusual that such an ordinary and intruding sense as discretion has no opportunity. I should have had the materials by which the change is accomplished —I never thought of the future. I will see Transit again."

§ 3

The broad man turned about with concern. "You had better not think of it any more. Haven't you heard what happened to him?"

"He is not dead?" asked Jeremiah, his jaws staggering.

"Worse than dead," said the broad man tenderly.

An inscription of horror cut in on Jeremiah's stony face.

"He is insane. They have locked him up. It is believed that they will have him killed."

"How can they kill him!" shouted Jeremiah. "I will free him. I will turn their damn crazy house into a pile of junk. Must man always destroy his saviors!"

"It would have been better if they had never passed the laws against capital punishment. Then he could have been cleanly executed. Now they will probably starve him or shock him to death, as society makes its roundabout riddances."

"But they will not do it. There is enough blasting powder in the world to get him out. Listen to me. He is more necessary to intelligent and hopeful men than any being that ever lived. Will you help me rescue him?"

"I can't tell you yet."

Jeremiah put his arm over the broad man's shoulders. "You will go with me, sweetheart. Your hands and my hands will do it. Your hands and my hands will be invincible. And if you don't I will kill you first and drink strength out of the murder. You cannot deny me, I tell you. We must set about it now. We must do it immediately, or our purpose will be hampered by plans."

"But," shuddered the broad man, "I have my rendezvous with her. She will kill us both by falling upon us and crushing us; she has the fixed will of statues."

"We cannot wait! There will be other nights for her."

"Trust me," implored the broad man, "that it cannot be done."

"Well," said Jeremiah moodily, "if we must wait. We can't go to her now, you say?"

"No; we must wait for the hour. She is very punctual."

"But how can we endure the waiting?"

"Show me the place where you were leading me to."

"Rather tell me about Transit."

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

They sat down. The broad man fastidiously made himself comfortable. "About a month and a half ago Transit suddenly astonished everybody by appearing before the National Scientific Foundation."

Jeremiah groaned.

"It made a sensation, of course. He declared that he had determined to change the nature of his work and offered to adapt his discoveries for the use of mankind. He announced that he was convinced that he was a synthetic man, but that the scientist, who made him and who had subsequently gone insane, made him too successful a human being.

"Instead of eliminating the animal elements he had instead made them practically the test of the reality of his artificial man. Thus he had fashioned him, Transit, with an unduly vigorous sexual development. To keep this wild sense tame and its appetites safe from the love feast that society had become, Transit had estranged himself from humanity; intending, however, when in his mind the workday of his life was over, to grant himself the night of orgy, the evening of which was to be spent in finishing his work among his brother scientists. He in-

tended to work within and with, instead of outside and regardless of, humanity, and he proposed to take a wife from among them."

"What apocalyptic simplicity!" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"He was applauded when he had finished his announcement. The foundation had tried formerly many times to annex him. But he had to undergo the usual formalities. His adherents, noticing his anxiety, had a special meeting called to vote on his membership. But even that interval was time enough for a fanatical opposition to gather against him. Hatred and timidity united in lurid attacks upon him. They cooked up shabby suspicions of his intentions. It was alleged that he merely wanted girls with whom he could make experiments of sensuality in the name of science."

"Oh, eternal defamers; eternal stinks in the nostrils; eternally foul with fear!"

"They blackballed him," uttered the broad man liturgically. "They passed a resolution calling upon the authorities to arrest him, and there where he stood, paling, they hissed and pelted him.

"Someone dragged one of the association's skeletons to him, and shouted, 'He wanted to marry among us. Let him have his bride!' and they crowded upon him. The ribs cracked as they forced the empty bones upon him. The members of the association, after this remarkable outburst in which they had revealed the shoddy stuff of their dignity, continued

to remain truculent. They were having their day after so many years of humiliation.

"Nobody knows what happened immediately afterwards. Several days later came a party of members of the Association, with search warrants in their pockets.

"When they entered he welcomed them. 'There they are,' he said, and pointed to a fatal heap of cinders—all his books and papers. He led the stricken fools down to an underground laboratory. Everything cried its own ruin—a mere garbage of pipes and broken glass and metal. In a corner gibbered a man, tied neck and legs and hands.

"In their sight Transit suddenly leaped upon him, grasped the weak throat between mountainous fingers. The men tore at him. When they had pulled him off, the body hung away, a corpse. It seems that the victim was his assistant. When I heard about it, I confess, I was angry with Transit. It seemed such a vain piece of fury."

"Fool," censored Jeremiah, "the man remembered!"

"That was just what he said. He looked at the men who blinked at him fearfully. 'That man was a human being; he had a memory,' he said. 'He resisted me when I killed the laboratory and I deferred his execution, as a little rite of welcome to you.'

"Then he seemed suddenly to lose his mind. He sat down and wept. As far as could be understood from his words he was crying because he had broken

his test tube containing a precipitate which could not be recovered. It seemed to refer to an incident which occurred in his childhood.

"Upon this, succeeded a mood so desperate and terrible, when with maniacal force, he so maltreated them, the policemen and the august members of the Association, that they forgot their high mission and ran. He ran after. They tried to shoot him down but their bullets respected him. He followed one of them into the hall of the Foundation.

"Inside his temper changed. He wandered into the auditorium where he got up on the platform and made a speech. There are conflicting reports about what he said. No one listened to him; the hall had been empty, and only a few frightened men hiding behind curtains heard him.

"He said that he was marrying the window, insisted upon it with great earnestness. He also justified himself by saying that he was willing to investigate and experience insanity. Shortly afterwards two men, walking noiselessly behind him, sandbagged him. He was tied up and delivered to the insane asylum where he has been since."

The broad man finished, as if an unpleasant task was over. He sighed and looked down upon three grass blades between his feet.

Jeremiah rose and walked about him. "I shall shout the sin and the shame of it to the world. I shall spatter the realization of it, like an acid over their life, until they curl up in the deserved agony. Punishment and forgiveness have failed in the world.

What I shall do will be to reveal their own sufferings to them. But first we must have Transit; his madness is invaluable and must be kept free; the only watchman who will serve the world will be he who understands his insanity. We will run away with him."

"But we must first wait for my tryst," urged the broad man in a panic.

"Very well, let us go there."

"She is not alone yet. It is necessary to wait another little while."

CHAPTER FOUR

§ 1

They waited in silence.

Then abruptly the man spoke. "I once was passing the theater when I noticed a bill stuck on the fourth Caryatid from the left. It was stuck on the left thigh and the fall of her hand made the fingers seem to point to it. The bill was posted on none of the others and I was unreasonably tormented by the wonder over why she should have been singled out. I walked over to read it.

"It was an advertisement of a masquerade ball. I frequently go to affairs of this kind, because I am a pleasure loving man by nature and have a healthy and undiscriminating appetite for gayety. I went to this one. I dressed up, as I usually do, as a magician, and generally there are enough Circes and witches to compound an enchantment of lovers, you know."

"Again, the instinct for metamorphosis plays," Jeremiah interrupted.

"The most unusual costume of the evening was a group effect of four young women. They represented as I suppose you have guessed it, Caryatids. Their headdresses were skillfully arranged to sug-

gest acanthus leaf capitals. For a long time they posed, supporting a Greek pediment made probably of stuccoed lath on which was painted a silly carnival legend, 'The Temple of Pleasure.'

"I looked at them very attentively; at first glance they were of even height; but searching their figures, one could discover discrepancies. They wore uniform masks and one cut of drapery, but individual arrangements in the very effort of rigidity revealed them.

"The fourth girl at the left I immediately recognized as *the* Caryatid. I clung to them. The music tore at my legs but I could not move a step. The girl I had brought played sylph, and she was light enough that evening. She came to me anxiously now and then but I forgot her so completely that I stared at her as at a stranger. I have not seen her since.

"Then it occurred to me that I could gracefully break up the group with my pretense of magic. I lifted up my wand and in a loud voice I bid them live and join the festivity. So capably was it done that many considered me an accessory. The Caryatids themselves eagerly assented; they must have been weary enough.

"They dropped the portico of the 'Temple of Pleasure' and radiated through the groups in the hall exquisitely balancing their elaborate coiffures.

"I fastened to the fourth girl.

"The others found Greek heroes and artists. I kept close to her. I became seized with a delirium.

I had a hallucination of spaciousness and in stepping across the hall I had so dilated distance and duration that it became a long and vivid journey.

"For a time I studied her body; her toes were a rotation of music running a definite and unchanging melody. Her body was as long and proportionate and perfect as a day without accident.

"A slow, cold voice came from her. She tried to part from me, but I followed her so closely and awkwardly and simply that she gave it up. When we danced she repelled me, our legs never seemed to groove. I never touched her breasts. Her hand upon mine pushed me away as with a stick.

§ 2

"The moment for unmasking surprised my hard waiting. She had kept on her full mask. For the gray cloth to simulate stone, her skin had been dusted with a gray powder. I remember remonstrating with her that there were ivory statuettes as warm and buff as her probable skin to have saved her the inconvenient realism of her costuming. She did not agree, saying that she *was* stone. Then I reminded her that the Greeks themselves painted their statues, hating the chill and monotony of stone.

"I was ready for dark eyes, having seen them through the punches of vision in the cloth eyeballs of her mask, and under the gray structure of her headdress I had seen wisps of black hair.

"The slow lifting of the mask, suspense ending

with a rip of pain, revealed a long golden face with lips like two strokes of red lacquer. Brilliant as it shone, a sleek perfection lay lifelessly over it like the bloom of artificial fruit. It was as regular as the face of an ancient statue and bewildered me with its fixity. And it regarded me with all the casual indifference of a statue. Every flick of her glance, every shift of her motions, ignored me and seemed to be for a surrounding and a company as remote as she.

"I remembered the look of statues in the museum. The shaping hand strove to unite them to, and make them gracious with, the beholder. It carved intimate gestures upon them; it dropped them into such postures that they could not writhe out of complicity with those who looked upon them. Yet, remorselessly, with a stuffing of contempt, the statues remained aloof, existing in a previsual milieu of which the beholder could have no comprehension.

"She belonged to another creation.

"I must have behaved ludicrously; they collected around us, laughed outright or smiled secretly. A disease of winking fell upon them, turned them with their finery into a massed peacock of tailed eyes. In the dance they butted us; and when I turned to console her, I found her mocking me too.

"It did not hurt me. To hurt me then was an impossibility for her presence was in itself too charged and heavy an impressiveness to make it possible to incur any other experiences. If she had led me aside and given herself to me in a beautiful heap out of

which I could have picked prides, and decorative kisses and embraces, it would have brought neither intensity nor diversity to the happening. My eyes gnawed her silently.

"When the evening ended I panted to take her home. She refused me. She said that she was going home together with her partners in the Caryatid group. She lied. All of them had escorts; I saw her later, a streak of laughing, coloring the side of a tall negro; and I followed her doggedly until I was beaten into unconsciousness.

"But she had given me her address. Do you know where it was? The theater itself—yes, we can start now. I went to see her the following night. I waited outside the stage door; the actresses came out one by one; they laughed at me with compassionate irony; one of them came over to me; 'cheer up, I'll substitute,' and we had a gay and entertaining time together; she was so simply delighted with every pleasure she gave me, was so grateful for my happiness that I will remember her with thankfulness to the end of her life. But I evaded her after that. It was while I was with her that I realized that my lady was the Caryatid herself, the fourth to the left with whom I was to have my appointment.

"So I came the next night and waited till the watchman was asleep. I walked over cautiously to her and waited. For a time she ignored me, although I noticed that her breath was heavy. Then she stepped down soundlessly. The empty stone image remained.

"Since then I have come to her every night. She is very exacting. Night is like a shadow of her. I am in darkness until I have reached her and gone to the inevitable light beyond her. She has eaten into me like a habit."

§ 3

"This is a remarkable change," said Jeremiah excitedly.

"It is not a change," protested the broad man.

"A figure of stone turning into a woman? That is a remarkable change. You perform the miracle of Pygmalion and a greater miracle since your woman returns to her stone when her reason for womanhood is over."

"She does not turn into a woman," said the broad man.

"You love her; you speak to her?"

"Yes, but she does not become a woman. I have loved and spoken to others who were not human or alive."

"Oh—you have?"

"I once followed a chance road on foot. At nightfall I came to a quiet house. I entered it myself because no one answered to my shouting and my knocking. It was unlighted and I did not see for a time. I had just concluded that the house was deserted when I noticed a strained face making a white blot on the steep darkness.

"I was badly scared and ran out, but the way was too long; I heard no flyers in the air. They would

have been riding high anyway till they were over cities, and it was a cold night.

"I ventured in again, and sat down, trembling sometimes with weariness and sometimes with terror. I could not look at it, but it seemed to me that the walls turned around slowly till it faced me. I could not evade it, and I saw gradually that it was a woman swinging from a noose.

"The face was very white, and swollen with the knot of the rope. Yet it contained something that saved it from gruesomeness; the look of a suffering person who amidst company keeps a film of apologetic cheerfulness over spasms of pain.

"She was a slight woman without attractiveness, a meek and gliding soul probably. Obviously she had been hanging for several days, and no one had missed her.

"I must have stared at her, terror welling out of me gradually, for a long time and leaving me with the numb recklessness of the shocked. At the end of my long scrutiny I found myself with the realization that she was shyly pleased to have me there.

"A good part of the night we spent in a courtship of glances. I found myself in love with the body hanging from the noose tied to the rafters.

"Finally I asked her, 'Why did you do it?'

" 'I was lonely,' she replied.

" 'No soul can be lonely,' I rebuked her, 'if it completes itself.'

"She laughed at me gently. 'A life is empty until another one comes to fill it; it is wasted until it can

reach another to fill with itself. And not only physically but spiritually is life a metabolism; it must have companionship that will be to it kitchen and toilet. I was alone and so my life stifled me gradually!'

"Then she told me of disappointments, dreary and hopeless, a story of a small life running a small course; a series of deaths until she was familiar with death; a period of blunted kindness, a silent shifting among brutal neighbors, and then the end on the long rope.

"She had such a delicate, pure soul, I knew that she had suffered most from a lack of love and she said so. It seemed tragically absurd that there had been nobody there to recognize the exquisite fineness of the slim, diaphanous girl. The fragility and sadness of the women of pictured time was restored in her.

"The next morning I stopped tradesmen clattering in automobiles. They brought the police and held an inquest. The poor woman reproached me. She looked at me as if I had abandoned her, and when the crowd grew and pushed her, there was on her face a look of offended sensitiveness. I went away with a feeling of great disturbance that revives often at the mention of death."

"You never asked her what happened after death?"

"No," said the broad man, "it never occurred to me."

"Fool! That is the change that man must learn."

§ 4

Jeremiah walked on, bursting with indignation. "That is to be my last effort if we cannot rescue Transit; but I had rather that he was there to direct it. I, too, am going to die. I will die with the attempt to saturate myself body and soul with the consciousness of returning—if only for a short while—to fix the knowledge of the process. Physically death is the success of an anarchy that has been tampering with the unity of life. It will be beyond all difficulties conceivable, beyond all torment and pain, but I will do it—I meant to do it after many exchanges of sex, as the climax to a full knowledge of life. It will not be possible now if we cannot rescue Transit."

"One thing I must make clear," the broad man diffidently remonstrated, "I do not believe in change."

"You do believe in it; what do you mean? You must believe in it!"

