

# MARY HUNTER AUSTIN

A WOMAN OF GENIUS

**Mary Austin**  
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# A Woman of Genius

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

It is strange that I can never think of writing any account of my life without thinking of Pauline Mills and wondering what she will say of it. Pauline is rather given to reading the autobiographies of distinguished people – unless she has left off since I disappointed her – and finding in them new persuasions of the fundamental lightness of her scheme of things. I recall very well, how, when I was having the bad time of my life there in Chicago, she would abound in consoling instances from one then appearing in the monthly magazines; skidding over the obvious derivation of the biographer's son from the Lord Knows Who, except that it wasn't from the man to whom she was legally married, to fix on the foolish detail of the child's tempers and woolly lambs as the advertisement of that true womanliness which Pauline loves to pluck from every feminine bush.

There was also a great deal in that story about a certain other celebrity, for her relations to whom the writer was blackballed in

a club of which I afterward became a member, and I think it was the things Pauline said about one of the rewards of genius being the privilege of association with such transcendent personalities on a footing which permitted one to call them by their first names in one's reminiscences, that gave me the notion of writing this book. It has struck me as humorous to a degree, that, in this sort of writing, the really important things are usually left out.

I thought then of writing the life of an accomplished woman, not so much of the accomplishment as of the woman; and I have never been able to make a start at it without thinking of Pauline Mills and that curious social warp which obligates us most to impeach the validity of a woman's opinion at the points where it is most supported by experience. From the earliest I have been rendered highly suspicious of the social estimate of women, by the general social conspiracy against her telling the truth about herself. But, in fact, I do not think Mrs. Mills will read my book. Henry will read it first at his office and tell her that he'd rather she shouldn't, for Henry has been so successfully Paulined that it is quite sufficient for any statement of life to lie outside his wife's accepted bias, to stamp it with insidious impropriety. There is at times something almost heroic in the resolution with which women like Pauline Mills defend themselves from whatever might shift the centres of their complacency.

But even without Pauline, it interests me greatly to undertake this book, of which I have said in the title as much as a phrase may of the scope of the undertaking, for if I know anything

of genius it is wholly extraneous, derived, impersonal, flowing through and by. I cannot tell you what it is, but I hope to show you a little of how I was seized of it, shaped; what resistances opposed to it; what surrenders. I mean to put as plainly as possible how I felt it fumbling at my earlier life like the sea at the foot of a tidal wall, and by what rifts in the structure of living, its inundation rose upon me; by what practices and passions I was enlarged to it, and by what well meaning of my friends I was cramped and hardened. But of its ultimate operation once it had worked up through my stiff clay, of triumphs, profits, all the intricacies of technique, gossip of rehearsals, you shall hear next to nothing. This is the story of the struggle between a Genius for Tragic Acting and the daughter of a County Clerk, with the social ideal of Taylorville, Ohianna, for the villain. It is a drama in which none of the characters played the parts they were cast for, and invariably spoke from the wrong cues, which nevertheless proceeded to a successful dénouement. But if you are looking for anything ordinarily called plot, you will be disappointed. Plot is distinctly the province of fiction, though I've a notion there is a sort of order in my story, if one could look at it from the vantage of the gods, but I have never rightly made it out. What I mean to go about is the exploitation of the personal phases of genius, of which when it refers to myself you must not understand me to speak as of a peculiar merit, like the faculty for presiding at a woman's club or baking sixteen pies of a morning, which distinguished one Taylorvillian from another; rather as a

seizure, a possession which overtook me unaware, like one of those insidious Oriental disorders which you may never die of, but can never be cured. You shall hear how I did successfully stave it off in my youth for the sake of a Working Taylor and Men's Outfitter, and was nearly intimidated out of it by the wife of a Chicago attorney who had something to do with stocks; how I was often very tired of it, and many times, especially in the earlier periods when I was trying to effect a compromise between it and the afore-mentioned Taylorvillian predilections, I should have been happiest to have been quit of it altogether.

I shall try to have you understand that I have not undertaken to restate those phases of autobiography which are commonly suppressed, because of an exception to what the public has finally and at large concurred in, that it does not particularly matter what happens to the vessel of personality, so long as the essential fluid gets through; but from having gone so much farther to discover that it matters not a little to Genius to be so scamped and retarded. I have arrived at seeing the uncritical acceptance of poverty and heartbreak as essential accompaniments of Gift, very much of a piece with the proneness of Christians to regard the early martyrdoms as concomitants of faith, when every thinking person knows they arose in the cruelty and stupidity of the bystanders. Hardly any one seems to have recalled in this connection, that the initial Christian experience is a baptism of Joy, and it was only in the business of communicating it that it became bloody and tormenting. If you will go a little farther with

me, you shall be made to see the miseries of genius, perhaps also the bulk of wretchedness everywhere, not so much the rod of inexplicable chastisement, as the reaction of a purblind social complacency.

I shall take you at the sincerest in admitting the function of Art to be its re-kneading of the bread of life until it nourishes us toward greater achievement, as a basis for proving that much that you may be thinking about its processes is wrong, and most that you may have done for its support is beside the mark. If I have had any compunction about writing this book, it has been the fear that in the relation of incidents difficult and sordid, you might still miss the point of your being largely to blame for them. And even if you escape the banality of believing that my having lived for a week in Chicago on 85 cents was in any way important to my artistic development, and go so far as to apprehend it as it actually was, a foolish and unnecessary interference with my business of serving you anew with entertainment, you must go a little farther honestly to accept it, even when it came – this revitalizing fluid of which I was for the moment the vase, the cup – in circumstances which in the rule you live by, appear, when not actually reprehensible, at least ridiculous.

Looking back over a series of struggles that have left me in a frame when no man under forty interests me very much, still within the possibility of personal romance, and at an age when most women have the affectional value of a keepsake only, the arbiter and leader of my world, I seem to see my life not much

else but a breach in the social fabric, sedulously bricked up from within and battered from without, through which at last pours light and the fluid soul of Life. Something of all this I shall try to make plain to you, and incidentally how in the process I have perceived dimly this huge coil of social adjustment as a struggle *against* the invasive forces of blessedness, the smother of sheep in the lanes stupidly to escape the fair pastures toward which a large Friendliness herds them. If you go as far as this with me, you shall avoid, who knows, what indirection, and that not altogether without entertainment.

## CHAPTER II

Of Taylorville, where I grew up and was married, the most distinguishing thing was that there was nothing to distinguish it from a hundred towns in Ohianna. To begin with, it was laid out about a square, and had two streets at right angles known as Main and Broad. Broad Street, I remember, ran east and west between the high school and the railway station, and Main Street had the Catholic cemetery on the south, and the tool and hoe works on the north to mark – there was no other visible distinction – the points at which it became country road. There were numerous cross streets, east and west, called after the Governors, or perhaps it was the Presidents, and north and south, set forth on official maps as avenues, taking their names from the trees with which they were falsely declared to be planted, though I do not recall that they were ever spoken of by these names except by the leading county paper which had its office in one corner of the square over the Coöperative store, was Republican in politics, and stood for Progress.

The square was planted with maples; a hitching rack ran quite around it and was, in the number and character of the vehicles attached to it, a sort of public calendar for the days of the week and the seasons. On court days and elections, I remember, they quite filled the rack and overflowed to the tie-posts in front of the courthouse, which stood on its own ground a little off

from the square, balanced on the opposite side by the Methodist Church. It was a perfect index to the country neighbourhoods that spread east and north to the flat, black corn lands, west to the marl and clay of the river district, and south to the tall-weeded, oozy Bottoms. Teams from the Bottoms, I believe, always had cockleburs in their tails; and spanking dapple grays drove in with shining top-buggies from the stock farms whose flacking windmills on the straight horizons of the north, struck on my childish fancy as some sort of mechanical scarecrow to frighten away the homey charms of the wooded hills. I recall this sort of detail as the only thing in my native town that affected my imagination. When I saw the flakes of black loam dropping from the tires, or the yellow clay of the river district caked solidly about the racked hubs, I was stirred by the allurements of travel and adventure, the movement of human enterprise on the fourwenty ways of the world.

From my always seeming to see them so bemired with their recent passages, I gather that my observations must have been made chiefly in winter on my way to school. From other memories of Taylorville arched in by the full-leaved elms and maples, smelling of dust and syringas, and never quite separable from a suspicion of boredom, I judge my summer acquaintance with its streets to have been chiefly by way of going to church, for, until the winter I was eleven years old, Taylorville, the world in fact, meant Hadley's pasture.

It lay back of that part of the town where our house was,

contiguous to a common of abandoned orchard and cow lot, and if it lacked anything of adventurous occasion and delight, we, Forrie and Effie and I, the McGee children, and the little Allinghams, did not know it. There was a sort of convention of childhood that we should never go straight to it by the proper path, but it must always be taken by assault or stealth: over the woodhouse and then along the top of the orchard fence as far as you could manage without falling off, and then tagging the orchard trees; I remember there were times when we felt obliged to climb up every tree in our way and down on the other side, and so to the stump lot where the earliest violets were to be found – how blue it would be with them in April about the fairy ring of some decaying trunk! – and beyond the stump lot, the alder brook and the Stone-pit pond where we caught a pike once, come up from the river to spawn. Up from the brook ranged a wood over the shallow hills, farther and darker than we dared, and along its banks was every variety of pleasantness. There was always something to be done there, springs to be scooped out, rills to be dammed; always something to eat, sassafras root, minnows taken by hand and half cooked on surreptitious fires, red haws and hazelnuts; always some place to be visited with freshness and discovery, dark umbrageous corners to provide that dreaded and delighted panic of the wild.