"I believe in ordering what we have in the finest and most decent way possible and then sitting down to enjoy ourselves. There must be a sitting down and enjoyment. It had always been the way in the life of a people. I have in mind the life of ancient Rome. The people began as a race of workers. It was noted for its energy and for the sort of overleap of effort that comes at times to those caught in the hypnotic rhythm of passionate labor. This

enthusiasm brought about self-sacrifice and curious heroisms. These were not due to inherent nobility but to the fact that the momentum of their effort was so great that it could hurdle even death. Eventually all the heavy labor of preparation was over; the decorations, if I may say it, were affixed;—the Augustan era—and then naturally enough the Roman people sat down to enjoy itself. It is futile then to have expected anything else but festivity. Those who wanted the Roman people to continue to guard and work are fools. When they had finished, they had consumed the world."

"And what of it?"

"I am temperamentally of those who wait for the time of festivity. When many men like me exist it is evident that the time has come."

"That may be as clever an observation as any, but it has nothing to do with the desire for change. People die and change. They remember the transformations of a past existence and they prepare for those of the future. This is true, no matter whether society is organized as a slave gang, a regiment, or as a company around a table. The desire is individual and therefore universal; it is not confined to our species but it sings in a flame and exults in a wheel's revolution and vibrates in the tense patience of an exposed seed."

"I'm sorry," said the broad man, "I don't understand you."

"No, how could you? You're all settled down for enjoyment, and for strongly condimented erotics you

order a statue and a corpse. You are offended by the sight of effort and art. You have found safety, even temperature, a drowsy landscape, a voluptuous mythology, and you think your incessant demand for change can be quieted. You shall yet fornicate with symbols, drink wind, and dance on griddles to transmute your comfort. Do you understand that?"

"I do not," said the broad man.

"You will understand nothing now," laughed Jeremiah. "You are too near connubium. You hear the cymbals of the rush of breasts. We are near the theater, are we not?"

"It can't be more than a block away," confirmed the broad man.

§ 5

The broad man clung to Jeremiah's arm heavily; he was staggering and a foam of words dripped from his lips; he said:

"A step is no place to do it on——The sky has dignity but it is too unsteady. I have told them to come—all of them are wearing tidies on which they have embroidered in the yellow corner, but in blue rope, a beach swarm. If the navel makes you desultory again, it is a coincidence with a sun spot and should be astrologized firmly. What is inevitable will keep its appointment. Do not lean against exhausted housefronts. Plagues have been pressed into the body by putting love like a bundle under the armpits."

The broad man broke from Jeremiah's arm and ran up to the steps of the dark theater with its row of sallow caryatids. The night was moonless. The radiolite flashes smoldering in symmetrical fires on the edges of the building made an insincere revelation of the façade. Into the occasion came the comment of a late airplane fluttering through the street.

On the steps of the theater, in front of the fourth Caryatid to the left, the broad man groveled.

"Ca-ca-ca-ca-ca-ca——

"As high, resistless as toppling surf. First I must strip you, my darling—indulge your modesty so that it gives you pleasure in return, but don't let it rule you—nipples become lips and suck in their turn—the belly swells—love blows it like a bubble—your lips are a universe for it is possible to live completely upon them—still—love restores the body to its unity. In love the face is forgotten. The eyes settle like exhausted pools. Masklike pain before the reach of ecstasy reduces the proud facility of the features. The lips sum them up, and the lips are clenched. Then the real station of the buttocks is known. Soft and reflective the hand admires them. The thigh's terraces become known. The architecture of the body, noble and complete, looms into appreciation. The belly is a dome under which religions agitate. Even bare feet with the leathered ball and heel, the veins apparent like a jumble of plumbing, and the knees, smiling like blind, plucked brows over the blank legs, are unsightly, but

love renaturalizes them. You are mine now—I am living upon you like a tree. My nerves feed upon you like roots. Ca-ca-ca-ca-ca—I have caught you. You must catch a cat, but a dog will obey your order. The dog is a slave and develops slave virtues, loyalty— He is unfit for freedom and in his free state, is the mean, vicious, desperate animal called wolves. Cats are treacherous like treacherous slaves—slaves untamed and disdainful of their captors. The free species is noble and magnificent—lions and tigers—ha—ha—ha— These after love speeches—they rise out of sounds and weary my darling—lips are made for better uses—excuse me —a man's humility before woman is a compensation for the mastery of love—I speak confidently because the minute in which I tie you to me with love rewards me for the long hours of separation in which I abase myself and waver and bat about you——"

The broad man continued to writhe.

From a seat on a stoop opposite, Jeremiah watched him out of haughty eyes.

§ 6

The broad man rose slowly. With his arms over his head joined around the thighs of the stone image, he wept slowly and genuinely. Then he beckoned Jeremiah over.

"See this," he exclaimed, pointing to the hand of the statue, of which the smallest finger alone was free, while the others were merged with the drapery. It wore a silver ring.

"I have given it to her," he said gravely. "I don't know what she does with my gifts. She was very pleased with the ring; I have given her bracelets, necklaces, earrings, chains, brooches, but they are gone when I see her again. But she never makes a promise to keep them; she has some special service for them; and I know she is very grateful for them. She is always so pleased—and she kisses me with abandon when I show her the gift. Isn't it a beautiful ring? I had it chased with an image of a snake—for constancy. A snake never leaves its hole. Isn't it beautiful?"

"It is a beatific lunacy," replied Jeremiah indignantly.

The broad man walked down the steps; throwing an effusion of so-long kisses. Jeremiah seizes his arm and jerks him out of sight. A sigh announces deflation.

"She was beautiful tonight," reminiscently. "Did you want to meet her tonight?"

"No!"

"No, of course not; this is like changing green twilight into a mint julep; churning sunlight into a butter; stuffing a rainbow for a couch—that's all I want, but you don't understand."

"Listen," harked Jeremiah, "we must count upon the weather."

Gossipy thunders blatted in the sky; far lightning opened blue veins.

"It will be over in a moment," plodded the broad man.

Dazzling rain flickered about them.

"It is a prelude to dawn," said Jeremiah, "your tryst was a long one."

"The day needs clarification and mercilessly summons down its hazes. Sentiment is the humidity of the mind, and must be compressed within the contours of a plan and wash out of our prospect if we are to be successful. My sentiment has gone out in a geyser spout; yours should be treated. I do not have your impatience with plans; a plan is a vehicle or a camp stool anyway."

"We have our wills for vehicles," said Jeremiah.

"Riders, rather," replied the broad man.

They went silently. The rain stopped. A morning crowded through the streets. On windows shadows wrestled with awakening.

Over the horizon the sun held his disk like a coin, for admission.

Jeremiah sang out. The broad man hummed. They laughed together. "The sun has turned us into cocks," said the broad man.

"For that, a truly subtle and satirizing transformation, he deserves praise; and mornings should be opened with hymns; as all virgins are opened with blarney. I'll start— Oh!"

"A safe start;—'Auroral obfuscation

'lace sleeves over the hard grasp of day——'

"This is not orthodox. Dawn is a woman, and voluptuous, although in this generation a virgin. Start again."

"Oh——"

"wave of lilies——"

"your transient bosom for a time, leaning its blanch monuments over the sky——"

"shivering, waiting whitely in the chill pools of space——"

"you rise, flaying your moody radiance,"

"and on the dry step of the horizon,"

"your pale feet, with red-tipped ankles, and honey soles stand"

"serenely momentous."

"It is enough for this dawn," said the broad man, "I am getting hungry."

"Wait for Transit. He'll make it three; and it will be such a breakfast as if the sun, which is swimming like a yolk in the sky, were poured out for an omelette."

"It will take very long," said the broad man anxiously.

"It will take as long as it takes and leave time for eating," said Jeremiah shortly.

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

The madhouse came upon them sententiously. Its desperate façade, stones glazed with a frost of significance, confronted them. Maudlin flags wrung in the doorways. A blush of darkness mantled the selfconscious corridors and the walls retreated. Foul sounds drifted toward them.

They juggled the guards and clapped through the heavy halls. Barred windows, still heaving with slumber, tattooed them. They found a keeper at a far end.

"Open Dr. Transit's room," said Jeremiah imperiously.

He looked at them with cynical respect. "Doctors for consultation?" he asked.

"Yes. Doctors," said Jeremiah with confident evasion.

The man led them to the door. He fitted the key in it. Jeremiah rushed in with gigantic knees. The broad man stood stricken in the doorway.

§ 2

On a cot, his hands tied, lay Transit open-eyed. The little room heaped upon him cubically in six

directions. They were bare white walls, dark in their bareness; light upon them was an albino evening.

Open-eyed; the dark hair softened over the forehead; the bound hands involuntarily stretched out; the body bared in the torment of sleeplessness; white and shrunken, thin and perpendicular; along the bed spine he lay—crucified.

Jeremiah untied the hands; he lay them crossed over the abdomen.

Mania exploded the eyes of Transit. Abyssal laughter uttered up. Jeremiah swayed over him in a mourning.

In the doorway the broad man trembled, but had no courage to escape.

"Do you know me?" asked Jeremiah.

Incongruous recognition made Transit laugh.

"You are the window cleaner," said Transit.

"Yes," replied Jeremiah, "but instead of cleaning this window I will open it; you must dress yourself and we will go out together and we will remember each other."

"What did they do with my clothes?" asked Transit plaintively.

Jeremiah poked around.

"They took them away, there were trousers and a vest and two coats; but there were women in the sleeves. They took them away."

"We will get clothes for you," said Jeremiah steadily. He suddenly stepped over to the broad

man quivering in the doorway and deftly gagged him. Transit plucked off the clothes like strips of decalcomania, wondering over the revealed patches of nudity, like a child.

"They're just like mine," he announced gleefully; but paused, felt in the sleeves. "There aren't any girls there."

Together they propped the broad man up in a corner. His eyes were white with terror; the gag was superfluous; he could not have uttered a sound.

Arm in arm, they stepped through the hallways, the tallness of Jeremiah hanging over Transit.

Some blocks away they sat down.

Transit chuckling to himself, rolling his eyes; Jeremiah sorrowful, with distaste in his face, lined as with dust from a ruin.

"My son," said Transit, "acids are white; bases are black. That is the difference. Seek acids. Above all make a laboratory of a woman. A woman is acid on top, white and delicate, but bases within, black and primitive and profound."

"You are mad, master."

"I am mad, my son, therefore I have nothing more to complain of."

"Is madness a change, master?"

"No, it is a restoration."

"A restoration?"

"A restoration to the sanity of beasts who can sense hallucinations."

"I have brought you freedom, master."

"Where is this freedom? Can you recognize it? Do not speak nonsense to me. That was not a woman you brought with you. You said you were going to bring a woman with you."

"Pardon me, master, I forgot. There are many who will pass us soon, and we will pick one out."

"Remember, she must be very tall. Her hair must be long so I can tie her down. She must not cry because virgins are soluble. And she must be able to love piecemeal, hand for hand, hair for hair. She must wear old clothes to the wedding, because new clothes are proud and amorous and rub off the bloom. She must be blonde so that if she is hard to find by day, she will be easier to find by night."

"Yes, master."

"And she must always laugh. She must devise a routine. She must laugh three times when she gets up in the morning. She must laugh not only with her mouth but with her whole skin. Her hands must laugh when they touch me. She must learn to smile constantly in my presence. Her feet must laugh too; all the curves of her body must laugh. Remember that. I must be shaken by laughter out of all the unsound, unstable, anxious moods of daily perversity. You understand? You will remember, won't you?"

"Yes, master."

"Don't be so solemn. Laugh too. You were a woman once; only you could not make me laugh."

§ 3

At this point the broad man arrived. He was naked and he bounded toward them like an awkward animal. His white, fat flesh looked unplausible. He came between them and still trembling stood under their eyes.

Transit at once began to undress himself.

"Take off your clothes," he said to Jeremiah. "We must all three be one."

Jeremiah undressed.

They left their garments at the foot of a statue.

Companionable, they marched arm in arm, Transit in the center, the nudity of the broad man like an intrusive confession, the nudity of Transit like a revelation too hard to bear, the nudity of Jeremiah like a necessity just discovered.

"I am hungry," complained the broad man.

"We will have a feast," reassured Jeremiah.

"Yes, we must eat well," said Transit. "The conversion of red meat in a man's stomach plays an old lure to women. With science for my Gabriel I shall realize the dreams of Mahomet."

Jeremiah looks offended.

"The brain cannot use the senses, as well as the senses use the brain. Under the rule of the brain the senses atrophy; but the senses have often killed off the brain. An hallucination is the accomplishment of a thing that the brain has declared was impossible. Within a few days I shall be Mahomet."

"O God!" mourned Jeremiah.

"It is true," said the broad man.

"What is necessary," said Transit, turning to the broad man, "is the adoption of principles. I have two principles. One is to make a demand without fear, shame or consideration of the rights or capacities of the person of whom the demand is made. A pure demand will always be obeyed. Napoleon received the devotion of a people because he demanded it in full. The demands of Christ petrified his own generation, but moved into grotesque life those that followed. A woman who is demanded purely, without question or delay, cannot help yielding.

"The second principle is that of seduction. It is the more inviting because the more voluptuous. Few men can demand purely, because it entails the condition that they themselves be lost in the demand. The satisfaction has no dimensions, leaves nothing over. It is a stroke of function that passes directly into the body without record in the mind. It is too incorrupt. That is why we must all turn to the other method which is safer and more sensual.

"It is this; play upon the vanity of ulterior necessity. When life became corrupt enough to question its own existence it developed society by means of which each individual could excuse himself by the subterfuge of denying the need of life for himself, but affirming it as a necessity for others. This vanity, which has produced martyrs and patriots, is strongest in women. Joan of Arc pushed herself rearward like a hot bitch into the presence of the

King out of a belief that she was necessary to him; thus fulfilling dreams of spectacular romance.

"More women have been won by men who convinced them that they were necessary to their existence than by the appeal to all their other vanities. It is also this belief in their necessity to man which makes women more stable, more assured, and enables them to live longer than men. We must be very careful to impress them with their necessity to us, wilting before them for the need of the liquid of their souls.

"Behold that woman," Transit orotundated.

They looked and saw nobody.

"She has deft ankles; see how she shrugs her hips giving them an individuality in the manner of the Melian Aphrodite; her breasts flame through the bodice, but her face! Oh, the anomaly of the face! It sleeps on her shoulders; it has a mold of hair; it has an oozing smile; the nose is thin; wait till it is dilated with the strong smell of a man love-sweating. Grovel at her feet; she will not disdain you; she will awaken slowly and out of her regard for your necessity she will finally come to you herself. See how she passes? Her profile is still; but her hips radiate and her breasts leap. Her leaving cowls mine eyes. I see nothing, a lame flame stumbling out of rubbish. A dirty cloud with a rip of lightning."

§ 4

They entered a restaurant and sat down at a corner table.

The proprietor came to them and courteously asked them to go out.

"You are all naked," he said.

"That is true," admitted Transit; "we are also naked within."

At this the proprietor was so pleased that he gave them a meal. He handed them towels of which they twisted loin clothes; and then the waitress consented to serve them with food, looking to see that the loin clothes were adjusted.

"This is not she," said Transit.

They saw her and observed how serving men with food had made her subservient to them in other ways.

She smiled at them. "You are Naturers?" she inquired.

"No," Transit solemnly simplified, "we are in search of women and we believed that it was fair to them to look for them in nakedness."

After that the waitress walked to and from the table awkwardly like a person under examination. The touch with which she set down the courses was significant; it vibrated among them unpleasantly.

Transit dipped watercress in oil and rigidly crunching it, said, "This will whet the dark women. When they see this in the space of my steps they will secretly acquiesce."

He carved a morsel of dark meat. "This will make blonde women tremble when they pass me. They will see it in the strut of nostrils; they will know that it was chewed for them."

The broad man agreed. He ate heavily. "We must eat so that the bloom of our flesh does not fade."

Jeremiah ate sparingly and in silence.

The desserts covered the table. "This will sparkle in my eyes," said Transit.

"In mine too," said the broad man.

Jeremiah left his untouched.

"Master," he asked, "have you given up your wish for ultimate change? I am ready to undergo all that is necessary."

Transit turned upon him with fury.

"Do not master me, fool; pedagogue measuring my steps. Show me the way to many women or leave me and discuss your changes with a professor of transmutation. I am Mahomet." He turned to the broad man. "You know whom I have had?"

Jeremiah hung his head in heavy humility.

"Whom?" asked the broad man smackingly.

"Well, there was the daughter of the president. She tickled under my arm like a cabinet portfolio. There was the woman who professed to believe in the chastity that obtained among the ancients, persuaded her husband to believe it, so that she should have pleasure in deceiving him. There were three sisters whom I entertained although they were all watching each other and were watched by their mother who was jealous of them. I loved two actresses who had declared their art made romance impossible. There was a woman who despised all men. I have deflowered angels——"

"Angels!" reported the broad man ecstatically.

"Golden angels. They were sent to protect women against men, but my sensuality was so refined that it detected their rare and exquisite feminity and reached them with ardor alone."

"It is the inevitable evolution of love," said the broad man.

"No woman can resist us," said Transit.

"It is impossible for them," said the broad man.

"They have knouted us with their breasts," said Transit in a frenzy, "we will avenge ourselves."

When they were ready to leave, the waitress stood in a back doorway, pressing against the wall and wincing with a pain that tormented her eyes. She breathed uncouthly with a yellow sob.

Transit stood still and it was hard to drag him out of the restaurant.

They walked through a thrill of wind.

"I am cold," said the broad man.

"The loins have their own warmth," said Transit unwinding his loincloth and hanging it over his shoulder. The broad man and Jeremiah followed him, their towels like epaulettes.

The grave pace of houses and trees being passed, beat into their senses.

Some children looked at them curiously and undressed similarly after they had departed.

Men looked at them boisterously, shouting comments to them. Women wavered out of their way.

All the time Transit became more and more bitter and reproached Jeremiah for having misled him.

His voice was high in the air now and rankled over him. It had begun to break in insanity. In every phrase now the crack sounded.

After a time, they sat down, spreading their limbs to dry the sweat out of their joints. The sun had rushed out of clouds and made the ground snug.

§ 5

A woman came over among them. She was round and handsome. They had seen her at the window of a house. They had passed and her wishing laughter had followed them. As they had looked back they had seen her bend out of the window, her breasts rolling out like laughter.

Short she was, but her body was a perfect articulation of curves. Her features were like intersections in a complex system of circles. She bounded to them and when she stood still before them, unquiet rounds of her body were still curvetting.

"You can all come back to my house," she babbled.

Transit rose triumphantly. The broad man sagged up. Jeremiah remained seated, looking bitterly upon the woman.

"Won't you come too?" she asked in a failing voice.

"No."

She could not bear to leave him, pressing her thighs spasmodically against his shoulder, but unable to say anything more. Jeremiah stood up and

pushed her between Transit and the broad man. He stood irresolutely before Transit.

"Good-bye, master," he said.

Transit laughed cruelly. "Get out, you funk; find some girl who will teach you not to be afraid of women and call her master. She will teach you more than I can."

The broad man laughed.

The woman looked back tenderness to him. She turned her head to him so that with her reluctant steps she seemed still doggedly to stand before him.

He heard the jibe of Transit's voice; he heard him beating the woman for looking back to him, and her scream as the blows penetrated her.

He sat down in the grass alone; the day marched past him, crowding with light, till the end limped in the splendid confusion of sunset.

And all that time, Jeremiah had whimpered like a little child, throwing himself from right side to left.

§ 6

He ate nothing that evening.

He passed night in a barn warmed by the heat of decomposing manure.

For a long time he could not sleep, watching the shapes of the world through the open doorway of the barn. The world was a cunning tree that swung its branches cloudily in and out of the door view, and a bulk of darkness blistered with stars. Shapes materialized out of it gauntly and among them finally

he recognized that of Transit. With a cry he was about to lunge himself toward him when he was beaten down with sleep.

Transit came to him at once. He was bigger than he had ever seen him and he was wearing a woman's dress although his motions were those of one naked; he laughed torturingly and kept running. Jeremiah ran at his side till his feet moved of themselves, shaking in his thighs like loose things.

He looked at Transit and saw that he was alive no longer. He touched him and Transit heaped down into the death fall. He stretched at bay, his back to the earth, his last face a catholic defiance—sky, rain, drench, dust fall and carrion glance of men. Jeremiah looked back, and the distance was empty; the pursuers had run out. There were only he and the dead Transit. He saw for the first time that Transit was wounded, red mouths on his skin.

He stood over the body wondering what to do. He stood for a long time until the body filled all the place with its coolness; the cold gathered like a hoar over Jeremiah's spine. He shivered so that he shook his eyes open.

A blue morning wind sucked at him from the doorway. The tree, gaunt as treachery, dragged allusive branches. A dulling of foredawn was on the sky.

The reality of awakening was so much less poignant than his dream that he felt relieved at once. But he knew there was danger and walked with worn feet back along the same road.

It was full dawn before he reached the house of

the woman who had summoned them. In the meantime sweat had relaxed his muscles and he had walked off the stiffness of his body on which he had slept with all the benumbing weight of old weariness.

§ 7

When he approached the house he found a crowd assembled. "Oh, man, something is the matter."

He knew that Transit was dead; but there might be an extenuation in manner that would help him in his grief.

He drove through the crowd. He had the authority of instinct to cut him through the knot of human beings. Murmur of conversation, like yellow spar of foam, followed him.

"She killed him——"

"Her husband found them——"

"He was a lunatic——"

"He's that crazy Dr. Transit——"

"A thing like that, in these days——"

"It was either she or he——"

The melancholy sordidness made Jeremiah heart-low. He wished to escape the contamination of the voices. But he went on. He reached the doorway and entered it. Inside he saw the body of Transit covered with a sheet; and in a corner held by police, the woman, and beside them a pale, long man, with his face lost under an overwhelm of shock.

The woman was uttering low animal sounds and her voice was so hoarse that he knew she had been

screaming. The wheels of her body were revolving blindingly. When he came in she stopped screaming and a silence so strange fell from her, that all those in the room quailed under it. The silence called them back to the dead man who lay cheaply under an incidental sheet.

The woman simultaneously came out of her hysteria. At length she panted toward Jeremiah, "he did it."

The unnerved policemen were heartened to laughter. "You can't get away like that."

Jeremiah moved over to her. "No, I didn't do it," he said, "you didn't do it either. He was doomed to die of a woman."

He went over to Transit and uncovered his body. It was cut with a knife. The face was undisturbed and indifferent. He had died, perhaps, looking on sarcastically while the blade wedged in his body was being pulled out. The act had restored his sanity for the madness was off his face. Jeremiah stood high over the raw stillness, an involuntary monument. In silence, in endedness, with no tremor of a nerve he stood, and grief ran from him. He stood, bewailing with the stricken immobility of his arms not the dead man under him, but his own loneliness; he stood complaining with mute mouth, his own desolation.

Only the woman, with strange and monstrous relevance, wheedled, "Come to me, dearie, come to me, dearie."

Jeremiah covered the body again.

"This body belongs to me. Dr. Transit was my friend, and there is nobody alive who knows as I do what Dr. Transit wished for, and prepared for. Will you give him into my custody?"

"There must be a coroner's inquest first."

It was several days before he received the body.

§ 8

In the meanwhile he had learned how Transit had been killed.

The woman had been disappointed with Transit and the broad man. They had beaten her for looking back at Jeremiah and when she came to the house she sprang forward and ran in through the door and tried to lock it against them. They forced it open, throwing her aside with the push, and her head stunned against the wall. When she came to she was sullen, and moved about warily keeping tables and chairs between her and them. Perforce she changed her tactics, permitted them to kiss her in hope of making them quarrel, but the broad man deferred to Transit and kissed only at his bidding. Baffled, she served them with food and liquor. They ate lustily and they drank much. She herself drank, hoping to be caught in a stupor of forgetfulness. But the drink only brought a completer clarity; the men became profoundly repulsive to her.

She was happy when a drunken whim seized Transit to go clothed. He said that she was offended. It

was an instinctive female care for regularity which made her revolt from them as they came. She missed the taking off of clothes—and he had been right, for after they had put on clothes—her husband's—she felt less hostile to them.

With the clothes came gallantry and courtship; they were gay and laughed a great deal. At this period the broad man left them. He had an appointment. When she was alone with Transit, she suddenly recognized him. The knowledge that he was Transit made her mad, too, with terror. Convinced that her life was in danger she maneuvered to defend herself. She yielded to him, but moved gradually to the kitchen. With the rhythm of passion over him Transit moved in a cadence of madness and sanity. In the pitch of ecstasy he grew sane, but the stench of satiety maddened him— Toward the end as he embraced her, he beat and bit, and she knew that he would mount to the frenzy of slaughter. When she saw him ready to kill, she backed away, seized upon a knife she had kept in her sight and as he impended over her, turned the point to the lungs and sickened as the body split and sank over the blade. The body fell upon her and over her nerveless hand in which still bulged the knife handle, a warm slap of blood touched her and ran down.

She stepped away, but as the body lay there with the knife end gruesomely sticking, it seemed too grotesque an indignity and she stooped over to draw it out. As she bent down she saw that Transit's hands themselves were weakly tugging at it. She

fell back in a soak of horror. The thought of him still alive was more terrible than the thought of him dead. The sight of the white hands, trying to close around the knife handle, the knowledge of the violated heart, still warm, still beating to a chime of the fixed steel, the unseen eyes, still alight,—she remembered that blades left in the wounds kept life in—she crawled over and with her face turned away struggled with the steel.

The tremor of the body nearly paralyzed her—for the first time it groaned—she lay away, utterly spent, life slowly radiating again to her skin. She returned doggedly to the pull, but she herself still bent away, and the very swaying arch of the body gave her leverage with which she was enabled to tear out the blade—she heard a spout of blood—later she heard a bubble; she knew that the breast was collapsing. After that she washed herself and remained steady, but keeping in the outer room, until her husband came.

This she told Jeremiah herself, brokenly.

She was freed and she sought out Jeremiah and stood in his way dumb and motionless. He made no effort to drive her off, permitting her to erect the fact of her presence before him for her own peace.

§ 9

Jeremiah planned a great funeral for Transit. For a symbol of change, flame,—against that a symbol of woman, enemy of change, that compromised it by whirling it into cycles.

Should he burn Transit?

He saw flame, like pecking carrion, tearing the body to pieces. No, Transit would be buried. Let it suffer the gradual incineration of time. For woman the swastika. He chose the swastika because its headlong monotony of motion, in endless self-pursuit, suggested a cycle.

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

A platform put up in one of the parks; upon it the body of Transit propped up to be well seen; standing over it Jeremiah feeling a great loneliness thus to be raised outside by standing above them—of serving their wolfish ears waiting to gorge on sentiment; dense thousands around him; each head augmented his height; he saw them not horizontally but vertically; they were an abyss. They continued to come; their swaying was rhythmical like an effect of light and shadow.

Still he did not speak. He did not speak until he saw a man boost a child upon his shoulders to look at him. Then he spoke out of a caprice of anger.

"This is the body of Dr. Transit.

"Under the left breast of the body there is a hole. His life was let out through that hole. Let me tell you of that life which was gouged out so simply—through a hole in his flesh.

"Dr. Transit chose to live alone. To live socially required more energy than he could spare from his important labors. To keep pure his devotion to these labors he denied his animal humanity and its satisfactions. Even the house that he built was

under discipline for he denied it the etiquette of proportion, the caresses of harmony, and the conveniences of perspective. By that, astute citizens, I mean that the conditions of order, which makes human life in the mass interfluent, he ignored.

"It has been repeated to you, often, so if I tell this to you again you will recognize it even if you cannot understand it—he was not born of the body of a woman. Unfortunately, his maker, to be sure that he had made a man, gave him the sense organs of a giant. Think of the fierce struggle of Transit who dimmed the eyes of an eagle in the mist of his laboratory, a lion in rut could not have been so passionate as he, and he held himself proudly. The loin cloth that he wore was woven out of denial and will. There has never been a tyranny in the world so inhuman as that which he practiced upon himself. This man, made more sensitive than a bat, which suffered from a rub of wind, took himself from all that might satisfy him, from all comfort and pleasure into the greatest desert that faces man, a desert barer than Sahara and bleaker than the Poles—the Unknown.

"Of course Transit's maker might have spared him. That man had an opportunity not to duplicate, but to make an invention in life. He had it within his power to create a being perhaps superior to, but surely different from, you; and undoubtedly in the structure of the nervous system he built a stronger, more delicate and flexible organization, for Transit was mentally stronger, more delicate

and flexible than begotten men. But his sexuality was made equally resourceful.

"Transit built himself a solitude to secure himself against women; he trusted that away from the conscious erosociation of daily life, there would be sublimation in the direction he desired,—of creativeness.

"But in the absence of woman, herself, many things fulfill the place of woman; a square of paper, a breathing of wind, a certain shyness of light like a dusk, will enact emotions as strenuous as the toil of love. It was impossible to banish woman from him for she existed in his body, in antithesis.

"He evaded a final test by attempting to make a woman for himself. She was to be merely an expedient; she was to be torso only, at first, but he added conducting limbs, then a beckoning head and he had accomplished his failure. He was tempted to use a discovery of his in the transmutation of sex to turn himself into a woman, and in the sexual fullness of a woman's life, exhaust his energy, but he feared it.

"What was he trying to evade, oh, contented? He was trying to evade insanity. There would come a moment of balance and in that moment he recognized he would go mad. It had been the fate of many other philosophers who through frequent paring of certain instincts turn them into cancers. When he approached madness he fled before it. He meant to take refuge in the National Scientific Foundation, but they pushed him out and his mad-

ness encompassed him. After that his death was an incident.

"The men who avenged themselves tawdrily by turning him away for his previous rejection of them, plotted his death, for look, in driving him out of his sanctuary he was huddled into the folds of the pythoness.

"Now what was his work, his activity that functioned so extravagantly? He had been made a man, a disinterested and superhumanly equipped man; and he accepted this problem of man—to win the complete unconsciousness of existence, to be conscious of the world. He felt that in learning the secret of change, he would obtain the clue to the instantaneous comprehension of life.

"Remember, tenderlings, that this matter of change is a characteristic of the universe. You too drool over it, in an accident of intense feeling. You have all at some time violated what is called reality.

"It has expressed itself in religion, and in art and in the creativeness of wishes; it has abolished barriers of life and made thought a sensation of all realities and a residence on sinking shores. In that way the work of Transit was merely a bounce in the rhythm of universal mind. He continued with an enormous stride the journey of tradition.