But perhaps the best service the pasture did us was as a theatre for the dramatization of the bourgeoning social instinct. We played at church and school in it, at scalping and Robinson

Crusoe and the Three Bears. We went farther and played at High Priests and Oracles and Sacrifice – and what were we at Taylorville to know of such things?

If this were to be as full an account of my Art as it is of myself, I should have to stop here and try to have you understand how at this time I was all awash in the fluid stuff of it, buoyed and possessed by unknowledgable splendours, heroisms, tenderesses, a shifty glittering flood. I am always checked in my attempt to render this submerged childhood of mine by the recollection of my mother in the midst of the annoyance which any reference to it always caused her, trying judicially to account for it on the basis of my having read too much, with the lurking conviction at the bottom of all comment that a few more spankings might have effectually counteracted it. But though I read more than the other children, there was never very much to read in Taylorville at any time, and no amount of reading could have put into my mind what I found there – the sustaining fairy wonder of the world.

I was not, I think, different in kind from the other children, except as being more consistently immersed in it and never quite dispossessed. I have lost and rediscovered the way to it some several times; have indeed, had to defend its approaches with violence and skill: this whole business of the biography has no other point, in fact, than to show you how far my human behaviour has been timed to keep what I believe most people part with no more distressfully than with their milk teeth. Effie,

I know, has no recollection of this period other than that there was a time when the earth was hung with vestiges of splendour, and if my brother has kept anything of his original inheritance, he would sooner admit to a left over appetite for jujubes and liquorice; for Forester is fully of the common opinion that the fevers, flights and drops of temperament are the mere infirmity of Gift. There was a time, before I left off talking to Forester at all about my work, when he visibly permitted his pity to assuage his disgust at the persistence of so patent a silliness in me, and still earlier, before I owned three motor cars, an estate in Florida and a house on the Hudson, there were not wanting intimations of its voluntary assumption as a pose; pose in Forester's vocabulary standing for any frame of behaviour to which he is not naturally addicted. But there it was, the flux of experience rising to the surface of our plays, the reservoir from which later, without having personally contemplated such an act, I drew the authority for how Lady Macbeth must have felt, about to do a murder, from which if I had had a taste for it, I might have drawn with like assurance the necessity of the square of the hypotenuse to equal the squares of the other two sides.

It is curious that, though I cannot remember how my father looked nor who taught me long division, I recall perfectly how the reddening blackberry leaves lay under the hoar frost in Hadley's pasture, and the dew between the pale gold wires of the grass on summer mornings, and the very words and rites by which we paid observance to Snockerty. I am not sure whether Ellen

McGee or I invented him, but first and last he got us into as much trouble as though we had not always distinctly recognized him for an invention. The McGees lived quite around the corner of the pasture from us, and, as far as my memory serves, the whole seven of them had nothing to do but lie in wait for any appearance of ours in the stump lot; though in respect to their father being a section boss, and the family Catholic, we were not supposed, when we put on our good clothes and went out of the front gate, to meet them socially. I think there must have been also some parental restriction on our intercourse of play, for they never came to our house nor we to theirs; the little Allinghams, in fact, never would play with them. They came to play with us and only included the McGees on the implication of their being our guests. If at any time we three Lattimores were called away, Pauline, who was the eldest, would forthwith marshal her young tribe in exactly the same manner in which she afterward held Henry Mills in the paths of rectitude, and march them straight out of the big gate to their home. I remember how I used perfectly to hate the expression of the little Allinghams on these occasions and sympathize with the not always successfully repressed jeers of the McGees. Mrs. Allingham was the sort of woman who makes a point of having the full confidence of her children – detestable practice – and I have always suspected, in spite of the friendliness of the families, that the little Allinghams used to make a sort of moral instance of us whenever they fell into discredit with their parents. At any rate the report of our doings in Hadley's pasture

as they worked around through her to our mother, would lead to episodes of marked coolness, in which we held ourselves each loftily aloof from the other, until incontinently the spirit of play swirled us together again in a joyous democracy.

At the time when the Snockerty obsession overtook us, Ellen McGee was the only real rival I had for the leadership of the pasture; if she had not had, along with all her Irish quickness, a touch of Irish sycophancy, I should have lost all my ascendancy after the advent of Snockerty. I feel sure now that Ellen must have invented him; she was most enviably furnished in all the signs of lucky and unlucky and what it meant if you put your stocking on wrong side out in the morning, with charms to say for warts, and scraps of Old World song that had all the force of incantations. Her fairy tales too had a more convincing sound, for she got them from her father, who had always known somebody who knew the human participators. It was commonly insisted by Mrs. Allingham that the McGee children would never come to anything, and I believe, in fact, they never did, but they supplied an element of healthful vulgarity in our lives that, remembering Alfred Allingham's adolescent priggishness, I am inclined to think was very good for us.

If I have said nothing of my parents until now, it is because the part they played in our lives for the first ten years was, from our point of view, negligible. Parents were a sort of natural appendage of children, against whose solidarity our performance had room and opportunity. They kept the house together; they

staved off fear – no one, for instance, would think of sleeping in a place where there were no parents – they bulked large between us and the unknown. There was a general notion of our elders toward rubbing it into us that we ought to be excessively grateful to them for not having turned us adrift, *sans* food and housing, but I do not think we took it seriously.

Parents existed for the purpose of rendering the world livable for children, and on the whole their disposition was friendly, except in cases like Mrs. Allingham, who contrived always to give you a guilty sense of having forgot to wipe your feet or tramped on the flower borders. I do not think we had a more active belief in our parents' profession of absorption in our interests than in my father's pretence to be desperately wounded by Forester's popgun, or scared out of his wits when Effie jumped at him from behind the syringa bush. It was admittedly nice of them and it kept the game going, but there were also times when they did not manage it so successfully as we could have wished. I think that we never questioned their right to punish us for disobedience, perhaps because there is, after all, something intrinsically sound about the right of might, though we sometimes questioned the occasion, as when we had been told we might play in the pasture for an hour, of the passage of which we knew as much as wild pigeons. There was always, to me at least, an inexplicableness about such reprisals that mitigated against their moral issue. There was one point, however, upon which we all three opposed an unalterable front; we would not kiss and

make up after our private squabbles. We fought, or combined against neighbouring tribes, or divided our benefits with an even handedness that obtains nowhere as among children, but we would not be tricked into a status which it might be inconvenient to maintain. I am sure, though, that Mrs. Allingham used rather to put it over my mother for her inability to make little prigs of us.

"Mothers," she would say on the rare occasions when she came to call in the beaded dolman and black kid gloves which other Taylorvillians wore only on Sunday, "MOTHERS," with the effect of making it all capitals, "have an inestimable privilege in shaping their children's characters." This was when we had had our faces surreptitiously washed and been brought in for ceremonial inspection; and a little later she would add, with the air of having tactfully conveyed advice under the guise of information, "I always insist" – here Forester would kick me furtively – "*insist* on having the full confidence of mine," at which point my mother would make excuses to get me out of the room before I, who never could learn that people are not always of the mind they think they are, made embarrassing disclosures.

Up to this time my mother figures chiefly as a woman who tied up our hurts and overruled my father when he tried to beg us off from going to church. I suppose it was the baby always in arms or expected that kept us from romping all over her as we did with my father; and much of her profession of interest in us, which came usually at the end of admonitory occasions, had the cold futility of the family prayers that my mother tried to make

appear part of the habitual order when Cousin Judd came to stay with us.

I do not know whether he suspected the hollowness of our morning worship, but I am sure I was never in the least imposed upon by the high moral attitude from which my mother attempted to deal with my misbehaviours. She used to conduct these interviews on the prescription of certain books by the reading of which I was afterward corrupted, on a basis of shocked solemnity that, as she was not without a sense of humour, often broke down under my raw disbelief. Forester, always amenable to suggestion, was sometimes reduced to writhing contrition by these inquisitorial attempts, but I came away from them oftenest not a little embarrassed by her inability to bring anything to pass by them.

I do not think our detachment was greater than is common with young children in families where they are pushed out of their privilege of cuddling as fast as they were in ours. There was thirteen months between Forester and me, another brother, early dead, before Effie, and two that came after. The children who died were always sickly; I think it probable in the country phrase, so appalling in its easy acceptance, my mother had "never seen a well day"; and what was meant to be the joy of loving was utterly swamped for her in its accompanying dread. I seem to have been born into the knowledge that the breast, the lap, and the brooding tenderness were the sole prerogative of babies; it was imperative to your larger estate not to exhibit the weakness

of wanting them. There comes back to me in this connection an evening with us three, Forester, Effie and I, squeezed on to the lowest step of the stairs for company, my mother in the dusk, rocking and singing one of those wildly sweet and tragic melodies that the men brought back out of the South as seeds are carried in a sheep's coat. To this day I cannot hear it without a certain swelling to let in the smell of the summer dusk and the flutter of the bats outside and the quaver of my mother's voice. I could see the baby's white gown hanging over her arm – it was the next one after Effie, and already she must have been expecting the next – and the soft screech of the rocker on the deal floor, and all at once I knew, with what certainty it hurts me still to remember, how it felt to be held so close ... *close* ... and safe ... and the swell of the breast under the song, and the swing of the rocker ... knew it as if I had been but that moment dispossessed ... and the need ... as I know now I have always needed to be so enfolded.

I do not remember just what happened; I seem to have come to from a fit of passionate crying, climbed up out of it by a hand that gripped me by the shoulder and shook me occasionally by way of hastening my composure. I was struggling desperately to get away from it ... away from the mother, who held me so to the mother I had just remembered ... and there was Jule, the maid, holding up the lamp, ordering me to bed in the dark for having spoiled our quiet evening. Then after what seemed a long time, Effie snuggled up to me under the covers, terrified by my sudden accession of sobs but too loyal to call down the household upon

us.