"It was in the change that death brings that he saw the quickest possibility of understanding all change. He was ambitious to undergo the miracle not for the sake of the miracle, for a raising of the

dead to scramble you into applause. He would use Death as an instrument of investigation. He believed that through a deliberate death and return to life although he would incur the greatest sufferings that the human organism could experience, he would reach this knowledge quicker, or would at least resolve the question of whether there was transmigration, or a mere subsidence into the stuff of life, edibles for the various thrivers upon dead flesh; for otherwise death would remain the mountain of probability in the way."

§ 2

Jeremiah stopped, the crowd was disintegrating. Men and women were hugging in the friendly anonymity of the crowd. The few with children were departing.

Deliberately, Jeremiah strode up and down the platform twisting his body, mutilating his poise. His hands uncoiled. He broke himself in motion. The larger muscles were flapping in doings of their own. Into climaxes of activity he hurtled, his head corked insecurely; his hands and feet streaming, his body pounding to break its own solidity. Within him he heard his heart clang, his lungs boom, his blood in cataract. In a leap that dangled him an instant over the crowd, he ended and sat down exhausted, while the sweat spurted through his pores and hot shower of the invisible ash of energy steamed from him.

As he had expected, the crowd had at once poured back. It had thickened till it had organized itself, had become the great animal, the mob, that prowled before him, an animal whose back quivered and on which alive faces ran like lice and which wagged a twitching tail of stragglers.

§ 3

Jeremiah remained seated until his skin was dry and his exhaustion was cleaned from his limbs. Then he rose again. They had not been interested in Transit before—he would make them interested, he would have them wait for every next word.

"Fools," he shouted.

There was an immediate response.

"Imbeciles, assassins, why did you murder this man? You, you are the guilty ones; as you have murdered the great men of the Past so you have taken this man's invaluable life——

"Who could have made your senile youthful again, your impotent virile, and righted your sexually miscast?

"He came with these benefits in his hands to you; he offered them to you as a free gift. He asked no reward for himself; all he desired was comradeship and a welcome. It was as if he had traveled a long journey for your sake and returning footsore and gasping, you turned your locks on him and let him die on your doorstep. What was his sin;

wherein did he offend you; wherein was he guilty of your judgment of death?

"I know what it was. Crouch down, bend your heads; there is a sun above that has witnessed it; there is a memory that cannot die that will live to preserve the infamy of it. You blush, you weep. Tears are acid but the memory is beyond corrosion. You are beginning to pay for your crime, the grave crime of killing a man for sinning with greatness.

"Because, if he remained upright, you would still live in his shadow; because, if unslaughtered, his whole life would make your lives fractional; you destroyed him out of despair. Out of your fear, pygmies, you killed the giant.

"Look at him well; forget the red wound by which your unchosen executioner carried out your sentence; look at his gaunt body, small, shrunken, sinewed by the labors, weathered in the steams and stenches of the chemist's laboratory, a body that sacrificed fresh air, movement, the embraces of women, for you! Look at his head! It is a large head, the eyes do not see now but their vision hangs upon them; their quest goes on, through death; what stirred in this head, before you ordered it stopped, was worth all the small ambitions, the little fits of love, the little torments and curiosities that are alive in you."

§ 4

The crowd wavered with weeping. Down into them he looked and saw tears smuggling over walls

of faces. And the sight offended him to laughter. He could not control himself, his laughter rapped out; he sank with the blows of it.

The crowd waited patiently. He rose up in fury.

"Go! Go!" he shouted, shaking his fist at them. "The show is over. Get out!"

They quivered still a moment. Then they heaped him over in rage. Over the dull sound of it he could hear screaming of the frightened and groaning of the hurt.

Thousands, caught by a frenzy, a movement that the bewildered could not even share. For the flash-time that he could see, Jeremiah looked at the piling faces, here and there a countenance organized with rage; but all the others, the thousands, without expression, unconscious, blank, open mouthed, uttering a passionless sound.

"They are safe as long as they howl," thought Jeremiah.

"They are asleep within this shell of sound like an unripe kernel."

§ 5

Then the platform bowled over. The dead body fell out of its box.

He went down among them like a fallen angel. His bitterness had madness in it, and divinity. Every blow that made human flesh yield, made him exult; and the blows that touched him were spurious. He was happy, instead of appalled, at the lunge of

the people. They were being beaten, both on his elbows and on the knees behind.

He went down, the crunch of feet jamming him down. The weight that made his breastbone seem the pivot of balancing mountains, the sudden breathlessness that made him thrust for snacks of air in the rambling intersections of men's feet, seemed to him too logical to be troubled about. But then the chaos collapsed into crystallization. A strenuous motion waved the mob evenly away. He saw it break and disappear like the scattering of a rocket at the turn of its arched flare.

He saw walling over him the policemen who had come to his rescue. Almost as if he was climbing them, he rose up by way of their knees and arms. He was surprisingly weak when he trembled up. But he was all right. They felt through his flesh for the bones and found them unfractured and in their sockets, and they went off from him to let him wring the pain out of his clamped skin. At his feet they placed the indifferent body of Transit, stiff and careless outside his box.

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

The crowd was gone but a certain dregs was left. The policemen rubbed it off in frequent charges, but there was a residue upon which night sticks were ineffective. Jeremiah saw to his chagrin that they were disciples.

There were six of them, four women and two men. Two of the women were sisters and in the middle years. The other two were both short, sentimental girls, one unattractive and halt, the other straight and beautiful. One of the men was very tall and very thin and bent brusquely over all the others. The second man was the broad man.

The two sisters set themselves to work smoothing and cleaning the body of Transit. The two others gently patted the dust from Jeremiah and with soft hands soothed him. The men imparted in undertones the scandal of their resolve to follow him.

It was a wry bait of happiness to Jeremiah. When they had come together he expected that Marlowe, whom he had seen in his audience, would also come to him, but Marlowe had gone away. A touch of vanity had made Jeremiah wish that he might appear among his most forward assailants; but in this action as in all the other ways of his life, Marlowe had been as phlegmatic as the middle finger.

The broad man had penitence in his air. He moved his head about as if it were something that could be offered and therefore kept its eyes closed like pocket flaps.

Jeremiah asked him if he were ready to give up the Caryatid, and he replied that he had already gone through, with her, a ceremonial of divorce.

The very tall, thin man, said nothing after some small, starched speech. His face was little and had an abstracted look as if his body were too long to remember. The two sisters looked at him over their labors and desired this thin spun youth for their unquickened fatness.

What secret smell of devotion had brought them all here? Were they necrophiles stung by corpse odors? Would the four Salomes dance for Transit and quarter him for portions? Jeremiah was too tired to drive them off as he wished. Every blow and fall that he had suffered in the day vividly outlined itself on his nerves.

§ 2

The two sisters whose tears ridiculously suggested rendering of fat—it was easy to see how they had come, the melodrama, the fecundative jet of scandal——

the tall thin youth, probably made shy and inarticulate by the hurry of his growth, and a ready recruit to any company of snufflers——

the short girl who limped—she was there as a symbol of all Apostleship, the eternal halt of followers——

the broad man—he had come to the extreme of his sensuality——

but the young girl, short, soft-jointed, with movements like folds of velvet, sleek and vibrant with health, why was she here? He could not understand. She should be away, among a forest of young men, taking gifts from their urgent arms and asleep at last under one of them. She was the rare, perfect one who could live without the need of transformations. The perfect of the species facing a sport and exchanging envies?—that was it, the lure of contrast that made her and him mutual worshippers.

§ 3

He spoke to them finally.

"My sacrifice has broken its halters and galloped away. I chose the mob for my beast and meant to slay it in a sermon. But it has not yet been tamed. There will be no civilization in the world until this most uncouth, savage and last of the wild beasts has been broken.

"I needed it for the ceremony. The world has grown too unceremonious. It is a sign of bloodlessness and degeneracy when any considerable event,

ordained or accidental, passes unloved, without ceremony. An event uncelebrated cannot legitimately conceive future.

"The death of Transit will be remembered with all the deaths that have taken away singular men. In the heroic old days the dead were publicly remembered, even those whom, similarly with Transit, the people hated on the testimony of their terror. Having nothing further to fear from a great adversary, they willingly acknowledged his greatness.

"Transit must not go out without ceremony. In the ending of a man, as in the beginning, there must be midwifery. The future lives of many men have been shortened by a sort of unskillful obstetrics. We must carefully prepare for this necessary immortality of Transit, so that it will be sound and flourishing and long lived.

"I do not know what we can do, except that we can carry out the interrupted rites I had prepared. We can sing our Saunce to him. One of us can consent to be buried in the same grave up to the lips as a living headstone for a few days, until a tree can be planted in the place. After that you will leave me, for I have Transit's unfinished work to do."

"I will never leave you," whispered the beautiful girl.

"I will go," said Jeremiah, "where no other can follow me."

"Come around," he continued to them all, "surround me so that close to me you may seem a multi-

tude, as your grossness rides up— You are not enough for a hecatomb except you," (to the girl) "who have no place here—you, mountain of beauty whom we in the swarthy valleys stumble for!

"But you will have to do. You will serve by delegation.

"You, sisters, stand for wives and spinsters. Like true parliamentarians, you misrepresent, but that is admitted in the nature of your functions. It does not matter which each you are, and you may take it by turns to enjoy your egotistical husbands fairly.

"You, lame and honest girl, represent all the followers; you represent the scholars who make a star out of their teachers' learning by straying from the center! You represent the disciples who walk behind the master himself along diagonal paths that take you to his anathemas. Finally you represent the master himself who cannot straightly follow his own thought.

"You, toppler, campanile with a toy bell—you represent youth; all the immature, all the heights without depths, all the emotions that leap out instead of tormenting and transforming within; be satisfied.

"You, broad man, humble sincere belly, you represent all sensuality; all the gluttony of the world stinks from you; all the sloth of the world basks in your paunch; all the excesses and perversions of the world flow in your stools; you represent all whose art it has been to make volumes out of thighs, and

statues out of pastries, and parables out of bawdry; you have created debauch.

"But you, girl,—you do not represent. You are an ambassador from perfection. The glaze of stagnation may be upon you—but it is perfect and it lies under a mountain that but points out the sky and your images are perfection. You may witness but you may not participate.

"Now in the first place we must deify Transit—it will not harm him to make him a god and it will give the world a legend to interpret him by.

"He is the God of Change,—the Godsmith.

"We who are malleable, who seek impressions femalely, inviting the blow that begets a newness upon us, we who are dative in our relations with all things, must acknowledge Change as our supreme principle.

"This should be our ideal lives: To believe nothing lest we be satisfied; men long for faith as the weary long for rest. To deny nothing; men deny out of disinclination toward the labor of discovery. Never to be consistent, for the straight line is the false path of achievement that arbitrarily places an end and assumes, that a goal can be definite. To be stopped by nothing that can impose its purpose upon you. Do not halt for love which will blur you with responsibilities, nor for rest, making a bed out of your body. Do not strive with an adversary, unless in the issue of the struggle is a clue to your further going.

"But if the need of love can harm you, stop and relieve yourself. If rest is crucial, so that without

it the body will crumble, stop and drink of sleep. And if the adversary's challenge trips you up too much, return and deal with him, not for victory but for freedom.

"Taste of all things. Do not shudder or tolerate disgust. Disgust is a superstition of the senses. Remember that all things are human that human beings are capable of, and all things are natural that exist in nature. Therefore let there be no virtue too common, no vice too exquisite for your contact; you must be as vast as the world to comprehend the world, and to be ready for the embrace of the universe. From this knowledge you can then devise a discipline that will let you live without waste.

"This was perhaps the message of Transit; I am a follower of Transit and am therefore astray; you, my followers, are straying from me; there will be an ultimate divagation upon the right path.

"It is now time to sing our Saunce. The nearest to our way of thinking was St. Satan, to whom hymns were sung in the old days when there was an expectant God. For the slantingest thieves, the starvedest gypsy kidnapers, the boniest whores, the penniest knifers, the aguiest witches, the excusingest enemies were of the company of St. Satan, while assessors, orphanage keepers, celebrities, generals, doctors and patriots go with God—a mere difference of emphasis. But in all cases that which tests and questions the institution, that begs for transformation or shrinks from it, as from the pity of Fate,—that adheres to St. Satan.

"Follow me——

Death helps us to see
for it as suddenly renders life a background,—
we will know thee; we will know thee.

Behold the quelled eyes
and all their visions bowing over them,—
we will know thee.

Forehead upright in the stiff hair,
a white beast's belly in the brake,
the hunt is not over,—
we will know thee.

Nostrils no longer monotonously
debate with breath,
a crudity of logic has closed them,—
we will know thee.

The frayed hands—life wore them out
clutching at immobilities,
what they have grasped has not been hidden,—
we will know thee.

Look into the gored breast, there was a heart
that hummed no ballads; sounded the smelter roar,
of shapes,—
we will know thee.

Low is the emptied censer, the phallus
overturned;—
we will know thee.

The rifled feet
have come too early,
we will wend their wanderings,—
we will know thee.

You lie disdained
like abandoned booty,
humbler existences will take you up,—
we will know thee.

Seeds tinkle in the bell-like fruits,
you die with a peal of lives,—
we will know thee.

Decay is another growth
with social functions of chemistry,—
we will know thee.

That you may be certain
of your desired
rankling memory,
we sing thus—
we will know thee.

§ 4

These stanzas Jeremiah chanted solemnly. As solemnly those about him repeated them after him.

"There were men and women who made changes with flowers," continued Jeremiah. "They took the nature of one plant and grafted it upon the nature of another. Unlikely new flowers started in, with a peregrine color, a surprise of stem; a new laundered corolla, a prodigy of a leaf. But they were all barren, barren like mules. It was making one plant live within another. There was no love, only a subtle expediency that faked a marriage.

"Nothing had come of it, but they had come a

little closer to establishing the identity of life. When life was known they would be able to do with it as they wanted. It might be then that instead of individuals barely afloat in the mob there would be completely free individuals with the mob as a vast reservoir of life, from which they could serve themselves.

"If Transit were alive he could tell them something about these things."

Jeremiah spoke thus to them, informally.

There were no answers. The broad man yawned; the overshoot of young man gape-blistered his eyes; the elderly sisters whiffled and spat circumspectly into handkerchiefs; the lame girl lumped on the grass; the maiden looked away with a steeped profile.

Obstinate flatteries of shadows—these were no replies.

The flesh and the soul; the fat and the perfume, thyme and rosemary that could perish in a breath of air kept safe in a pomade; into the fatness of women, life ever as of old fastened.

It might be nothing more, this effort that they inherited from Transit, than a concentration of senses. It might shut the eyes, deaden the fingertips, seal the nostrils, stone the ears, make a eunuch's rape of the body; all for the sake of a sense, as quick as instinct, as comprehensive as understanding—to see, hear, smell, touch and fertilize in one throb of sensation. If it brought nothing more than that, it would increase our wit of life. It may walk the road of unhappiness but there is no opportunity

now to stop a high man with such a warning—a man who has picked ecstasy and agony from the same nerve fiber. We may be, however, repeating a journey; a tree might be still out of a knowledge of all life; the gradual quiescence of philosophers may be that too. But the tree might be the supreme acknowledgment of failure. Cynics may become ferments; epicureans, sun puddles; pessimists, Narcissi of ugliness; pragmatists treadmill donkeys, and so make strategies out of defeats.

He should not speak any longer; there were only followers to listen—if there were adversaries!

He slid to the grass, it baffled him how exhaustion knocked at him like a persistent caller. Rather than be forced open he let in weariness that easily overpowered him.

§ 5

He lay down; the beautiful girl gave him her lap and he slowly hardened her thighs. The two women took the tall youth with a faint snarl of quarrel. The broad man squatted toadily opposite the lame girl contemplating the immeasurable footstep of the sky.

"We are like a camp of gypsies," said Jeremiah bitterly. "People will come to us for tricks."

"We will show them a rare animal—truth," said one of the women.

"What truth?" asked Jeremiah harshly.

There was no answer.

"We can only show them her," indicating the girl,

"this perfection of organization and balance within the accepted conditions of life, as our enemy, in the highest strength and security."

"Why do you call me enemy?" wept the girl.

"Because there is nothing in you that we can desire to change."

Among the two women and the long thin man there was a discussion as to the interpretation of Jeremiah's philosophy as a new analogue of love. Between the broad man and the lame girl there was a vivid discussion of martyrdom in which the glow of blood and ingenuities of death and torture and the appetizers of denials were voraciously discussed.

Jeremiah overheard them and said nothing. He lay helpless with weariness. And the unconscious caress of the maiden curved over him like a courtesy of nature.

Hopeless slanders, ignoble, eventual.

He glanced at the dead body, shadows smugging the face, rigidity holding the limbs to reticence,—but the lips of the wound were wide open and they held forth with a shabby eloquence. They spoke like the others. They witnessed the loathsome disaster over and over, desecrating in the purple with pomp. The raped body lay there, packed among shadows without a stitch, but alive in the protestations of the wounds, glibly alive, begging a pardon for whispering familiarly; deprecating its death but giving solemn assurance.

He was at the point of despair.

And the maiden weakened him. Night perfect,

unalleviated by stars, could not overwhelm as completely; her suffusing presence blotted over him; her distillate presence blowing from her body as from clubbing petals beat upon him. Enervation came over him. He waited for a catastrophe, but nothing occurred, only the hanging of his body; on long strings of exhaustion he felt it swinging, dealt with gently by the breezes. On parallel cords of desire he felt himself dangling at the same time, his hands dripping and his feet fallen. He only hoped for endurance to last till circumstance cut him down; he tried to make his senses small; he curbed as he was able the separate whims of his flesh.

§ 6

His safety came thus; the maiden herself timidly asked him to leave her lap. She rose and went away for a minute. The minute had been enough.

He rose on weak legs.

"Tonight we must rest," he told them, "we will finish tomorrow. Where can we go?"

"Come to our house," said the two women.

"We will go to your house," said Jeremiah.

They got a barrow and put the body of Transit in it. Jeremiah was weary enough to have taken such transportation himself. They draggled into town amidst the pointing eyes of people.

"There go Transit and his Devils."

They threw rubbish, but when the maiden voluntarily went to the front they stopped.

"We have an angel for hostage," said the broad man.

They reached the house of the sisters. It was an individual house, ancient and disagreeable. An old man came out and quarreled dispassionately out of habit. A tubular shadow stood behind him. They entered and were scraped by the walls; they filed silently up an unhappy staircase, with the stiff length of Transit's body among them.

§ 7

In a large room they came together again; solemn, cold lights gaped upon them. The weather was not chill, but the room had a bleakness to which they shivered. The sisters lit so cheerful smiles and flickered with hospitality.

Jeremiah did not eat but sat stooped to the discomfort like someone homeless under rain. The maiden stood near him like a perplexed mother. The lame girl sat in a corner quietly munching sandwiches. The broad man quite absorbed looked around unselfishly and offered from reserve stock in his lap. The tall boy raised his knees as a barricade from the sisters.

They slept long just as they were, saying little after their repast. The dingy night leaned over them.

The broad man ransacked the floor for a soft space. In the intervals of sleep his inflated body punched out exhalations.

The lame girl lapsed.

Like two cats the sisters slept across each other.

The tall boy dripped along the floor.

The maiden lay straight and calm; sleep circulated over her.

§ 8

Jeremiah lay apart; the lids of his eyes had become flimsy. Penetrating through them, sights wetted his eyeballs, and they swam in visions. All the dreams dreamed in that dark room full of the heaving and masked breaths of sleepers came to him. He saw the sisters rending the maiden and pulling a booty of men out of her. He saw the lame girl falling again and again from high places upon her broken foot. He saw the broad man riding a great distance in one leap. He saw the dream of Transit, a writhe of mathematics, an emergence upon a fourth plane where all abstractions had become finite and sensuously understood. He saw the old man in another room, sleepless, driving sleep from him in a little, mean doggerel of temper. He saw the huge dream of the world, the strange conflagration of life that burned on after the dying down of greater fires.

Night slowly dried off the windows; it was a white morning in the world. The dreams scattered almost in palpable débris, like bottles breaking on the ground, their liquid escaping in a wide, blot-forgotten reminiscence.

One by one the sleepers rose, though the earlier

risers dealt fugitively with their sounds of awakening. The broad man last, sleep shabbily remained in his face. Of them all only the maiden appeared fresh and rested with an awake, dawn-greeted face. The sisters came in dubiously like two just broken from a conspiracy. The lame girl had tottering eyes. The tall boy stalked solemnly pale, as from a knighting vigil.

To Jeremiah they seemed still more puzzlingly incongruous. For himself, the physical insufficiency that he felt, the failure of recuperation after the concession of sleep, seemed a new indignity suffered from his body. His impertinent body like the rest of his disciples did not keep up with him. He had no bosom for speech this morning and silently, with impatient signs, he herded his flock out of the door, with their still but now odorous burden in their midst.

§ 9

Jeremiah was surprised that the odor was not stronger. Rotting was a transference of the material of life from one form to another, from one form to a multitude. Even then why was it decomposing so quickly? There was coarseness in the abrupt transaction; the hard body of Transit should have kept together better. Jeremiah felt a first disgust with it. There was in this undeniable decease a mad haste like its former lunge after unaccustomed life that brought on the stumble of its death; the certain

transformations were being entered upon with a fool's or a drunkard's fumbled compliances.

At that moment Jeremiah felt close and intimate with Transit for the first time. He looked at the body which he had once embraced and saw it plainly very near at hand and the proximity brought about, too, a nearness in understanding.

The effect was to take away magic. He was able to see now, like one who has seen a play, that there had been a logic of circumstance in what had happened. The probable degeneration of respectability, or the more awful descent of insanity, were these better or more reasonable than the actual catastrophe? It now appeared like a decent attempt of a regardless providence to spare Transit further humiliation.

So his respect for Transit recoiled. In the ebb, his consideration for these people, for all but the maiden who did not count among them, became still more a caprice. Their absurd bodies, their groveling faces, their regard for a variously misunderstood platitude gave him sour amusement.

He was fingering, in open and inert daylight, a fabric of events he had appraised as phenomena and now were proved to be commonplaces. He with his own self-esteem, was caught in the rearrangement, a particularly fine thread of martyrdom!

He looked at the unconscious exemplars. He had been in the lead and now he stood aside as though to review them. There was the youth, industriously pushing the wheelbarrow with the legs of Transit,

like monstrous batons, at the head. A little behind and at each side of him, were the two sisters, keeping scrupulously even in their sharing of his shadow. Behind them walked the maiden, daylike in the luster of her cheek, and the lame girl. And attentively behind, the broad man chatting with glib, experienced momentum——

these were the executors of his resolutions!

§ 10

he laughed at himself silently——

he was to have been a prophet; he was to have interrupted the functional blow of life to invent some new and more grotesque apocalypse to frighten men, not into the healing uncertainty but into his own small certainty. He was to have badgered them, sanctimonious agent provocateur, into a violence upon himself that they would feel chagrined over, and that would give him holy wounds to show to people in a corrupt beggary——

he, from the artificial stimulation of denials, with the pallor of fasting for a background, the choler of long undergone and unnecessary discomforts for a rhythm, the loneliness of his arms for a costume, and the sounds of his pains for his choir, was about to render a forced drama before a diddled audience——

he beheld himself an orator and his own insurgence tore him down; as he pushed this effigy through his mind he felt that he was blushing.

Transit had never seduced himself with nobility.

Transit had obeyed the purposes that had been created with his own body. There had been two purposes and they had both been pursued with spectacular promptness. Transit had not entered anything with a ceremonious air of having dedicated himself to what was, after all, casual or inevitable, and consequently had not been filled thereafter so full of self-worship or self-commiseration that it had anæsthetic effects in his contacts afterwards with suffering and fortune.

even this self-laughter might be only an obscure penance shift.

what was all this matter that he had made his business, this howl of change? It might be nothing but sickness, complaining in incompleteness, of the transition from a woman to man——

he had—had he?—turned into one of those people who through a deficiency of vital impulse defend themselves with an illusion of superiority, suffer their various lacks and deprivations as a species of ennobling poverty, an ancient falsehood of excusing thin blood and slow heart as disgust for actions, of alleging loss of appetite to be philosophic contempt for food.

§ 11

No——

He was not such; he knew it; a real rest and good food would restore him. He was tall. His cheeks were massive. His lips were distinguished. A bit of health would burnish his eyes.

What was his concern with a theory of change? Oh, aching ambition and loneliness of man; the microscope has not been able to convince you that in the bacteria Nature has fulfilled the cycle of diet; you who eat plants, and animals, and are not visibly eaten alive, as are others; and suppose that, therefore, there is to be for you a metamorphosis astounding, vulgar wishers and what-nexters, who alternately fondle their beast and kick him away; enamored of Impalpa, and seeking an existence of the medicine men, free from stomachache and clothes, with endless pang of rapture. Was discontent any more divine than content; he with fulminous mouth a god, before him with a mouth of greeting?

He, Jeremiah, would live like a peasant. He would learn to think with his senses. He would fill them to the tips till he was as wise and questionless as the insects, those marvelous beings who fulfilled the injunctions of life so keenly.

"Till ye are mature ye shall delight in eating," and the caterpillars and grubs ate with a joyous appetite not to have been matched at the best banquets of Rome; "when ye are mature ye shall couple," and with what a burn of ecstasy they held their nuptials, dying for anticlimax.

Man was not built for so eager and gay a life; he was not so bright of movement, but in his own way, with longer periods and to a slower rhythm, he could, too, achieve it. So he would live, to the tips; even if it meant planting himself like stout, earth-immersing vegetables. He would have steadi-

ness and familiarity in his eyes, in their maturity the organs of recognition rather than of searching. He would have warmth and coolness—he would have sounds out of the earth—his ears wanted to know the sound even of the nursery animalism—comfort, and many women, healthy and no chemists' changelings—poor Marlowe!

§ 12

He turned this over in his mind, it was not as appealing as it should be; he added items, certain pictures on the wall; certain drinks in the icebox; plump, facetious women who would robustly play with him. Item a music machine; item a girl, tender and virginal, delicate, dear hands; item a corpulent closet, book stuffed——

the picture had no contours——

it, too, had the appearance, nay, the verisimilitude, of a dogmatist's promise; under its allurements, were words.

he accepted it nevertheless; his revolt against his rôle was nearly complete; he had nothing to do with these specters who trundled a corpse——

what if he should calmly walk away in the opposite direction leaving them to fulfill alone their diverting journey.

but he would take the maiden with him. With her he would be able——

able?——

Was nothing more necessary than a good mouth, strong arms and brimming loins? hearty laughter, proprietary tricks of gestures and tones in the voice? a storm of love which would beat them one upon the other with a shock more significant than any lightning? Let it come; he was man and there must be a woman to complement him, a woman ungnawed by any worm of subtlety, fresh, opening her arms for love as she dilated her nostrils for breath, a clean young body with gleaming hair, each strand of which was a ray of unique energy, whose breath chanted, whose mouth was dewy. There was no other than this maiden.

He would give himself to her entirely; he was not afraid of this surrender; he would give her himself to the pith——

For a time; for a time——

he would defeat the mockers, the athletic men who went to women briefly as to a comfort station; who when they exalted it, made it like unto their club horse-play——

those who believed in living among themselves, like a hunting pack——

who created an anti-husbandry of beer steins, cigars, loose-talk; who breathed with a swagger; who carried on to romantic grotesque an adolescent vehemence of masculinity; who made it into a ritual.

They were wrong. In many years of contact they would not be nearer than they were to themselves, to their supposed incorporate spirit. Their frank-

ness would have no meaning since there was no mystery. They would be irritated by their similitude, not individuals but mirrors, madly repeating individually flawed images. There could be no intimacy, though they went about nude as savages——

unless they bisexed themselves, created homofemina, alternately introduced abyssal women. But they were healthy men and dogmatic and could not disobey their principles. In the end they would slip away, into comfortable marriage excused under cover of some timely doctrine.

There could be no intimacy. Intimacy was a mutual need. A perfect intimacy only occurred in an equation of offerings. Only between men and women could need be admitted without danger. Such an admission in any other relationship would mean an invitation to be preyed upon. In sex alone was the need equal on both sides, and the satisfaction mutual, and since the need was recurrent, there could be growth of intimacy between them. It would be more possible for a sophisticated and loftily cultured woman to live in perfect intimacy with an illiterate man from the mountains, than with another sophisticated and loftily cultured woman. For that reason he would consent to give himself entirely to the woman whom he chose; to give her his mind as well as his body, his day as well as his night, his fellowship as well as his love. They would live together no matter what befell his exuberance, restrained, or overstrained.

§ 13

He walked on, his resolution growing clear and tumultuous, like the young sunlight swarming in the sky.

The thought pleased him. He did not raise his head from the monochrome of the ground, in unconscious fear of disturbing thought; this dream could be maintained consciously. Awakening could be guarded against. It had a physical reality that could be fed, when its energies thinned, when the tenseness of performance relaxed, by new suggestions from the brain, which worked feverishly, supplying new scenes and new reasons which became fine speeches.

he was no longer the successor of Transit.

he was the lover of the maiden; he daydreamed; she loved him tenderly and she put her hand in his hand.

The others went away with the body of Transit, leaving the two alone to follow. Instead they sat down and the maiden leaned her head on his shoulders.

They lived perfectly. In the morning they arose and kissed. They ate amid applause of laughter. They spent the day to each other. At night they walked in the fresh outdoors. They slept together temperately——

he would not ask her to live with him immediately. He would wait till she should really be ready

for him. He would see her only occasionally and let her learn life, and if, when she had seen more of the world, she would come to love any other man before him, he would withdraw——

but she would come to him herself. She would say softly, "I am here." He would open the door and she would bunch in his arms; like a little child she would be, and he would be strong and helpless with strength.

She would have an enemy monstrous and hateful. The thought of it, as it passed through his mind, sent a ripple of fury throughout his body, and his muscles stiffened and his teeth crunched and saliva gushed in his mouth.

She gave him her warm, soft hand to play with. The fingers and the palm were plump. He played with the hand, enclosing it completely in his fist. She laughed as her mode of participation.

he played with her hair. She coiled it up for him so that the white of the brow was visible and her ears appeared. He slowly untwined it and held it in the palms of his hands. Its weightless softness was incredible. He took away his hands and it settled down calmly. His hands pursued it. They followed it as it pointed down her back, as it pointed down the breasts, round and innocently curious under the sheath of cloth, as other eyes. It spurted from her like an exhalation.

it made these visions peculiarly pertinent, to have her, walking and visible, with but a lift of his head, a few yards away.

They ran in and out of his head. They had incomplete realization in his body. At their climaxes there was a quiver in his muscles and a consciousness of collusive quickening in his blood.