It came back ... the need of mothering. There was a time when I had lain abed some days with the measles or whatever. I was small enough, I remember, to lie in the crib bed that was kept downstairs for the prevalent baby ... and my mouth was dry with fever. I recall my mother standing over me and my being taken dreadfully with the need of that sustaining bosom, and her stooping to my stretched arms divinely ... and then ... I asked her to put me down again. I have had drops and sinkings, but nothing to compare with this, for there was nothing there you understand ... the release, the comforting ... it wasn't there ... *it was never there at all!*

## CHAPTER III

But I began to tell you how Ellen McGee and I invented Snockerty and arrived at our first contact with organized society, at least Forrie and Effie and I did, for it led to our being interdicted the society of the McGee children for so long that we forgot to inquire what inconvenience, if any, they suffered on account of it.

You will see for yourself that Ellen must have invented him – where, indeed, should a saint-abhorring, Sunday-schooled Taylorville child get the stuff for it? God we knew, and were greatly bored by His inordinate partiality for the Jews as against all ancient peoples, and by the inquisitorial eye and ear forever at the keyhole of our lives, as Cousin Judd never spared to remind us; and personally I was convinced of a large friendliness brooding over Hadley's pasture, to the sense of which I woke every morning afresh, was called by it, and to it; walking apart from the others, I vaguely prayed. But Snockerty was of the stripe of trolls, leprechauns, pucks, and hobgoblins.

We began, I remember, by thinking of him as resident in an old hollow apple tree, down which, if small trifles were dropped, they fell out of reach and sound. There was the inviting hole, arm high in the apple trunk, into which you popped bright pebbles, bits of glass – and I suppose He might have sprung very naturally from the need of justifying your having parted with something

you valued and couldn't get back again, at the prompting of an impulse you did not understand. Very presently the practice grew into the acknowledgment of a personality amenable to our desires.

We took to dropping small belongings in the tree for an omen of the day: whether the spring was full or not, or if we should find any pawpaws in the wood, and drew the augury from anything that happened immediately afterward: say, if the wind ruffled the leaves or if a rabbit ran out of the grass.

It was Ellen who showed the most wit in interpreting the signs and afterward reconciling their inconsistencies, but it was I conceived the notion of propitiating Snockerty, who by this time had come to exercise a marked influence on all our plays, by a species of dramatic entertainment made up of scraps of school exercises, Sunday hymns, recitations, and particularly of improvisations in which Ellen and I vied. There were times when, even in the midst of these ritualistic observances, we would go off at a tangent of normal play, quite oblivious of Snockerty; other times we were so worked upon by our own performance as to make sacrifices of really valuable possessions and variously to afflict ourselves.

It was I, I remember, who scared one of the little Allinghams almost into fits by my rendering in the name of Snockerty of an anathema which I had picked up somewhere, but it was Ellen who contrived to extend His influence over the whole of our territory by finding in every decaying stump and hollow trunk, a means

of communication, and deriving therefrom authority for any wild prank that happened to come into her head. It is curious that in all the escapades which were imposed on us in the name of our deity, for which we were duly punished, not one word of the real cause of our outbreaks ever leaked through to our parents. It was the only thing, I believe, the little Allinghams never told their mother, not even when the second youngest in a perfect frenzy of propitiation, made a sacrifice of a handful of his careful curls which I personally hacked off for him with Forester's pocket knife. He lied like a little gentleman and said he had cut them off himself because he was tired of looking like a girl baby.

I think it must have been about the end of Snockerty's second summer that Ellen's wild humour got us all into serious trouble which resulted in my first real contact with authority.

Along the west side of Hadley's pasture, between it and the county road, lay the tilled fields of the Ross property, corn and pumpkins and turnips, against which a solemn trespass board advised us. It was that board, no doubt, which led to our always referring to the owner of it as old man Ross, for except as he was a tall, stooping, white-bearded, childless man, I do not know how he had deserved our disrespect. I have suspected since that the trespass sign did not originate wholly in the alleged cantankerousness of farmer Ross, and that the McGees knew more of the taste of his young turnips and roasting ears than they admitted at the time when Snockerty announced to Ellen through the hollow of a dark, gnarly oak at the foot of Hadley's

hill, that he would be acceptably served by a feast of green corn and turnips out of Ross's field. This was the first time the idea of such a depredation had occurred to us, I believe, for we were really good children in the main, but I do not think we had any notion of disobeying. Personally I rather delighted in the idea of being compelled to desperate enterprises. I recall the wild freebooting dash, the scramble over the fence, the rustle of the corn full of delicious intimations of ambush and surprise, the real fear of coming suddenly on old man Ross among the rows, where I suspect we did a great deal of damage in the search for ears suitable to roast, and the derisive epithets which we did not spare to fling over our shoulders as we escaped into the brush with our booty. There was a perfect little carnival of wickedness in the safe hollow where we stripped the ears for roasting – fires too were forbidden us – where we dared old man Ross to come on, gave dramatic rehearsals of what we should do to him in that event, and revelled in forbidden manners and interdicted words. I remember the delightful shock of hearing Alfred Allingham declare that he meant to get his belly full of green corn anyway, for belly was a word that no well brought up Taylorville child was expected to use on any occasion; and finally how we all took hands in a wild dance around the fire and over it, crying,

"Snockerty, Snockerty, Snockerty!"

in a sort of savage singsong.

Following on the heels of that, a sort of film came over the performance, an intimation of our disgust in each other at the

connivance of wrongdoing. I remember, as we came up through the orchard rather late, this feeling grew upon us: the sense of taint, of cheapness, which swelled into a most abominable conviction of guilt as we discovered old man Ross on the front porch talking to our father. And then with what a heaviness of raw turnips and culpability we huddled in about our mother, going with brisk movements to and fro getting supper, and how she cuffed us out of her way, not knowing in the least what old man Ross had come about. Finally the overwhelming consciousness of publicity swooped down upon us at my father's coming in through the door, very white and angry, wanting to know if this were true that he had heard – and it was the utmost limit of opprobriousness that our father should get to know of our misdeeds at all. Times before, when we downrightly transgressed by eating wild crabs, or taking off our stockings to wade in the brook too early in the season, we bore our mother's strictures according to our several dispositions. Forester, I remember, was troubled with sensibility and used fairly to give us over to wrath by the advertisement of guilty behaviour. He had a vocation for confession, wept copiously under whippings which did him a world of good, and went about for days with a chastened manner which irritated me excessively. I believe now that he was quite sincere in it, but there was a feeling among the rest of us that he carried the admission of culpability too far. Myself, since I never entered on disobedience without having settled with myself that the fun of it would be worth the pains, scorned repentance,

and endured correction with a philosophy which got me the reputation of being a hardened and froward child. That we did not, on this basis, get into more serious scrapes was due to Effie, who could never bear any sort of unpleasantness. Parents, if you crossed them, had a way of making things so very unpleasant.

It was Effie who, if we went to the neighbours for a stated visit, kept her eye upon the clock, and if she found us yielding to temptation, was fertile in the invention of counter exploits just as exciting and quite within the parental pale, and when we did fall, had a genius for extrication as great as Forester's for propitiatory behaviour. So it fell out that our piratical descent on Ross's field was our first encounter with an order of things that transcended my mother's personal jurisdiction.

Up to this time contact with our parents' world had got no farther than vainglorious imaginings of our proper entry into it, and now suddenly we found that we were in it, haled there by our own acts in the unhappy quality of offenders. I think this was the first time in my life that I had been glad it was Forester who was the boy and not I who was made to go with my father and Mr. Allingham to Ross's field to point out the damage, for which they paid.

It was this which sealed the enormity of our offence, money was paid for it, and came near to losing its moral point with Forrie, who felt himself immeasurably raised in the estimate of the other boys as a public character. It served, along with my father's anger, which was so new to us, to raise the occasion to a

solemn note against which mere switchings were inconsiderable. No doubt my brother has forgotten it by now, along with Effie, who got off with nothing worse than the complicity of having been one of us, but to me the incident takes rank as the beginning of a new kind of Snockertism which was to array itself indefinitely against the forces inappreciably sucking at the bottom of my life.

It was as if, on the very first occasion of my swimming to the surface of my lustrous seas, I was taken with a line at the end of which I was to be played into shoals and shallows, to foul with my flounderings some clear pools and scatter the peace of many smaller fry – I mean the obligation of repute, the necessity of being loyal to what I found in the world because it had been founded in sincerity with pains. For what my father made clear to us as the very crux of our transgression, was that we had discredited our bringing up. Old man Ross could be paid for his vegetables, but there was nothing, I was given to understand, could satisfy our arrears to our parents' honour, which, it transpired, had been appallingly blackened in the event.

Nothing in my whole life has so surprised me as the capacity of this single adventure for involving us in successive coils of turpitude and disaster; though it was not until we followed my father into the best room the next morning after he had seen Mr. Allingham, still rather sick, for the turnips had not agreed with us, that we realized the worst, rounding on us through a stream of dreadful, biting things that, as my father uttered them, seemed to

float us clear beyond the pale of sympathy and hope. I remember my father walking up and down with his hands under his coat behind, a short man in my recollection, with a kind of swing in his walk which curiously nobody but myself seems to have noticed, and a sort of electrical flash in his manner which might have come, as in this instance, from our never being brought up before him except when we had done something thoroughly exasperating: I am not sure that I did not tell Ellen McGee, in an attempt to render the magnitude of our going over, that he rated us in full uniform, waving his sword, which at that moment hung with his regimentals over the mantelpiece.

"Good heavens," he said, "you might have been arrested for it – my children —*mine*— and I thought I could have trusted you. Good heavens!"

Suddenly he reached out as it were over my brother's shoulder, to whom in his capacity as the eldest son most of this tirade was addressed, with a word for me that was to go tearing its way sorely to the seat of memory and consciousness, and, lodging there, become the one point of attachment to support the memory of him beyond his death.

"As for you, Olivia," I started at this, for I had been staying my misery for the moment on a red and black table cover which my mother valued, and I was amazed to find myself still able to hate – "as for you, Olivia May" – he would never allow my name to be shortened in the least – "I *am* surprised at you."

He had expected better of me then; he had reached beyond my

surfaces and divined what I was inarticulately sure of, that I was different – no, not better – but somehow intrinsically different. He was surprised at me; he did not say so much of Forester, and he *did* say that it was exactly what he had expected of the McGees, but he had had a better opinion of me. I recall a throb of exasperation at his never having told me. I might have lived up to it. But with all the soreness of having dropped short of a possible estimate, that phrase, which might have gone no deeper than his momentary disappointment, is all I have on which to hang the faith that perhaps ... perhaps some vision had shaped on his horizon of what I might become. I was never anything to my mother, I know, but a cuckoo's egg dropped in her creditable nest. "But," said my father, "I *am* surprised at *you*."

He was, I believe, one of those men who make a speciality of integrity and of great dependability in public service, which is often brought to answer for the want of private success; an early republican type fast being relegated to small towns and country neighbourhoods. He had a brilliant war record which was partly responsible for his office, and a string of debts pendent from some earlier mercantile enterprise, which, in the occasion they afforded of paying up under circumstances of great stringency, appeared somehow an additional burnish to his name. He was a man everybody liked; that he was extremely gentle and gay in his manner with us on most occasions, I remember very well, and I think he must have had a vein of romance, though I do not know upon what grounds except that among the few books

that he left, many were of that character, and from the names of his children, Forester, Olivia May, and Ephemera, called Effie for short, which were certainly not Taylorvillian. Forester grew out of a heroic incident of his soldiering, of which I have forgotten all the particulars except that the other man's name was Forester, and my father's idea of giving it to his son who was born about that time, was that when he should grow up, and be distinguished, the double name of Forester Lattimore should serve at once as a reminder and a certificate of appreciation. I recall that we children, or perhaps it was only I, used to abound in dramatic imaginings of what would happen when this belated recognition took place, though in fact nothing ever came of it, which might have been largely owing to my brother's turning out the least distinguished of men.

Whether if my father had lived he would have remained always as much in the dark as to the private sources of my behaviour, I try not to guess, but this incident picked him out for me among the ruck of fathers as a man distinguished for propriety, produced, in the very moment of pronouncing me unworthy of it, the ideal of a personal standard. If he hadn't up to this time affected greatly my gratitude or affections, he began to shine for me now with some of the precious quality which inheres in dreams. And before the shine had gone off I lost him.

## CHAPTER IV

My father's death, which occurred the March following, came suddenly, wholly fortuitous to the outward eye, and I have heard my mother say, in its inconsequence, its failure to line up with any conceivable moral occasion, did much to shake her faith in a controlling Providence; but affects me still as then, as the most incontrovertible of evidences of Powers moving at large among men, occupied with other affairs than ours. A little while ago, as I sat writing here on my veranda, looking riverward, an ant ran across my paper, which I blew out with my breath into space, and I did not look to see what disaster. It reminded me suddenly of the way I felt about my father's taking off. He was, he must have been, in the way of some god that March morning; that is one of the evidences by which you know that there are gods at all. You play happily about their knees, sometimes they play with you, then you stumble against a foot thrust out, or the clamour of your iniquity disturbs their proper meditations, and suddenly you are silenced. My mother was doubtless right; it would have been better if he had stayed with her and the children, certainly happier, but he got in the way of the Powers.

It is curious that until I began just now to reconstruct the circumstances in which the news of his death came to me, I never realized that I might have been looking on, but high above it, at the very instant and occasion, for, from the window of my room

in the second story of the Taylorville grammar school I could see the unfinished walls of the Zimmern block aglitter with the light which the wind heaped up and shattered against their raw pink surfaces, and a loose board of the scaffolding allowed to remain up all winter, flacking like a torn leaf in the mighty current in which the school building, all the buildings, shook with the steady tremor of reeds in a freshet. Between them the tops of the maples, level like a shorn hedge, kept up an immensity of tormented motion that invaded even the schoolroom with a sense of its insupportable fatigues. I remember there were few at their desks that day, and all the discipline relaxed by the confusion of the wind. At the morning recess there had been some debate about dismissing the session, and one of the young teachers on the third floor had grown hysterical and been reprimanded by the principal.

It must have been about eleven of the clock, while I was watching the little puffs of dust that rose between the planks of the flooring whenever the building shuddered and ground its teeth, divided between an affectation of timorousness which seemed to grow in favour as a suitable frame of behaviour, and the rapid rise of every tingling sense to the spacious movement of the weather and my private dramatization of the demolition of the building, from which only such occupants as I favoured should be rescued by my signal behaviour. Already several children had been abstracted by anxious parents, so that I failed to be even startled by another knocking until my attention was

attracted by the teacher opening the door, and opening it wide upon my Uncle Alva.

I saw him step back with a motion of his head sidewise, to draw her after him, but it took all the suggestive nods and winks that, as she drew it shut behind her, were focussed on my desk, to pull me up to the realization that his visit must have something to do with me. It was not, in fact, until I was halfway down the aisle after Miss Jessel called me, that I recovered my surprise sufficiently to assume the mysteriously important air that was proper to the fifth grade on being privileged to answer the door.

There was not, I am sure, in the brief information that I was wanted at home, one betraying syllable; nothing sufficiently unusual in the way Miss Jessel tied me into my hood, nor in finding Effie tied into hers on the first floor, nor in the way her teacher kissed her – everybody kissed Effie who was allowed – nothing in Forester's having already cleared out without waiting for us. We got into the town in the wake of Uncle Alva and between the business blocks where the tall buildings abated the wind. There was no traffic in the streets that day. Here and there a foot passenger with his hat held down by both hands and his coat tails between his legs, staggered into doorways which were snapped to behind him, and from the glass of which faces looked out featureless in the blur of the wind. As we passed the side door of a men's clothing establishment one of these pale human orbs approached to the pane, exhibited a peering movement, rapped on the glass and beckoned. I know now this must have been the

working of an instinct to which Taylorville was so habituated that it seemed natural to Uncle Alva – he was only my mother's half brother, not my father's – to send us on with a word about overtaking us, while he crossed the street at the instance of that beckoning finger to be chaffered with in the matter of my father's grave clothes. All this time there was not a word spoken that could convey to us children the import of our unexpected release. We drifted down the street, Effie and I, sidling against the blasts that drove furiously in the crossways, and finally as we caught our breath under a long red sandstone building, I recall being taken violently, as it were, by knowledge, and crying out that my father was dead, that he was dead and I should never see him again. I do not know how I knew, but I knew, and Effie accepted it; she came cuddling up to me in the smother of the wind, trying to comfort me as if, as I think did not occur to her, he had been my father only and not hers at all. I do not recall very well how we got across the town between the shut houses, high shouldered with the cold, except that Uncle Alva did not come up with us, and the vast lapping of the wind that swirled us together at intervals in a community of breathlessness, seemed somehow to have grown out of the occasion and be naturally commensurate with its desolating quality. I do not think it occurred to us as strange that we should have been left so to come to the knowledge that grew until, as we came in sight of our home, we were fairly taken aback to find it so little altered from what it had been when we left it three hours before. It had never been

an attractive house: yellow painted, with chocolate trimmings and unshuttered windows against which the wind contrived. It cowered in a wide yard full of unpruned maples that now held up their limbs protestingly, that shook off from their stretched boughs, disclaimers of responsibility; the very smoke wrenched itself from the chimney and escaped, hurryingly upon the wind; the shrubbery wrung itself; whole flights of fallen leaves that had settled soddenly beside the borders all the winter, having at last got a plain sight of it, whirled up aghast and fled along the road. The blinds were down at the front windows, and no one came in or out.

I remember our hanging there on the opposite side of the street for an appreciable interval before trusting ourselves to a usualness which every moment began to appear more frightening, and being snatched back from the brink of panic by the rattle of wheels in the road behind us as a light buggy, all aglitter from point to point of its natty furnishings, drew up at our gate and discharged from the seat beside the driver a youngish man, all of a piece with the turnout, in the trim and shining blackness of his exterior, who, with a kind of subdued tripping, ran up the walk and entered at the door without a knock. I am not sure that Effie identified him as the man who had taken away the babies, indeed, the two who came after Effie were so close together and went so soon, that I have heard her say that she has no recollection of anything except a house enlivened by continuous baby; but she had the knowledge common to every

Taylorville child of the undertaker as the only man who was let softly in at unknocked doors, with his frock coat buttoned tight and the rim of his black hat held against his freshly shaven chin. We snatched the knowledge from one another as we caught hands together and fairly dove into the side entrance that opened on the living room.

The first thing I was aware of was the sound of Forester blubbering, and then of the place being full of neighbours and my mother sitting by the fire in a chair out of the best room, crying heartily. We flung ourselves upon her, crying too, and were gathered up in a violence of grief and rocking, through which I could hear a great many voices in a kind of frightened and extenuating remonstrance, "Come now, Mrs. Lattimore. Now Sally – there, there – " at every word of which my mother's sobbing broke out afresh. I remember getting done with my crying first and being very hot and uncomfortable and thinking of nothing but how I should wriggle out of her embrace and get away, anywhere to escape from the burden of having to seem to care; and then, but whether it was immediately after I am not sure, going rather heavily upstairs and being overtaken in the middle of it by the dramatic suggestion of myself as an orphan child toiling through the world – I dare say I had read something like that recently – and carrying out the suggestion with an immense effect on Uncle Alva, who happened to be coming down at that moment. And then the insidious spread through all my soul of cold disaster, out of which I found myself

unable to rise even to the appearance of how much I cared.