§ 14

He lifted his head at last; he noticed that the broad man was talking to the maiden. It displeased him, now. There was a slur of promiscuity in her talking to the broad man.

She should not have been doing that. She should have been waiting for him in silence.

He watched them doggedly. At intervals the broad man touched her and she did not shrink away. With the same pace, in the same position, she continued walking as if the touch had not been felt, and had no significance. It suggested instinctive acquiescence, as if her skin understood and was not perturbed.

She walked easily; he saw her from behind and her steps flowed from side to side from her suddenly revealed wide hips. He did not see but he knew that her breasts danced in the same rhythm.

There was youth in her body but maternity was outlined on it.

As he approached he heard the broad man saying, "I have known many women and until you came, I thought I knew women; but you are different from all other women."

When Jeremiah came up to them, the maiden looked up to him gladly and at once went over to him——

but it did not now reach the quick of him. He smiled again, as before, a meager, guardian smile. In his mind he was reviewing with astonishment the mental adventures of the hour before——

they were over; the rebellion had spent wanly like a fit of temper. Was that all it had been? It was possible to think of this last absurd incident as the significant and critical event, but was it that? Could the sight of her, unconscious accessory, in a moment of unfaithfulness to the conditions of a day-dream, have changed him so abruptly? It was merely that a mood ending took the incident and used it for the convenience of boundary, and it at once took all the false importance of a frontier post.

but he felt spasmodically contrite when he saw Transit again; it was like a meeting with a man talked about slightingly a moment ago. Yet he felt an altering in their relationship.

he walked briskly among the disciples; he spoke in mocking approval to the sisters. He put his arm about the tall boy. He encouraged the lame girl until her face was enraptured. He admonished the maiden against the broad man, twitting him in a way that he knew must be wounding.

his attitude toward them changed. They were no longer there on sufferance. They were there for his use.

§ 15

They reached the meadow which was to be the burial place.

Jeremiah began the digging. He was embarrassed by the resistance of the root-organized earth. He turned the spade over to the broad man who puffed at the labor. The tall youth took it up and finished it. It was a shallow grave.

Transit was laid in it carefully with a smile rising. The earth poured back, arched over him gradually, like a beast of possession.

They left nothing to mark the place; the raw earth, a show of flesh, rent in the smooth green skin exhibited that here life apparently had had a wound; over this the grass would soon leap.

Up to that time Jeremiah had accredited fame as an agent of eternal life, but no longer; a thunder after lightning, nothing more.

He hurried them. He wanted it over with. He had become impatient with the whole matter. No ceremonial, no grand departures—the essence of Transit was busy or being busied with; more than decent interment was absurd.

All over!

to never mind a last pat of the earth, to turn backs unceremoniously as though the word was a dismissal bell, to talk and forget——

the mind stretched in delicious acknowledgment of freedom; that was how he felt; as for the snuffers, they were obviously waiting for cues, with tame

minds ready to be sad, solemn, stiff, unconcerned, placid, amiable, gay at his wish; he felt them wetly, dogs' tongues at his heels.

No intrusion on his strength availed. A fervent lightness played in his feet. He could caper to his work now. What Had Thus Gone Before And Ended In The Earth Heap Had Been A Digression —although it could bear excusing; but his buoyancy lifted him above the immediate. He could not work at once; there was a rebellion in his craving body that like an army banged about for relaxation, booty, irresponsibility, a town burning, some massive show; it would then be ready for its strenuous encounter.

He reminded himself suddenly that condemned prisoners in the old days had been given last indulgences before their execution; one had wanted a good dinner, one had wanted music and dancing, one the company of a woman, one a cigar, one wanted nothing——

He did not know what he wanted—an absolute exposure to life, perhaps?

He must, however, send his retinue off, for disciples are turned through devotion into duennas of their masters.

They were sedately displaying themselves, covered with solemnity, to one another, standing at the same time monumentally over the grave as if half consciously they were graciously and opportunely serving as its stones, and in their smiles toward Jeremiah there was a glitter that asked for commendation.

At his gesture they packed around him, bringing

him grotesque, set faces, with pointlike eyes, and dogged mouths, making unconditional offers of new sacrifices, and it was apparent that they anticipated some further melodrama to which the burying of Transit had been an inconsequential prelude.

Therefore he relished the shock which he saw blot their faces when he bid them good-bye asking them to meet him again the week following at the house of the sisters, whom he knew anxious to mistress the occasion.

He parted from them one by one, submitting absently to reverent handclasps and intimacies of protestations, stopped only by the slim touch of the maiden, who had regarded him aloofly with a dismayed adoration; and like a retort of circumstance, it shocked him in turn. He felt a tapering descent of mood to helplessness, as his decisions shattered under her glance; eventually by her own drooping away he was fully and impregnably alone.

With the last parting consummated, they gathered together and swarmed away, and he overheard proposals for meetings, for propagating the doctrine—bound to bear apocrypha—to initiate organization and formulate principles—another church containing already the schismatic sisters, and the dilettante epicure of tolerated dissent, the broad man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

When they were gone Jeremiah sat down to think out his course. He had a desire to go to Marlowe for the week but he had, too, a knowledge of its impracticability.

He put it judicially to his mind. He would come as before into the robustly sweet garden; it would thrust him upon the round walls, for uniting its confident, orderly little universe; with almost a military air, as the flowers, in rank, waved their plumes and the hedge gathered it in walls; Marlowe perhaps would be there, and in every sturdy tree his presence would be engrafted; and his earnest fitness could be drawn in, in the humid breath that rose from the soil and the starting green things.

He would be heard and Marlowe would come to the door. "That you?" Marlowe would say hesitantly. He would be brought to the parlor and be sat opposite an embarrassed woman, Marlowe's wife —she whom he had played with in exuberance.

At best he could reanimate the flirtation. He could interest her by romanticizing his adventures; could add seductive glamours to the insinuating name of Transit and hawk his relationship with this van-

ished merlin, resonantly, till perhaps, Marlowe added an unintended accent by breaking in jealously to remind of his part in the tale; following from that he would extend his hardships till tenderness tarnished the woman; and as a final effect he would multiply his disciples and raise them in station; and as they became swarms of princes, and the woman was smalled to worship, she would, having no capacity for initiative, thrustingly await him, and reaching him delicately, there would come the tremble of her hands, the fixity on her eyes like signals at windows, the attention of her breasts; he would rise, slowly lifting himself up for perusal, lifting a calm head, and masculinely rousing his arms.

There might be an efficacious sentimental softening of the brittle edges of last days as they fell away in this deliberately incurring a romance, and sweetening it to saturation by the dash of spite, in making the necessary engine of it, the wife of Marlowe in the very time when, no doubt, he was assimilating her to his precise world of measured obligations, and could spare least to have her attunement unkeyed, and her docility distended by the drastic loyalty of a sudden love.

But this could give satisfaction to an absurdly small area of life, and he meant his last week to be a complete and mentally naked exposure, something impossible in such an affair where he would have to go costumed as an apostolic gallant with a sign of silk in his robe and a twinge of ecstasy in his hardships, and where he would have to go

clothed finally in a woman's body, too obdurate to admit to him any other touch of life.

§ 2

What he desired was an exposure, a presenting of himself to chance and accidents, a so-to-say surrender, offering in a unique experiment to the hands of destiny, his body and all its fermentations.

He knew this could best be done not by letting himself go merely, by sleeping when he was tired, by going off when he felt crowded, by shouting aloud when he touched something communicable, by eating at the prompt of his hunger, by rutting at every glimpse of a woman. By its very limitations it could reveal nothing that was not implicit in his own body; and although life might not be proved to be anything besides this, it was necessary to make the proof, to take a place in any casual background, and a part in the pantomime of any occurrences, going beyond this simplicity, which man had managed to make, in its direct manifestations, only a small part of daily procedure.

Could he do it by aimlessly starting upon a road to be determined by any caprice of his own, or of chance as indicated by a recognized sign or symbol? or by remaining in one place, to let life close in upon him, as he stood?

These reflections occupied him pleasantly as a man, with time on his hands, before an occasion, might make his toilette and choose his clothing, tasting, in the very privilege of choice, a sweet luxury,

and even multiplying the choices to eke out the pleasure. The week seemed agreeably long, seven days, seven mornings, seven noons, seven nights.

The day had a companionable, easy restlessness with little caprices of wind and a gem-bright sky deliberately flawed with white runs of cloud, and a calmly warming sunlight, that, in the occasional interventions of cloud, became incandescent pearl, leaving a hardly palpable chill like a reminiscence. And so well did the day and he go, that he thought of himself then as an organ of it, and this sense of identity was so pervasive that he could not even conceive of it as a thing that must pass.

He discovered, as he walked on, that his pleasure in the day was dwindling, and he roused his senses in anger; showing his eye the unabating glory of the sun, and lifting his arms that the loverly wind might hold him closer. His eyes obeyed and his skin obeyed for the moment, but only under the prod of his command.

An uneasiness was running rapidly through his body, and he wondered what it might be; and laughed that a man should not know when he was hungry—for he realized now that it was hunger—and was vexed at the same time. He had not eaten for many hours, and the suction of his stomach pulled more stoutly than the grip of his mind. It angered him to find nature in his own body, as indifferent and unwieldable, and, in a sense, as distant as in its greater manifestations.

He forgave his body, and whetted by the absolu-

tion his palate paraded into his mind a brilliant phantasy of food. As if a promise had been given him, his energies rose as from a mutiny, and, like elated children, leaped. And Jeremiah noticed, with embittered amusement that his body was as brisk now with nothing more than a dinner for reward as when he embarked it upon a possible discovery of the nature of life!

"Though I have a mutinous body," he said, "it is loyal to me, and my mind, to whose continual rebellion I have yielded much, must follow me in surrender. To think, after the body has summoned, of the protest of the mind, is not feasible, and perhaps in the stream of juices with which the body celebrates its traditions orgiastically, there will be revenue for the mind too."

§ 3

He was walking over the field to the nearby road. His feet chose the city like horses who know the way to their stalls. But no definite destination was on the horizon. He walked quickly for his hunger was no debilitation, but a stimulant, and he overtook a man who was walking before him.

The man was old but ruddy, like fruit that withers freshly, and the white hair, so vividly contrasting, appeared almost to be ceremonial.

The old man turned around, and smiled to Jeremiah garrulously, "She will wait for you," he said.

Jeremiah slowed down, with a halt, symbolically apologizing for his last step.

"I am very hungry; could you help me to find something to eat?"

"No doubt she will want you to be well fed. Love thrives in a full belly. A woman will endure a foul kiss if the lips have a gravy streak."

Jeremiah smiled politely and reiterated, "could you help me find something to eat?"

"Are you alone here?" asked the old man.

"Alone," answered Jeremiah.

"And you have no friends at all in the town?"

"No one nearby," answered Jeremiah.

"One usually thinks of his friends in an emergency like this," said the old man with an overtone of reproof.

"One also presumes upon a general store of friendship for an emergency like this; if I did not believe in it, I would have suppressed my hunger for opportunity, or eaten by chance from things in the field."

"True, indeed, but it is simpler to have friends, and you have a friend in me, even if you haven't admitted yet that you want a meal for two."

"She is so starved that she has become invisible," said Jeremiah in weary sarcasm.

"There are plump ones to take her place, able to feed you like Rinaldo's daughters from their own breasts," said the old man still jocular.

"If you could only bring them to me, I will promise to turn them into muses for thus turning themselves into cows, and I shall hold you more estimable

than Phoebus who was celebrated for his golden heifers."

"The return deserves a dinner," acknowledged the old man genially, laying his arm over Jeremiah's shoulder.

"Look ahead; do you see the house there at the foot of the hill? that's where we will feast."

Jeremiah saw a large gaudy house. At the moment the old man was saying, "young people are always hungry," as if confiding a secret of vulnerability and Jeremiah had a sudden sense that here was a witch house where children ate their way into an oven.

The impression organized when, as he approached, he saw a twiggy girl in a hammock. She had a face whose gaunt prettiness was in constant flight before embarrassment. She whisked it out of sight when she saw him watching her, and when he mounted the porch, beyond evasion, it hung over the rim of the hammock and trembled with a greeting that the pared lips hardly had the power to utter.

In contrast to the panic of the girl, the old man ran over with assurance. His tone was grandiloquently affable, mixing something uninviting in his hospitality.

He blew the door in, and caught Jeremiah in his arm, and dragged him, in one shuffle, to the center of the room already occupied by an old man, an old woman, and three girls; and there was the same crumpling up that he noticed in the girl on the porch in each of them.

Somehow their timidity accused the old man and made his assertiveness offensive. As their faces wanly writhed with good manners, his coarsened with good humor; as they retreated unhappily in the public corners of their chairs, he expanded till his shadow appeared to be deliberately placed like a goal; as their cheeks whitened with constraint, his own, florid, bloomed oppressively.

He kept his arm on Jeremiah's shoulders and winking to the shrunken girls, he said, "See what I have brought you."

Jeremiah bowed, and there was a titter, in unison of "pleased to meet you."

The old man, rising, excused himself with a tortured smile, and hobbled out hastily; the old woman who suffered with a twitch, had the advantage of having her embarrassed mumble taken for a spasm of palsy. The three girls, like their sister on the porch, had a prettiness that seemed to have been pressed back in their faces; the color and light in their eyes lost in depths reachable only by exploration; the maiden flush dim in a sort of powdered pallor on their cheeks; their lips austerely bitten in to chide their fullness, since prettiness swings in the face like an open door, and they had shut themselves. While Jeremiah was looking at them, astonished, the other girl came in; he did not know it, till he saw her, detecting her as moths are detected clinging to the wall. She settled down, hidingly, among the three and looked at Jeremiah like one begging to be spared.

"When I was young," said the red and white old man in asides, "the more bashful girls were, the more I liked to find them out. I liked them timid, because, in fact, they were bolder in the end than the bold ones; and I guess woman's nature hasn't changed any since my time."

"Nor man's neither, do you mean?" asked Jeremiah.

"The timid ones throw themselves into an adventure heart and soul; nothing frightens them off the way your big, red girls, swinging and roaring, go, who stampede if a man breathe out of pitch to them. It's the little girls who risk all——"

"Perhaps out of desperation," said Jeremiah.

"I don't care," said the red and white old man, "I've given you my hint. Here they are; I am going to have the dinner served."

He went out.

There was simultaneous unfolding of the people. They lost none of their timidity, but they swelled out as though pressure had relaxed.

Jeremiah went over to the girls. "Are you his daughters?" he asked.

"No," they answered.

"Not sisters?" he continued.

"No."

"No relatives of any sort?"

"No."

"Servants?"

"No."

If only one of them would act as spokesman for

the rest. He singled out the one whom he had seen on the porch. He felt himself smiling in a way that united her to him, that embraced her within a radiation of his own energy. He saw her visibly extend, the exiled beauty returning and attentive on her eyes.

"I saw you first," he said intimately, "and feel that I know you the longest. I want to know what you are to this old man."

"He says that he likes to have young faces around him and has boarded us here. There are young men sometimes but they don't stay. It's hard to understand why, because he is so jolly."

"So you like to be here?"

"It is lonesome sometimes but the house is big and he treats us so well, and it isn't so dull when he is here, because he is so jolly."

"Who are the old people?"

"They are neighbors. Their son never comes to see them. He is a man older than you. They stay here because it is lonesome in their own house."