Of all that time my father lay dead in the best room, for by the usual Taylorville procedure the funeral could not take place until the afternoon of the second day, I have only snatches of remembrance: of my being taken in to look at him as he lay in the coffin in a very nice coat which I had never seen him wear, and the sudden conviction I had of its somehow being connected with that mysterious summons which had taken Uncle Alva away from us that morning in the street; of the "sitting up," which was done both nights by groups of neighbours, mostly young; and the festive air it had with the table spread with the best cloth and notable delicacies; and mine and Forester's reprisals against one another as to the impropriety of squabbling over the remains of a layer cake. And particularly of Cousin Judd.

He came about dusk from the farm – he had been sent for – looking shocked, and yet with a kind of enjoyable solemnity, I thought; and the first thing he wished to do was to pray with my poor mother.

"We must submit ourselves to the will of God, Sally," he urged.

"O God! *God!*" said my mother, walking up and down. "I'm not so sure God had anything to do with it."

"It's a wrong spirit, Sally, a wrong spirit – a spirit of rebellion." My mother began to cry.

"Why couldn't God have left him alone? What had he done that he should be taken away? What have *I* done – "

"You mustn't take it like this, Sally. Think of your duty to your children. 'The Lord giveth' – "

"Go tell Him to give me back my husband, then – "

Effie and I cowered in our corner between the base burner and the sewing machine; it was terrible to hear them so, quarrelling about God. My mother had her hands to her head as she walked; her figure touched by the firelight, not quite spoiled by childbearing, looked young to me.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she cried with every step.

"You mustn't, Sally; you'll be punished for it – "

Cousin Judd shook with excitement; he was bullying her about her Christian submission. I went up to him suddenly and struck him on the arm with my fist.

"You let her alone!" I cried. "Let her alone!"

Somebody spoke out sharply, I think; a hand plucked me from behind – to my amazement my mother's.

"Olivia, Olivia May! I *am* surprised ... and your father not out of the house yet. Go up to your room and see if you can't learn to control yourself!"

After all there was some excuse for Cousin Judd. There was, in the general estimate, something more than fortuitous circumstance that went to my father's taking off. Early in the winter, when work had been stopped on the Zimmern building, there had been a good deal of talk about some local regulations as to the removal of scaffolding and the security of foot passengers. That the contractors had not been brought to book about it

was thought to be due to official connivance; my father had written to the paper about it. But the scaffolding had remained until that morning of the high wind, when it came down all together and a bit of the wall with it. That my father should have been passing on his way to the courthouse at the moment, was a leaping together of circumstances that seemed somehow to have raised it to the plane of a moral instance. It provided just that element of the dramatic in human affairs, which somehow wakens the conviction of having always expected it; though it hardly appeared why my father, rather than the contractor or the convincing city official, should have been the victim. If it wasn't an act of Providence, it was so like one that it contributed to bring out to the funeral more people than might otherwise have ventured themselves in such weather.

It was also thought that if anything of that nature could have made up to her, my mother should have found much to console her in the funeral. The Masons took part in it, as also the G. A. R. and the Republican Club, though they might have made a more imposing show of numbers if all the societies had not been so largely composed of the same members. In addition to all this, my mother's crape came quite to the hem of her dress and Effie and I had new hats. I remember those hats very well; they had very tall crowns and narrow brims and velvet trimmings, and we tried them on for Pauline Allingham after we had gone up to bed the night before the funeral. Mrs. Allingham had called and Pauline had been allowed to come up to us. I remember her

asking how we felt, and Effie's being as much impressed by the way in which I carried off the situation as if she had not been in the least concerned in it. And then we sat up in bed in our nightgowns and tried on the hats while Pauline walked about to get the effect from both sides, and refrained, in respect to the occasion, from offering any criticism.

It was the evening after the funeral and everybody had gone away but one good neighbour. The room had been set in order while we were away at the cemetery; the lamp was lit and there was a red glow on everything from the deep heart of the base burner. The woman went about softly to set a meal for us, and under the lamp there was a great bowl of quince marmalade which she had brought over neighbourly from her own stores; the colour of it played through the clear glass like a stain upon the white cloth. It happened to have been a favourite dish of my father's.

For the last year it had been a family use, he being delicate in his appetite, to make a point of saving for him anything which he might possibly eat, and taking the greatest satisfaction in his enjoyment. Therefore it came quite natural for me to get a small dish from the cupboard and begin to serve out a portion of Mrs. Mason's preserves for my father. All at once it came over me ... the meaning of bereavement; that there was nobody to be done for tenderly; the loss of it ... the need of the heart for all its offices of loving ... and the unavailing pain.

## CHAPTER V

It followed soon on my father's death that we gave up the yellow house with the chocolate trimmings and took another near the high school, and that very summer my mother lengthened my skirts halfway to my shoe tops and began to find fault with my behaviour "for a girl of your age." We saw no more of the McGees after that except as Ellen managed to keep on in the same class at school with me; and Pauline and I found ourselves with a bosom friendship on our hands.

I went on missing my father terribly, but in a child's inarticulate fashion, and it is only lately that I have realized how much of my life went at loose ends for the loss out of it of a man's point of view and the appreciable standards which grow out of his relation to the community. Ever since the Snockerty episode there had been glimmers on my horizon of the sort of rightness owing from a daughter of Henry Lattimore, but now that I had no longer the use of the personal instance, I lost all notion of what those things might be; for though I have often heard my mother spoken of as one of the best women in the world, she was the last to have provided me with a definite pattern of behaviour.

Pauline had struck out a sort of social balance for herself grounded on the fear of what was "common." Her mother had a day at home, from which seemed to flow an orderly perspective of social observances, for which my mother, never having arrived

at the pitch of visiting cards, afforded me no criterion whatever.

She had been a farmer's daughter in another part of the state, and had done something for herself in the way of school teaching before she married my father. My grandparents I never saw, but I seem to recall at such public occasions as county fairs and soldiers' reunions, certain tall, farmer-looking men and their badly dressed wives, who called her cousin and were answered by their Christian names, whom I understand to be my mother's relatives without accepting them as mine. They were all soldiers though, the men of our family; you saw it at once in the odd stiffness sitting on their farmer carriage like the firm strokes of a master on a pupil's smudged drawing. I think I got my first notion of the quality of experience in the way they exalted themselves in the memories of marches and battles. There had been a station of the underground railway not ten miles from Taylorville, and there had gone out from the town at the first call, a volunteer company with so many Judds and Wilsons and Lattimores on the roster that it read like the record of a family Bible. They had gone out from, they had come back to, a life as little relieved by adventure as the flat horizon of their corn lands, but in the interim they had stretched themselves, endured, conquered. I have heard political economists of the cross roads account variously for the prosperity of Ohianna in the decade following the civil outbreak, but I have never heard it laid to the revitalizing of our common stock by the shock of its moral strenuositities.

To this day I question whether Cousin Judd got more out of

his religion than out of this most unchristian experience, from which he had come back silver tipped as it were, from that emperym into which men pass when they are by great emotions a little removed from themselves, to kindle in my young mind a realization of the preciousness of passion over all human assets. It came to me, however, in the years between twelve and fifteen that my mother's relations did things with their knives and neglected others with their forks that were not done in circles that by virtue of just such observances, got themselves called Good Society. I was aware of a sort of gracelessness in their vital processes, in much the same way that I knew that the striped and flowered carpet in my mother's best room did not harmonize with the wall paper, and that the curtains went badly with them both. I have to go back to this, and to the fact that my clothes were chosen for wearing qualities rather than becomingness, to account for a behaviour that, as I began to emerge from the illumined mists of play, my mother complained of under the head of my "not taking an interest."

How else was I to protect myself from the thousand inharmonies that chafed against the budding instinct of beauty: the plum-coloured ribbons I was expected to wear with my brown dress, the mottled Japanese pattern upon the gilt ground of the wall paper, against which I had pushed out a kind of shell, hung within with the glittering stuff of dreams.

For just about the time I should have been absorbed in Cousin Lydia's beaded dolman and the turning of my mother's one silk,

I was regularly victimized by the fits and starts of temperament, instinctive efforts toward the rehearsal of greater passions than had appeared above my horizon, flashes of red and blue and gold thrown up on the plain Taylorville surface of my behaviour, with the result of putting me at odds with the Taylorvillians.

It was as if, being required to produce a character, I found myself with samples of a great many sorts on my hands which I kept offering, hopeful that they might be found to match with the acceptable article, which, I may say here, they never did. They were good samples too, considering how young I was, of the Magdas, Ophelias, Antigones I was yet to become, of the great lady, good comrade and lover, but the most I got by it was the suspicion of insincerity and affectation. I sensitively suffered the more from it as I was conscious of the veering of this inward direction, without being able to prove what I was sure of, its relevance to the Shining Destiny toward which I moved. If you ask how this assurance differed from the general human hope of a superior happiness, I can only say that the event has proved it, and as early as I was aware of it, moved me childishly to acts of propitiation. I wanted gratefully to be good, with a goodness acceptable to the Powers from which such assurance flowed, but it was a long time before I could separate my notion of this from my earliest ideal of what would have been suitable behaviour to my father, so that all the upward reach of adolescence was tinged by my sense of loss in him.

It was when I was about thirteen and had not yet forgotten

how my father looked, that I made an important discovery; on the opposite side of the church, and close to the Amen corner, sat a man with something in the cut of his beard, in the swing of his shoulders, at which some dying nerve started suddenly athrob. I must have seen him there a great many times without noticing, and perhaps the likeness was not so much as I had thought, and I had had to wait until my recollection faded to its note of faint suggestion, but from that day I took to going out of my way to school to pass by Mr. Gower's place of business for the sake of the start of memory that for the moment brought my father near again. I even went so far as to mention to my mother that I liked sitting in church where I could look at Mr. Gower because he reminded me of somebody. We were on our way home on Sunday night – we were always taken to church twice on Sunday – Forester was on ahead with Effie, and just as we came along under the shadow of the spool factory, I had reached up to tuck my hand under my mother's arm and make my timid suggestion.

"Well, somebody who?" said my mother.

"Of my father – "

"Oh," said my mother, "that's just your fancy." But she did not shake off my hand from her arm as was her habit toward proffers of affection, and the moment passed for one of confidence between us. I was convinced that she must have taken notice of the likeness for herself. That was in the spring, and all that summer vacation I spent a great deal of time playing with Nettie Gower for the sake of seeing her father come at the gate about

five in the afternoon the way mine had done.

Nettie was not an attractive child, and of an age better suited to Effie, who couldn't bear her; the relation, it seemed, wanted an explanation, but it never occurred to me that so long as I withheld my own, another would be found for it. Nettie's brother found it about the time that my friendship with his sister was at its most flourishing. He was no nicer than you would expect a brother of Nettie's to be, though he was good-looking in a red-cheeked way, with a flattened curl in the middle of his forehead, and of late he had taken to hanging about Nettie and me, looking at me with a curious sort of smirk that I was not quite arrived at knowing for the beginning gallantry. He knew perfectly well that I did not come to see Nettie because I was fond of her, but it was yet for me to discover that he thought it was because I was fond of him. I remember I was making a bower in the asparagus bed; I was too old to play in the asparagus bed, but I was making a point of being good enough to do it on Nettie's account, and I had asked Charlie for his knife to cut the stems.

"Come and get it." He was holding it out to me hollowed in his palm; and he would not let go my hand.

"You don't want no knife," he leered sickeningly. "I know what you want." Suddenly I caught sight of Nettie's face with its straight thick plaits of hair and near-sighted eyes narrowed at me behind her glasses, and it struck me all at once that she had never taken my interest in her seriously either.

"Well, what?" I began defensively.

"This!" He thrust out his face toward mine, but I was too quick for him. That was my first sex encounter, and it didn't somehow make it any the less exasperating to realize that what lay behind my sudden interest in Nettie couldn't now be brought forward in extenuation, but I am always glad that I slapped Charlie Gower before the paralyzing sense of being trapped by my own behaviour overtook me. I hadn't found the words yet for the unimagined disgust of the boy's impertinence when, as I was helping to wipe the dishes that evening after supper, I tried to put it to my mother on a new basis which the incident seemed to have created, of our being somehow ranged together against such offences. It was the time for us to have emerged a little from the family relation to the freemasonry of sex, but my mother missed knowing it.

"I am not going to Nettie Gower's any more," I began.

"No?" said my mother; and of course I could not conceive that she had forgotten the confidence in which the connection with Nettie began.

"That Charlie ... I just hate him. You know, he thought I was coming to see Nettie because of him."

"Well," said my mother, turning out the dishwater, "perhaps you were."

And that, I think it safe to say, is as near as my family ever came to understanding the processes at work behind the incidents of my growing up. Yet I think my mother very often did know that the key to my behaviour did not lie in the obvious explanation

of it; and a sort of aversion toward what was strange, which I have come to think of as growing out of her unsophistication, kept her from admitting it. It was less disconcerting to have my springs of action accounted for on the basis of what Mrs. Allingham would have called "common," than to have it arraigned by her own standard as "queer." There was always in Taylorville a certain caddishness toward innovations of conduct, which we youngsters railed at as countrified, which I now perceive to have been no worse than the instinctive movement to lessen by despising it, the terror, the deep, far-rooted terror of the unknown. The incident served, however, to supersede with resentment the sense of personal definite loss in which it had begun.

Before the year was out I had so far forgotten my father that I saw no resemblance to him in Mr. Gower and would not have recognized it had I met it anywhere, though the want of fathering had its share no doubt in landing me, as I cast about for an appreciable rule to live by, in what I have already described as a superior sort of Snockertism. The immediate step to it was my getting converted. That very winter all Taylorville and the six townships were caught up in one of those acute emotional crises called a Revival. It had begun in the Methodist, and gradually involved the whole number of Protestant churches, and had overflowed into the Congregational building as affording the greatest seating room; by the middle of February it was possible to feel through the whole community the ground swell of its disturbances. Night after night the people poured in to it

to be played in spirit, striped, agonized, exalted at the hands of a practised evangelist, which they *liked*; as it had the cachet of being supernaturally good for them, they liked it with a deeper, more soul-stretching enjoyment than the operas, theatres, social adventure of cities, supposing they had been at hand.

It hardly seems possible with all she had to do, and yet I think my mother could not have missed one of those meetings, going regularly with Cousin Judd, who drove in from the farm more times than you would have thought the farm could have spared him, or with Forester, who had been converted the winter before, though I think he must have regretted the smaller occasion. Left at home with Effie who was thought too young to be benefited by the preaching and too old to be laid by in an overcoat on the Sunday-school benches with dozens of others, heavy with sleep and the vitiated air, late, when I had finished my arithmetic and was afraid to go to bed in the empty house, I would open the window a crack toward the blur on the night from the tall, shutterless windows of the church, and catch the faint swell of the hymns and at times the hysteric shout of some sinner "coming through," and I was as drawn to it as any savage to the roll of the medicine drums.

The backwash of this excitement penetrated even to the schoolroom, as from time to time some awed whisper ran of this and that one of our classmates being converted, and walking apart from us with the other saved in a chastened mystery. And finally Pauline Allingham and I talked it over and decided to

get converted too. Pauline, I remember, had not been allowed to attend the meetings and considered her spiritual welfare jeopardized in the prohibition. We knew by this time perfectly well what we had to do, and had arranged to get excused from our respective rooms – Pauline was a grade behind me on account of diphtheria the previous winter – and to meet in the abandoned coal-hole between the boys' and girls' basement. Pauline, who had always an aptitude for proselyting, brought another girl from the sixth grade, who was also under conviction – we had the terms very pat – a thin, hatchet-faced girl who joined the Baptist Church and afterward married a minister, so that she might very easily have reckoned the incident at something like its supposititious value in her life. I remember that we knelt down in the dusty coal-hole where the little children used to play I-spy, and prayed by turns for light, aloud at first, and then, as we felt the approach of the compelling mood, silently, as we waited for the moment after which we might rather put it over our classmates on the strength of our salvation.

It came, oh, it came! the sweep up and out, the dizzying lightness – not very different, in fact, from the breathless rush with which on a first night of *Magda* or *Cleopatra* I have felt my part meet me as I cross between the wings – the lift, the tremor of passion.

"Oh," I said, "I'm saved! I'm saved! I know it."

"So am I," said Flora Haines. "I was a long time ago, but I didn't like to say anything." And if I hadn't just been converted

I should have thought it rather mean of her. In the dusk of the coal-hole we heard Pauline sniffing.

"I suppose it's because I'm so much worse a sinner," she admitted, "but I just can't feel it."

"You must give yourself into the Lord's hands, Pauline dear." Flora Haines had heard the evangelist. I began to offer myself passionately in prayer as a vicarious atonement for Pauline's shortcomings.

"Don't you feel anything?" Flora urged, "not the least thing?"

"Well ... sort of ... something," Pauline confessed.

"Well, of course, that's it."

"Yes, that's it," I insisted.

"Well, I suppose it is," Pauline gave in, mopping her eyes with her handkerchief, "but it isn't the least like what I expected."

We heard the school clock strike the quarter hour, and got up, brushing our knees rather guiltily. Flora Haines and I were kept in all that afternoon recess for exceeding our excuse, but Pauline saved herself by bursting into tears as soon as she reached her room, and being sent home with a headache.

That was on Thursday, and Saturday afternoon we were all to meet at our house and go together to a great children's meeting, where we were expected to announce that we were saved. Pauline was a little late. I was explaining to Flora Haines that I was to join our church on probation on Sunday, but Flora, being a Baptist, had been put off by her minister until the Revival should be over and he could attend to all the baptisms at once. We naturally

expected something similar from Pauline.

"I hardly think," she said, stroking her muff and looking very ladylike, "that I shall take such an important step in life until I am older."

"But," I objected, "how can anything be more important?"

"It's your *soul*, Pauline!" Flora Haines was slightly scandalized.

"That's just the reason; it's so important my mother thinks I ought not to take any steps until I can give it my most mature judgment."

Flora Haines and I looked at one another silently; we might have known Pauline's mother wouldn't let her do anything so common as get converted.

## CHAPTER VI

I was duly taken into the church on the following Sabbath, to the great relief of my family, having for once exhibited the normal reaction of a young person in my circumstances, and though I have laid much to the door of that institution of the retarding of my development and the dimming of the delicate surface of happiness, I think now it was not wholly bad for me. If I hadn't up to this time found any way of being good by myself, I was now provided with a criterion of conduct toward which even those who hadn't been able to manage it for themselves, moved a public approbation. I have heard my mother say that even Mr. Farley, the banker, who read books on evolution and was a Freethinker (opprobrious term), had been known to pronounce the church an excellent thing for women.

The church left you in no doubt about things. You attended morning and evening service; as soon as you were old enough for it, which was before you were fit, you taught in Sunday school; you waited on table at oyster suppers designed for the raising of the minister's salary, and if you had any talent for it you sang in the choir or recited things at the church sociables. And when you were married and consequently middle-aged, you joined the W. F. M. S. and the Sewing Society.