"He is a kind man to keep them."

"Oh, he is very kindhearted."

"Is there anybody else in the house?"

"Yes, there are servants. You will see them. They are funny people. They hardly talk. He makes jokes on them and they don't understand."

"Are there any animals in the house?"

"No, he doesn't like to keep them in the house."

"He does not need them," commented Jeremiah.

"We would so like to have them," wished the girl.

"Have there been any love affairs here?" asked Jeremiah.

"He makes love to all of us," blushed the girl. "He tells all the young men who come here to make love to us, but they never do it."

"That's very disappointing, isn't it?" he said to her gayly, and smiling imperatively upon her, and turning the smile, in a slow rotation upon the others. There was a nodding away, but a rebound of greater momentum when his face had turned off.

"I will make love to you," announced Jeremiah. He sat down in their midst and lifted his arms back till his hands were on the arms of the outer two girls. They fluttered like small birds.

"I have never seen such beautiful girls before," he said with conviction. "Beauty in a demure girl is a lure like the beauty of inaccessible and unattainable things.

"When I met the old man on the road, we might have parted like any wayfarers who stop for a minute of gossip had he not told me about you. Then I could not leave him and followed him till I saw the pictures that I had made out of his words realized in you.

"Now I am with you I touch utter happiness; but what will happen when the one who is to choose me must be discovered from among you, if you care to welcome me at all——"

At this moment, the red and white old man returned. At his approach the trembling thin bodies shook out of his arms. The red and white old man

laughed with suspicious hilarity. "No hints are lost on you," he said.

"No," said Jeremiah, "and for their sake I must eat heartily."

"The dinner is ready in the next room," said the red and white old man.

At the table, he sat between two of the girls. His feet kept him in touch with the others, and to those nearest him, he let his hands down and stroked their thighs with gently reassuring fingers.

He ate with gusto, with dancing jaws. At the same time, he was thunderously gay, laughing and putting to jest the small table occasions; and the red and white old man vociferated echo-wise.

He saw the servants. The cook came up to the old man for a whisper. He was dark and smutty. Yet there was a ridiculous fairness in his skin, the apparent lightness of frayed, thin things. He moved jerkily and stood stolidly under the joking of the old man. He was apishly capable in his movements. The waiter was far more helplessly humorous. He was dressed in livery to add to the obvious jest of his existence. He was short; he had a bald head, a monster's head, dehaired to utterly leave it naked to laughter. The face below was a puzzled tenacity. The eyes were wide and uncomprehendingly open. The nose was flat, with kiosk like nostrils, agitated, having still more the appearance of intent aimlessness,—a dislocated brain,—and in climactic conclusion, an unabridged gape of mouth, a mouth interested in the universe.

The old people ate quietly, the old man helping his wife when her hand trembled too much.

The girls giggled obligato.

"Let the girls sing," suggested Jeremiah.

The girls blenched at such an extraordinary idea. Their breaths blew up in astonishment. But soon enough one of them, exhorted by the unerring fingers of Jeremiah, sang in a growingly straight voice, sputteringly at first, like water, at a tap, and ending in a similar shrill monotony.

The others came in with their clinking voices. "Sing," shouted Jeremiah to the old man, leading with his fine bosomed baritone; and soon the bass of the red and white old man rolled in a throaty wallow of sound.

The old man sang; but in his face, above the laboring cavern of his mouth, there was a look of unoriented dissent; it rose from the angry waving of his nostrils, to the red cores of his cheeks, to the violence of his eyes on which lived a brilliant hatred. It rose by way of a system of suddenly dug lines all pointing with direct, dragon-like polarity to the eye fangs, and over it was the white heat of the forehead on which curled lines like folds of smoke.

Jeremiah saw it and was pleased.

Without warning Jeremiah said to the old man, "You should have made a splendid animal trainer."

The old man groveled, narrowing himself like one surprised by unseen blows. He laughed; the laughter ran over his face like an excrement.

"Often one wonders," continued Jeremiah, "that

man has tamed beasts. They are often swifter, stronger, wilier than he; they can, having him weaponless, destroy man. But man has tamed man himself, as slaves anciently and as citizens today, as armies, god-fearers, rank-respecters, law-abiders, loyal as servants proud to have masters of prestige —if only abstractions. Through the ability first to tame and subjugate man, man learned to subjugate other animals.

"In a comparatively free society the slave-making instinct survives. Women as imperious as insect queens flourish in salon hives. The magnetic personality, indicating the lodestone origin of all enslavement, exerts beyond the limits of physique a physical compulsion which sways one or an army. At times this, in a man, is an unavoidable flower of personality. In every man, even in the humblest, there is a cry of it and it has been seen that the most submissive have been most truculent and it is fair to believe that the great fierce captains by the solitude of triumph made their kowtow to Fate, for sheer need of indulging their slavishness. There are others who, living in balance, have had no need for commanding or obedience. If they have been the greatest and the most perfect slaves, like Cæsar who could laugh at the slavishness of the popular Pompey, like Confucius who could offer perfect service to small princes or provinces, it is because they have been free to choose and to perform, while the others, wheeled by instinct, followed the agitated courses of their ambition or devotion."

Jeremiah ended and the old man went out of the room; he went out of the room when Jeremiah ended, as soon as the last syllable was uttered and the coil of words in which Jeremiah wound him was wholly secure; he went out stiff within it, like one unnaturally mummified; he went out amidst the silence of the four women which filled in the air and made a heaviness like fog.

Jeremiah turned to them slowly; he was astonished by their astonishment, encircled in their wonder. He came slowly toward them and at the thrust of his coming they awakened mythically; their faces came clear as if he saw them at last after having been only images and reflections. The reality was palpable. He felt the rays of their eyes and was swayed by the lines of their faces; where before he had seen only a luster of surfaces and a concept of arrangement.

He realized that he could not leave them here, and he felt now that a prolonging of this adventure would be too troublesome; and he laughed at his own heartlessness when he gave them the directions to the house of the sisters. He had, strangely, no compunction, as he watched them on the road going to the house of the sisters.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

He himself walked on aimlessly; the only adventure that could happen to him now was one that could divert him from his intention, could make life in some way too private for experiment, or the experiment unnecessary by supplying the knowledge that could be gained by it, or proving the futility of the knowledge.

If he could find in emotion, or in naked abstraction, that which he was seeking; if it could be pointed out to him, as even a woman could be pointed out in a curtained window in a guarded house, he would be satisfied. He went on in the hope that this partial consummation might be his reward. But he expected nothing more than a repetition of daily experiences that would flow in and out of his life like the very food that he took in that time, but be of less importance.

He was for the while in a strange suspense, a balance of desires which did not leave him in comfortable inanition but roused in him a dull fury of impotence. He had a distaste for making overtures; he did not want to address any man in the street no matter how cryptic the back of his neck might look,

nor any woman no matter how plausible might be the tides of her hips; nor did he want to be alone, to drug himself with contemplation. He wanted to step into some sinecure of activity where without any motion of his he would be caught in some diverting mobility. The thought came to him: would it end again in some natural call; would he be drawn again by his tongue, hot with the pricking of hunger, to swallow once more his mood with boluses of food; or would he, with smarting loins, be drawn as irresistibly into a woman; or at a moment of crucial implications would he nap off eclipsed by his swollen eyes?

He walked through the streets with an almost fierce readiness for any encounter. He should have felt more of the poise that he had been in possession of on that night when he had met the broad man and watched his rendezvous with the Caryatid; but instead he walked with all his nerves out.

The night came down like a vast blotter. All the filth and blackness in the city seemed to sop up into the sky and leave it in a void of clean darkness. It had no effect upon him. The warmth too had risen off the earth and left a clean smelling coolness.

§ 2

Presently he met a dog; it was a small mongrel, yellow-skinned, servant-souled, with hanging ears and slighted tail, and soft, huge fobs for paws. For a time he followed Jeremiah, distantly first, then

nearer, and presuming to jump up to lick his hand as it swung out to him.

The dog gave relief. Jeremiah spoke to him; the mild sound of his voice gladdened the dog to frenzy.

"You are a trick played on me by the animal destiny of mankind. I have been running from food, and love and chatter only to find you, the metaphor for them, alongside. Hungry, cold, tired, knowing that man can comfort you, you come to me derisively to present these needs of yours which are mine also. You are joyful in the confidence that I will obligingly solve your problem; you pay me fealty for it by licking my hand; but you are not sent to me to be comforted, but as an attack upon me; perhaps it is intended we should both be insulted."

The dog jumped, ran ahead. In his extreme pleasure he barked. After a time, however, his patience began to give way. When they approached a house the dog would quiver with anticipation, run ahead toward it, and invite Jeremiah to enter. When Jeremiah walked on, he howled in vexation, ran stumbling after Jeremiah and butted his shins, and tried with persuasive entanglements to bring him back. It was a gathering annoyance and when Jeremiah approached a man, he suddenly took up the dog in his arms, gave it over peremptorily to the stranger, saying briefly, "this is a stray dog who wants some shelter and has been following me for it. I shall want shelter myself, so please take care of him."

§ 3

As he walked on an enfeebling sense of loneliness came to him; and with it, all heaping together, came exhaustion, chill, hunger, and an unexpected and urgent craving for venery. He forgot everything presently in his search for satisfaction, and the night, after a squalidly elaborate meal, given at a small, panderous hotel—ended nauseously in a half laid bed with his cheeks against viscid breasts and a sense of uncomfortable relief like one who has befouled himself.

He got up the next morning in the first clarity of the day. He moved away loathingly from the woman until he saw, on her face, asleep, a clenched callousness as strong as his disgust. Then somewhat comforted he washed himself as silently as he was able, but she woke and looked at him blankly, "Won't you kiss me before you go?" she asked. "No," said Jeremiah aghast. "No?" asked the woman blankly, and then lay down again, drew the blankets over her head like one whose part in a necessary performance is over.

Jeremiah drew down the blinds.

"Thank you," acknowledged the woman with casual gratitude.

§ 4

He went out. A day of the seven had passed unsatisfactorily.

It had ended in a glut of the physical and yet the

obligation was not his. The decision was still before him. It occurred to him that it would be well to leave the city and go out into the country. He walked to a square where aeroplanes took off and waited for someone to take him aboard a machine.

He was wearing no riding things, but if an end of his clothing was shorn off by a stroke of the wind, it would not matter. He hailed a rider and although he did not find him hospitable, he climbed in. The machine rose up vertically and then, changing its planes, gleamed forward. After a silent, dull consumption of space, it slowed down so that there was again a sensation of motion, and the planes again changing, the machine settled to the ground, a slab of lawn, and Jeremiah, thanking the aviator briefly, went off on the road while his host entered the house.

For his further journeying Jeremiah could not choose a direction. He was now, perhaps, two hundred miles from the city. He made up his mind to spend the rest of the week walking back. He began at once, feeling light-hearted and sure that he would have interesting, if inconclusive, encounters.

§ 5

He was not disappointed—a woman in front of him, walking fluently. He ran after her.

"Are you going to the city?"

"Not particularly," she answered.

He stopped to understand how the strong clear voice harmonized with the tried sufficiency of her

body, travel trim, but keen-jointed like a grasshopper.

"You do not mind if I walk with you?"

"Not if you are good company," she answered with a streamer of laughter.

"I promise to be good company," he replied. "I will listen to you most of the way."

"What if I am not a good talker?"

"Travelers are all good talkers. Besides there is nothing that so generates conversation as an unequal curiosity."

"Why do you think that your curiosity is greater than mine?"

"Because, having given up my identity, I have also cut myself off from my experience; and I am like a child facing life with voracious senses. I must learn everything."

"Perhaps I am one who lives like that from occasion to occasion."

"Then your curiosity is normal and directed while mine is just born and a search."

The woman turned upon him with settled eyes. He could not see them till, like one taking a jewel out of the public light, he looked away and saw the images of them in his retina, black, unsharpened, black without glamor, black like the deep of a clump of trees. It struck the gayety from him.

He paced beside her, silently. He had noticed before how measured her walk was. The evenness of it went into his own steps, and into his own body and brought peace upon it. He felt his energies sink

into the pace, and his muscles rise and fall. "It is the rhythm," he thought, and soon he found himself repeating: "rhythm is rest; rhythm is rest; rhythm is rest; rhythm is rest."

After a time, in calm and exhilaration, he watched his companion again; the open had not been so cruel to her face as he had thought; the skin was brown and finely wrinkled even, but there was hardihood and a dull staying glow upon it as on a winter apple.

"You must tell me more of yourself," Jeremiah ventured again.

"I am thirty-four years old," she replied slowly. "I am a woman; I do not stay in one place but wander about."

Jeremiah felt this slight keenly. He determined not to acknowledge it, and feeling desperate in silence abruptly began to speak of himself.

"Within six days," he said, "I will try to die and resurrect myself to reveal what the change of death is."

The woman did not reply at once. Then she said, "There has been death before."

Jeremiah answered, "There has been death but no knowledge of death."

The woman smiled with her shoulders. "The knowledge of death, which is common in the world, is of the same nature as the knowledge of electricity; we can measure it by its influence and effects, even if we do not know its substance. We see that there is no breath, and no pulsing of the blood; that no warmth is given off, that it does not stir to any call

to the senses, and we know that is non-life. If we stay, we see that it no longer is active but passive to the outer world which claims it; the outer world, slowly picks it apart, and digests it, and we know then that death is not only non-life but a rending of the material of life."

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust," said Jeremiah satirically.

"Why not," ran the woman, "life is a cycle; death, like the nine months of gaining consciousness, is the period in which the substance in which life transpired wanes from consciousness. It is probably not immediate, as we suppose, but a gradual devitiation. Death, like birth, is a node in the vibration we call life."

"I do not believe it," said Jeremiah, "for life is not a sea in which an infinite succession of waves rise and break, in eternal sameness. It is a thing that has made iridescent the face of the earth, that has changed and elaborated itself, from sea scum to man, in many transformations. Death itself, is a change, and important to the knowledge of man."

"Why is man not solitary then, since his is the culmination of life; he has his ancestors for his living neighbors?"

"Because each change was not participated in en masse, but as an advance of individuals. Already today, we have discovered morons. Most men are morons in the standard of the highest individuals. They do not understand our progress. They cannot keep pace with us. They will be left behind and

the individuals will ultimately become a new species. This species was already foreseen many years ago and called the superman, only it was, with curious human logic, given the very virtues which retard his development, which keep man, man. At that time, man will remain, perhaps be nearly as thriving and numerous as he is today; but there will be a species higher than him. In death I expect to find a clue to him."

"You frighten me," laughed the woman. "Man according to you is the creature with a mission. He is the Israelite among the animals, the chosen one. But perhaps like other animals it is his business to remain himself."

"The analogy is wrong," reproached Jeremiah. "Israel was chosen as the perfect and his tragedy was his fall from the perfect, whereas, in my belief, man is not perfect, and perfection is not even a goal. Man is a point reached by the gathering complexity which we call life, which may end, perhaps, as the consciousness of the world. And as it is, if man's business were to remain man our average life span would be, today, thirty years; at that age most of the surviving women would be grandmothers. If species remained as they are, those that we know as fossils would be alive today; the dodo would be hopping about; the buffalo, the marabou, the wild turkey, would be common in the woods."

"Perhaps. But why are you so confident that the dissenters will be the true type of coming men?

Dissent is in itself a too human trait, and it may be that the worst dissenters of all are those who participate neither in the daily business, the ordinary revolt, the aspirations of humanity, but wrap themselves up in serenity."