It was after the incident of the coal-hole that I began to experience this easy irreproachability, and to build out of

its ready-to-hand materials a sort of extra self, from which afterward to burst was the bitter wound of life. For my particular church went farther and provided a chart for all the by-lanes of behaviour. "You were never," said the evangelist, whose relish of the situation on the day that a score or so of us had renounced the devil and all his works, gave me a vague sensation of having made a meal and licked his lips over us, "you should never go anywhere that you could not take your Saviour with you," and when I saw Cousin Judd wag at my mother and she smile and pat her hymn book, I was apprised that we had come to the root of the whole matter.

I have wondered since to how many young converts in Ohianna that phrase has been handed out and with what blighting consequences.

For a Saviour as I knew Him at thirteen and a half, was a solemn presence that ran in your mind with the bleakness of plain, whitewashed walls and hard benches and a general hush, a vague sensation of your chest being too tight for you, and a little of the feeling you had when you had gone to call at the Allinghams and had forgotten to wipe your feet; and it was manifest if you took that incubus everywhere you went you wouldn't have any fun.

It was fortunate at that time that it was not the desire for entertainment that moved me so much as the need of my youth to serve; the unparented hunger for authority. But with the pressure of that environment, if there had been anybody with the wit to

see where my Gift lay, what anybody could have done about it it is difficult to say. When all that Taylorville afforded of the proper food of Gift, brightness, music, and the dance, was of so forlorn a quality, it has been a question if I do not owe the church some thanks for cutting out the possible cheapening of taste and the satisfaction of ill-regulated applause – that is, if Gift can be hurt at all by what happens to the possessor. It can be cramped and enfeebled in expression, rendered tormenting in its passage and futile to the recipient, but to whom it comes its supernal quality rises forever beyond all attainer.

What happened to the actress during all the time I was undertaken by the church to be made into the sort of woman serviceable to Taylorville, was inconsiderable; what grew out of it for Olivia was no small matter, and much of it I lay without bitterness to Cousin Judd, who, from having got himself named adviser in my father's will, was in a position to affect my life to the worse.

And yet, in so far as I am not an unprecedented sport on the family tree, I had more in common with this shrewd-dealing, loud-praying, twice-removed soldier cousin than with any of my kin, though I should hardly say as much to him, for he has never been in a theatre, and if he still considers me a hopeful subject for prayer it is because his Christian duty rises superior to his conviction.

He is pricked out in my earlier recollections by the difficulty he seems to have had in effecting a compromise between the

traditional distrustfulness of the Ohianna farmer toward the Powers in general, and particularly of the weather, and his obligation of Christian Joy, and for a curious effect of not belonging to his wife, a large, uninteresting woman with a sense of her own merit which she never succeeded in imposing on anybody but Cousin Judd. She had a keen appreciation of worldly values which led her always to select the best material for her clothes, and another feeling of their expensiveness which resulted in her being always a little belated in the styles. She approved of religion, though not active in it, and in twenty years she and Cousin Judd had arrived at a series of compromises and excuses which enabled her to appear at church one Sunday in five and still keep up the interest of the clergyman and congregation as to why she didn't come the other four.

Whenever the days were short or the roads too heavy, Cousin Judd would put up over night at our house, and I remember how my mother would always be able to say, looking about the empty democrat wagon as though she expected her in ambush somewhere:

"And you didn't bring Lydia?" and Cousin Judd being able to reply to it as if it were something he had expected up till the last moment, and been keenly disappointed:

"Well, no, Liddy ain't feeling quite up to it," which my mother received without skepticism. After this they were free to talk of other things.

What there was between Cousin Judd and me, with due

allowance for the years, was the spark, the touch-and-go of vitality that rose in me to a hundred beckonings of running flood and waving boughs – music and movement; and only the moral enthusiasms of war and religion raised through his heavy farmer stuff. We should have loved one another had we known how; as it was, all our intercourse was marked on his part by the gracelessness of rusticity, and by the impertinence of adolescence on mine. I used regularly to receive his pious admonitions with what, for a Taylorville child, was flippancy; nevertheless there were occasions when we had set off of summer Sunday mornings together to early class, when the church was cool and dim and the smell of the honey locusts came in through the window, that I caught the thrill that ran from the pounding of his fist where he prayed at the other end of the long bench; and there was a kind of blessedness shed from him as with closed eyes and lifted chin he swung from peak to peak of the splendid measure of "How Firm a Foundation," that I garnered up and hugged to myself in place of Art and the Joy of Living. All of which was very good for me and might have answered if it had not come into Cousin Judd's head that he ought to overlook my reading.

By this time I had worked through all my father's books and was ready to satisfy the itch of imagination even with the vicious inaccuracies of what was called Christian literature. The trouble all came of course of my not understanding the nature of a lie. Not that I couldn't tell a downright fib if I had to, or haven't on

occasion, but a lie is to me just as silly a performance when it is about marriage or work as about the law of gravitation, and when it is presented to me in the form of human behaviour it makes me sick, like the smell of tuberose in a close room; and I failed utterly to realize then that there are a great many people capable of living sincerely and at the same time blandly misrepresenting the facts of life in the interests of what is called morality. I do not think it probable that Cousin Judd accepted for himself the rule of behaviour prescribed by the books he recommended – I shall not tell you what they were, but if there are any Sunday-school libraries in Ohianna you will find them on the shelves – but I know that he and my mother esteemed them excellent for the young.

So far as they thought of it at all, they believed that in surrounding me with intimations of a life in which there was nothing more important than settling with Deity the minor details of living, and especially how much you would pay to His establishment, they had done their utmost to provide me with a life in which nothing more important could happen. If you were careful about reading the Bible and doing good to people – that is, persuading them to go to church and to leave off swearing – all the more serious details such as making a living, marrying and having children would take care of themselves; and the trouble was, as I have said, that I believed it. And that was how I found myself farthest from Art and Life at the time when I found myself a young lady.

I had to make this discovery for myself, for there were no social occasions in Taylorville to give a term to your advent into the grown-up world, though there was a definite privilege which marked your achievement of it. There was a period prior to this in which you bumped against things you were too old for, and carromed to the things for which you were quite too young, and about the end of your high-school term you had done with hair ribbons and begun to have company on your own account, and the sort of things began to happen which marked the point beyond which if you fell upon disaster it was your own fault. They happened to me.

By dint of my doing her compositions and of her doing my arithmetic, Pauline Allingham and I had managed to keep together all through the high school, and it was in our last year, when we used to put in the long end of the afternoons at Pauline's, playing croquet, that I first took notice of Tommy Bettersworth. The Bettersworth yard abutted on the Allingham's for the space of one woodshed and a horse-chestnut tree, and it was along in October that I began to be aware that it was not altogether the view of the garden that kept Tommy on the woodshed or in the chestnut tree the greater part of the afternoon. It may be that the adventure with Charlie Gower had sharpened my perception, at any rate it had aroused my discretion; I was carefully oblivious to the proximity of Tommy Bettersworth. But there came a day when Pauline was not, when she wanted to tell me something about Flora Haines which she was afraid he might overhear.

"Come around to the summer-house," she said, "Tommy's always hanging about; I can't think what makes him."

"Always?" I suggested.

"Why, you know yourself he was there last Saturday, and Thursday when we ..."

"Is he there when you and Flora are there, or only ..."

"Oh," Pauline gave a gasp, "No – Oh, I never thought ... Olive ... I do believe ... that's it!"

"Well, what?"

"It's *you*, Olive," solemnly. "It must be that ... he really is..." Pauline's reading included more romance than mine.

"Well, he can't say I gave him any encouragement."

"Oh, *of course* not, darling," Pauline was sympathetic. "You couldn't ... it is *so* interesting. What would the girls say?"

"Pauline, if you ever ..."

"Truly, I never will... But just *think!*"

But we reckoned without Alfred Allingham. Alfred was not a nice boy at that age; he had come the way of curled darlings to be a sly, tale-bearing, offensive little cad, and the next Saturday, when Pauline turned him off the croquet ground for ribaldry, he went as far as the rose border and jeered back at us.

"I know why you don't want me," he mocked; "so's I can't see Olive and Tommy Betterworth makin' eyes." He executed a jig to the tune of

"Olive's mad and I am glad.

And I know what'll please her – "

At this juncture the wrist and hand of Tommy Bettersworth appeared over the partition fence armed with horse-chestnuts which thudded with precision on the offensive person of Alfred Allingham. Pauline and I escaped to the summer-house. I thought I was going to cry until I found I was giggling, at which I was so mortified that I did cry.

"He'll tell everybody in school," I protested.

"What do you care?" soothed Pauline, "besides, you have to be teased about somebody, you know, and have somebody to choose you when they play clap in and clap out. You just *have* to. Look at me." Pauline had been carrying on the discreetest of flirtations with Henry Glave for some months. "Tommy Bettersworth is a nice boy, and besides, dear, we'll have so much more in common."

Pauline was right. Unless you had somebody to be teased about you were really not in things. I was furiously embarrassed by it, but I was resigned. Tommy sent me two notes that winter and a silk handkerchief for Christmas which I pretended was from Pauline. I am not going to be blamed for this. It was at least a month earlier that I had observed Tommy Bettersworth's inability to get away from Nile's corner on his way home from school until I had passed there on mine. It struck me as a very interesting trait of masculine character; I would have liked to talk it over with my mother on the plane of human interest; it seemed possible she might have noted similar eccentricities. I remember I worked around to it Saturday morning when I was helping her to

darn the tablecloths. My mother was not unprepared; she did her duty by me as it was conceived in Taylorville, and did it promptly.

"You are too young to be thinking about the boys," she said. "I don't want to hear you talking about such things until the time comes."

This was so much in line with what was expected of parents, that I blinked the obvious retort that the time for talking about such things was when they began to happen, and went on with the tablecloths. But I couldn't tell her about the handkerchief after that. It would have been positively unmaidenly. And after he had sent me a magnificent paper lace valentine, I distinctly encouraged Tommy Bettersworth.