"Serenity is the attempt to grow a new skin; solitude and silence and space are elements of it, but life has besieged solitude, and sounded silence and overreached space. The skin does not grow. Man does not advance by defenses; man remains still one of the most defenseless of all animals."

"This may be true," said the woman, "but why do you want to die?"

"Because in death," said Jeremiah, "I expect to find the pattern of the future man. I want to communicate it. I have a nostalgia for it. And I want to save the race."

"Why?"

"For the same reason that the child, in the old Dutch story, put her hand in the hole in the dike wall. She put it there in sheer fright. In her mind was the fear of the whole community overwhelmed by the flood, and she acted out of an instinctive confusion of herself with the community. She certainly did not do it because she believed it was a moral thing to do, or that she would be a heroine in true story books. Ideas and discoveries are thus accidental. Within us is the sense of our identity, not as individuals, but as parts of an inconceivable organism. The impulse to abstract greatness, of the philosophers, of the scientist, of the artist, is not

finally to win praise; these men are too mature for adolescent self-assertion; their desire for what appears to be fame is really a desire for acknowledgment of duty done. I do it because I find that I am the only one who sees the necessity of exploring death."

"You have a strong and impure faith," said the woman.

"What do you mean?"

"You have the blind confidence of the martyrs of ancient religions. Martyrs, to commit bestiality with their ideas, set in motion circumstances that will incarnate them. You will undergo a martyrdom which will essentially be a protest against the tyranny of the limits of life. You will attempt to trespass upon death, and in your self-resurrection you will attempt to trespass upon birth. It may be a useful effort, but I do not see the usefulness of it. It is another attempt to do things by magical short cuts. It is another religion. If you have disciples you will not merely have died, but a holy mystery will be made of your death. There will be merely a new death ritual. Other religions believed that the struggle of life would be over in another existence. They believed in revelations. Your plan is only a belief in a new revelation. If you believe that life is always developing, why hope for a short cut?"

"Because I believe that development has proceeded by short cuts," answered Jeremiah.

"Short cuts of another nature," quibbled the woman. "The divine revelations of the prophets

presented imagistic pictures of future life but they did not realize them."

"They helped to create orderly society," said Jeremiah, "in which progress came swiftly."

"They created stagnations," said the woman.

"My revelation is not to be a recital of the adventures of my supposed soul, but the report of what my life experienced in the incident of death. It is to be as scientific as the subjection of a substance to chemical action. All experiments were begun in the anticipation of a certain outcome. I will make the attempt in the belief that what we know as will can survive death and reëstablish life. If I am wrong a life will be lost; the lives of other experimenters have been lost. It is not an uncommon thing."

"I am sorry I met you," said the woman, suddenly, sternly.

"Why?" said Jeremiah, bewildered.

"You have given me an interest in life."

"Surely you did not receive that from me."

"Not that. When we see a rich man beside a boulevard wife with a chute bosom and a mania mouth, endoored within a residence which lions, like fists, guard; first served up with the concentrated fatness of the land, like a pair of kept locusts, so that each meal is a crop ruin; carried in a plane that sucks up the wind; deposited in a theater where they turn two huge obliterating backs, one black the other white, to dam up the audience; brought back to a bed softer than the cloud of Juno, in which they

frisk with new glands, to rise perhaps upon a Sabbath where priests ululate, and they are acclaimed the living Adam and Eve, the living first man and woman, we might acknowledge with profound envy, 'they live.' Or when we see a gypsy, running from houses, running from the stability of marked spaces; avoiding the fat running foods; loving desultorily on rancid turfs, wizened women with needy breasts; always leaving after their brief day or week of habitation, as casually as a wind that has soiled with broken branches and leaves, a place littered with their refuse; denying responsibilities; and oblivious of the shocked thumbs of Pharisees; and becoming public only in the convivium, when in camp the girls stir with fluted legs in the dance, and the songs defy business hum and liturgical sonor, then with lofty, conferring envy, we might admit, too, 'they live.' And all that smiles, we acknowledge, lives, loves life and knows life. That is not life, no more than a lozenge of stained glass was a church. When I say that you have made me interested in life I mean that you are compelling me to a new feat of consciousness, to feel all life instead of my own, to proceed to an abstraction, after absorption in a pleasant and individually fashioned concreteness. That is what you have done to me—for the time."

"You have your revenge," said Jeremiah, "I am suddenly finding this interest in life an alien intruder."

"Alien to what?" asked the woman.

"To the new sensations I have in your presence."

"Are they new?"

"Yes."

"I am a woman. I am thirty-four years old. I do not stay in one place, but wander about," warned the woman satirically.

"Because you are a woman, thirty-four years old and do not stay in one place but wander about," said Jeremiah stolidly.

The woman felt, and knew that he saw her so, at once a girl with a scream of boldness over a blush of fear; maidrid; a woman, wifely, ramifications of femaleness spreading to the tenderness of her scalp and the buttressed calves of her legs, heating her eyes, wilting her shoulders, smoldering over her bosom and lap; like the scent, honey and unfolding of a flower; and a woman severe and lonely, chastening with contempt and denial. She knew that he saw these persons and did not shrink or trouble to hide them.

Night came. They found shelter in a house. They were given adjoining chambers. After lying awake for a time, Jeremiah rose and went into the room of the woman. He was prepared to be denied but not to be resisted. Strong limbed, the woman kept him off. He went out, weary and beaten.

The next morning they continued together. Was this exposure to life? What did it matter, congealment on a mountain, desiccation in the desert, obscure putrefaction in a glen; if he followed, waitingly, this woman?

He prayed that she would leave him by night, but

she went on oblivious of him, conscious of a power of seclusion. They spoke. She lived calmly in his presence, as though he were perhaps an out-of-place element in the scene without motivation, but not affecting her existence beyond offering a relieving disharmony. She bathed before him, displaying a nudity unexpectedly ambient and effuse considering her hammered face; swift curves of muscles leaped up her thin legs, arched her shoulders, girded her loins; her breasts hung, plump drops falling over the breast bone, virgin small; the brown skin bristled with sunlight as she left the shower; clothed, her nakedness remained posturing in his memory.

They conversed gravely.

She refused to let him know her past life. "If it is not visible in me I will not be able to reveal it by telling stories," she said.

His confession she heard with indifference. She acknowledged no purpose, no desire, no affiliation. She would leave him abruptly to examine a field flower, or a beetle in the dust. She would look up intent upon cloud shapes. She would bestow unrelated observations. When they approached groups of people she would astonish him by her notice of revealing details. She would say: "This hesitating man who hobbles himself with awkwardness is pale because he is proud, and his loneliness has forced him to hunt for company. This woman is trying to break herself of love by satirizing herself; she holds in her hand one of her letters, crumpled, which she will smooth out again in the night. This boy is reading

a biography; he looks out of the book to see himself, magnified by Future, tally with the hero."

They stayed under the same shelter at night; the woman locked her room.

Jeremiah remonstrated. "There is no intimacy possible between a man and a woman without love."

"No," she admitted, and kept her door locked.

This brought him to desperation. He had transcended casual desire and defended himself from a rarefaction of the desire into romantic longing. He might temporarily say, it is impossible for me to live without her. But he knew that for the time, she loomed up in his path and that he could not go on until his experience with her was complete. Until that consummation he would suffer suspense, would lapse and run down, and he had no time to wait.

He did not explain this to her, for he knew that it would be likely to result in an amused or hurried, detached surrender, involving at the most an acknowledgment of impersonal interest. This could not satisfy him; he wanted her to be reduced to impassiveness, to receive and not to offer, love, as a gift. In that posture only he would be free to go on.

The last evening brought them near the city. During the day the woman had asked him many questions. The questions had been trivial and they had annoyed him. Sometimes it seemed to him that she asked them out of politeness, sometimes that, wishing to ask personal questions, she had been overtaken by embarrassment.

That night she retired before him. Following her

he noticed that her door was open. He did not make any attempt to enter but went to his own room; but he knew that the woman was not sleeping. He saw her walking in the room restlessly waiting for him and coolness of relief ran over his body. He walked into her room. She scattered upon her bed, her arms outflung, the violence of her breath making pendulums of her breasts. At his touch she clicked to him in an almost magnetic junction. As the uneasiness of Jeremiah ebbed, the incident became unreal, there was even a moment when, he felt that she had become a part of the past, that at that moment the incident was dissolving into memory; and the dissolution was an inconceivably sweet thing, since it disencumbered him.

She told him like a young girl repeating confidences, all that days ago he had been curious to know, and it had no interest for him now. It could add nothing to his knowledge of her, but he made no attempt to interrupt her out of a gentleness. He even played a part for her sake, turning to appropriately jealous backbiting when her story dealt with former love.

CHAPTER TEN

§ 1

The next day they entered the city. The woman wept the greater part of the way because of Jeremiah's resolutions. Instead of parting as they had originally planned, she went with him, holding him by the arm, through the streets, until they came to the house of the two sisters. She refused to leave him even then, but went with him up the steps.

He found the young girl there and the broad man. They addressed him reverently as master, and told him that the others were waiting for him in a larger place in another part of the city. They went there all together and Jeremiah was amazed when he and the woman were led into a large and crowded meeting hall.

There were too many staring faces.

What were they all doing here? pallid faces, in tiers, with uniform rows of eyes like bands of ornament, living friezes on unbuilt walls. He could distinguish among them the two sisters, the lame girl, the long youth; they were together like an older sediment. In the arrayed faces he saw, too, the girls he had sent away from the house of the old man. They were signaling to him with meek eyes and they tottered with bliss when they were recognized.

This much the sisters had already accomplished. They had done their work well. He smiled broadly as he saw this and looked at the woman with him, his companion on the road, and was shocked to see her uncomfortable and impressed.

The smile was immediately reflected on all the faces, like a response. One of the sisters arose and turning to the assemblage recited pontifically, "Our master is with us." From the assembly returned in formulated reverence, "Welcome, our master."

She then turned to him and said: "We have all examined into the wisdom of Dr. Transit, to which you have led us, and we have accepted him. He speaks through you, and within you his wisdom grows, and expands until it covers humanity. We have awaited your coming to inform you that we are constituted your flock and humbly beseech you that you will shepherd us, for life is a vast field over which our steps err. Will it please you to rise before us and pronounce what will be our first steps? Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have come under your guidance before have written down what they have heard from you and they have made it into a convenient form. Will it please you to recite it to us, oh master?"

Her voice scratched on the hard silence. Why did they not laugh! transfixed idiots, their eyes sacrificed their oxen reverence—dolts—there was not one missile of laughter, not a hand to tear her from the rostrum. But the white faces did not break; the walls of pallor stood rigid.

He stood up to a visible clicking of eyes, and laughed; laughed into the white, drilled faces; he glared at them and they waited. He was on the point of stepping down and leaving without a word; but he remained instead. He would be kind to the faces.

"I am sorry that I am not in condition to be with you now. I will retire to another room, one of the rooms in the hall, and I ask that you leave me there without disturbance for two hours; then will you please send these"—he pointed to his companion of the road, the young girl, and the broad man—"and anyone among you who is a doctor to attend me."

§ 2

With this he descended abruptly and walked out into the corridors leading into the hall. He found a room, halfway between the hall and the street, and, entering it, shut the door.

He waited a while to hear whether there would be any sounds. From the street he heard nothing; the entrance door had been locked; in the corridors a stillness was filling that grew heavier; through it, the sounds of the hall could not come.

He was pleased.

The time had come. He must die with no external agencies, but entirely by will; he must dissuade his body from breathing and his heart from distributing his blood; and his brain from directing these operations. If it could only be done as easily as stabbing,

as suffocation, or shooting; but shooting or stabbing would leave holes through which his life, if he revived it, would leak; if he hanged himself, the constricted noose would bar its return.

He was prepared for the struggle his life would make against the summoned death; even at the beginning it had laid a coldness upon him that numbed his will; he chafed it; life seemed suddenly regrettable; it swarmed about him garishly and lewdly, crowded about him, till he had no room for his purpose.

There were times when he had stopped breathing when he felt the limpness of his lungs, and suddenly the desire for life came upon him, and he drew breath voraciously, groaning in the agony of relief, with each intake; there were times when he heard his heart ceasing; when its peristalsis was weak and the beat wavered, and suddenly it would shake his bosom, beating on his rib, and he would hear it pumping; the effort was making him dizzy, he felt himself falling; and he found himself again cool in a bath of sweat, but too weak to rise, too swimming and inconstant; he could not afford to faint; the body craftily took refuge in these intervals of unconsciousness; there was pain now crowding his head; infinite lassitude swung his limbs against his slipping consciousness; he tried again a stoppage of breathing and was interrupted with a wrench of desperate breathing, that seemed to tear open his breast.

An ache for comfort, for ease, slid upon him; de-

sire to liberate himself from the terrible strain of his effort, a moment's reprieve, a recess, a seductive rhythm on his fuddled senses told him that he would have his will there; he would have it without striving; but weakly he struck against it.

Suddenly he felt salt in his mouth; he recognized it immediately—blood; his tortured lungs were bleeding and this horrified him to consciousness; he had always had a horror of blood; his own blood oozing out, filling into his mouth, the thought shook him back to consciousness; he suddenly felt himself clear-headed, and found himself spitting into his palm; every time he spit there was a red drench. Would this defeat him? He closed his eyes; he felt unimaginably weak; too weak, perhaps, to face the ordeal; why had he bled? he could not stand this; he could not stand this; the salt taste in his mouth filled him with horror; he wanted to wash his mouth; he tried to rise but could not, the fear of the blood in his mouth made him suddenly fear death; death meant this blood letting; it would be easier to bear a knife or a bullet; he tried to rise and found that he could not; he felt his leg; there was no sensation in it; was he paralyzed? A new kind of dread broke him. He shuddered, then he coughed monotonously, and shut his eyes when he spit to keep the horror of the redstreaked spittle out of them; with this came a revulsion; he had no time for this disgust; he went on with the struggle and felt a dull sense of triumph as an unsteady torpor mounted his senses, staggering him with monstrous dislocations

of pain; at times he felt himself faint again; he would estimate the emptiness of his lungs and the shivering intake of breath, the halt and the subsequent pounding of his heart—it was after a thunder like this under his ribs that consciousness ended.

§ 3

The four whom he had chosen came to his door, and with them were the two sisters who had taken for granted that his omission of them meant that their presence was implied. They knocked on the door gently. When they got no reply they knocked louder. Finally they forced open the door and found the body of Jeremiah.

The woman who had accompanied him on the road ran to him and raised lamentations; the young girl became white and motionless with grief; the broad man turned to comfort her, himself finding it hard to look at the body; the two sisters blazed with chagrin; the medical man knelt down, almost with relief for the opportunity it gave him to perform a familiar function; he felt of the heart and of the skin, "Dead," he pronounced.

"Remarkable," he said. "There is no evidence of any external violence; there is blood on his lips but his throat shows no signs of strangulation."

The woman of the road declared, weeping, that he had killed himself by an effort of will.

For weeks the body of Jeremiah lay in a room.

It had the freshness of life, but it was lifeless. It

was not yet cold, although the blood did not circulate.

Something kept the body from inevitable decay.

"The will lies over it like an enforcing atmosphere," said the woman of the road.

One day there was a motion over the body. It was indefinable, but all felt it and started.

For the first time, since death, a stench went slowly into the air.

THE END