This being the case, I do not know just how it began to be conveyed to me, as in the lengthening evenings of spring, Tommy took to church-going, that his hands were coarse and his ears too prominent, and as I confided solemnly to Pauline, though I had the greatest respect for his character, I simply couldn't bear to have him about. This was the more singular since the church-going was the visible sign of the good influence that, according to the books, I was exercising; and though Tommy was as nearly inarticulate as was natural, I was in no doubt on whose account this new start proceeded. If I had not disliked Tommy very much at this period, why should I have taken to tucking myself between Forester and Effie on the way home, embarrassedly aware of Tommy, whose way did not lie in our direction, scuffling along with the Lawrences on the other side of

the street? I seem to remember some rather heroic attempts on Tommy's part to account for his presence there on the ground of wanting to speak privately to Forester, certain shouts and sallies toward which my brother displayed a derisive consciousness of their not being pertinent to the occasion.

I have often wondered how much of these tentative ventures toward an altered relation were observed by our elders; not much, I should think. At any rate no mollifying word drifted down from their heights of experience to our shallows of self-consciousness.

My mother adhered to her notion of my not being at an age for "such things," borne out, I believe, by the consensus of paternal opinion that she might too easily "put notions" in my head; not inquiring what notions might by the natural process of living be already there. Perhaps they were not altogether wrong in this, so delicate is the process of sex development that nature herself obscures the processes. To this day I do not know how much my taking suddenly to going home with Belle Endsleigh by a short cut was embarrassment, and how much a discreet feminine awareness that in my absence Tommy would better manage to make the family take his walking with them as a matter of course, but I remember that I cried when my mother, who did not approve of Belle Endsleigh, scolded me. And then quite suddenly came the click and the loosened tension of the readjustment.

Along about Easter Alfred Allingham told Pauline that Tommy had thrashed Charlie Gower, and though it was supposed to be the strictest secret, it was because Charlie had teased

him about me. Pauline was rather scandalized by my insistence that Charlie wouldn't have done it if Tommy hadn't rather conspicuously brought it on himself.

"I call it truly noble of him ... like a knight." Pauline could always throw the glamour of her reading around the immediate circumstance. "At any rate, after this you can't do anything less than treat him politely," she urged.

Whether it would have made any difference in my attitude or not, it did in Tommy's. I saw that when he came out of the church with us next Sunday. There was a certain aggressive maleness in the way he strode beside me, that there was no mistaking. I looked about rather feebly for Belle.

"I don't see her anywhere," Tommy assured me, "besides, we don't want her." As I could see Tommy in the light that streamed from the church windows, it occurred to me that if he was not good-looking he certainly looked good, and he had a moustache coming.

Forester, who was going through a phase himself, had gone home with Amy Lawrence; Effie lagged behind with mother, talking to Mrs. Endsleigh about the prospects of the Sewing Society raising the money for repainting the parsonage. Looking back to see what had become of them I tripped on the boardwalk.

"If you would take my arm" ... suggested Tommy. I was aware of the sleeve of his coat under my fingers.

The next turn took us out of sound of the voices; the street lamps flared far apart in the long, quiet avenue. The shed pods

of the maples slipped and popped under us with the sweet smell of the sap.

"How did you like the sermon?" Tommy wished to know. What I had to say of it was probably not very much to the point. No one overtook us as we walked. There was a sense of tremendous occasions in the air, of things accomplished. I had established the privilege. I was walking home from church with a young man. I was a young lady.

## CHAPTER VII

As often as I think of Olivia Lattimore growing up, I have wondered if there was really no evidence of dramatic talent about, or simply no one able to observe it. There was no theatre at Taylorville, and when from time to time third-rate stock companies performed indifferent plays at the Town Hall, Forrie and Effie and I heard nothing of them except that they were presumably wicked.

Occasionally there were amateur performances in which, when I had won a grudging consent to take part, I failed to distinguish myself. Effie had a very amusing trick of mimicry, and if you had heard her recite "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night," you would have thought that the Gift on its way from whatever high and unknowable source, in passing her had lighted haphazard on the most unlikely instrument. I was not even clever at my books except by starts and flashes.

I graduated at the high school with Pauline, and afterward we had two years together at Montecito. This was the next town to Taylorville, and its bitter rival. Montecito had a Young Ladies' Seminary, a Business College, and the State Institution for the Blind, for which Taylorville so little forgave it that the new railroad was persuaded to leave Montecito four miles to the right and make its junction with the L. and C. at Taylorville. This carried the farmer shipping away from Montecito, but the victory

was not altogether scathless; young ladies were still obliged to go to the seminary, and it enabled Montecito to put on the air of having retired from the vulgar competition of trade and become the Athens of the West.

Pauline and I went over to school on Mondays and home on Fridays. The course of study was for three years, but because there was Effie to think of and my mother's means were limited, I had only two, and was never able to catch up with Pauline by the length of that extra year. She was always holding it out against me in extenuation and excuse; when she tried to account for my marriage having turned out so badly on the ground of my not having had Advantages, I knew she was thinking of Montecito. She thinks of it still, I imagine, to condone as she does, I am sure, with an adorable womanliness, what in my conduct she no longer feels able to countenance. And yet I hardly know what I might have drawn from that third year more than I took away from the other two, which was, besides the regular course of study, an acquaintance with a style of furnishings not all gilt wall paper and plush brocade, and a renewed taste for good reading. They made such a point of good reading at the seminary that I have always thought it a pity they could not go a little farther and make a practice of it.

The difficulty with most of our reading was that it had no relativity to the processes of life in Ohianna; we had things as far removed from it as Dante and Euripides, things no nearer than "The Scarlet Letter" and "David Copperfield," from which

to draw for the exigencies of Taylorville was to cause my mother to wonder, with tears in her eyes, why in the world I couldn't be like other people. I read; I gorged, in fact, on the best books, but I found it more convenient to go on living by the shallow priggishness of Cousin Judd's selection. All that splendid stream poured in upon me and sank and lost itself in the shifty undercurrent that made still, by times, distracting eddies on the surface of adolescence.

But whatever was missed or misunderstood of its evidences, the Gift worked at the bottom, thrrove like a sea anemone under the shallows of girlishness, and, nourished by unsuspected means, was the source no doubt of the live resistance I opposed to all that grew out of Forester's making a vocation of being a good son. I do not know yet how to deal with sufficient tenderness and without exasperation with the disposition of widowed women, bred to dependence, to build out of their sons the shape of a man proper to be leaned upon. It is so justified in sentiment, so pretty to see in its immediate phases, that though my mother was young and attractive enough to have married again, it was difficult not to concur in her making a virtue, a glorification of living entirely in her boy. I seem to remember a time before Forrie was intrigued by the general appreciation, when it required some coercion to present him always in the character of the most dutiful son. He hadn't, for instance, invariably fancied himself setting out for prayer meeting with my mother's hymn book and umbrella, but the second summer after my father died, when he had worked

on Cousin Judd's farm and brought home his wages, found him completely implicated. We were really not so poor there was any occasion for this, but mother was so delighted with the idea of a provider, and Forester was so pleased with the picture of himself in that capacity, that it was all, no doubt, very good for him.

He always did bring home his wages after that, which led to his being consulted about meals, and the new curtains for the dining-room, and to being met in the evening as though all the house had been primed for his return, and merely gone on in that expectation while he was away. Effie, I know, had no difficulty in accepting him as the excuse for any amount of household ritual, making a fuss about his birthdays and trying on her new clothes for his approval, but Effie was five years younger than Forester and I was only twenty-two months. It was more, I think, than our community in the gaucheries and hesitations of youth that disinclined me to take seriously my brother's opinions on window curtains and to sniff at my mother's affectionate pretence of his being the head of the family. At times when I felt this going on in our house, there rose up like a wisp of fog between me and the glittering promise of the future, a kind of horror of the destiny of women; to defer and adjust, to maintain the attitude of acquiescence toward opinions and capabilities that had nothing more to recommend them than merely that they were a man's! I could be abased, I should be delighted to be imposed upon, but if I paid out self-immolation I wanted something for my money, and I didn't consider I was getting it with my brother for whom

I smuggled notes and copied compositions.

It never occurred to my mother, until it came to the concrete question of spending-money, that there was anything more than a kind of natural perverseness in my attitude, which only served to throw into relief the satisfactoriness of her relations to her son. Forester, it appeared, was to have an allowance, and I wanted one too.

"But what," said my mother, tolerantly, for she had not yet thought of granting it, "would you do with an allowance?"

"Whatever Forester does."

"But Forester," my mother explained, waving the stocking she had stretched upon her hand, "is a boy." I expostulated.

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Olivia!" The ridiculousness of having such a question addressed to her brought a smile to my mother's lips, which hung fixed there as I saw her mind back away suddenly in fear that I was really going to insist on knowing what that had to do with it.

"I give you twenty-five cents a week for church money," she parried weakly.

"That's what you think I ought to give. I want an allowance, and then I can deny myself and give what I like."

"Forester earns his," said my mother; she hadn't of course meant the discussion to get on to a basis of reasonableness.

"Well," I threatened, "I'll earn mine."

That was really what did the business in the end. All the boys in Taylorville worked as soon as they were old enough, but it was

the last resort of poverty that girls should be put to wages. Before that possibility my mother retreated into amused indulgence. She paid me my allowance, appreciably less than my brother's, on the first of the month, with the air of concurring in a joke, which I think now must have covered some vague hurt at my want of sympathy with the beautiful fiction of Forester's growing up to take my father's place with her. They had achieved by the time Forester was twenty, what passed for perfect confidence between them, though it was at the cost of Forester's living shallowly or not at all in the courts of boyhood which my mother was unable to reënter, and her voluntary withdrawal from varieties of experience from which his youth prevented him. My mother always thought it was made up to her in affection; what came out of it for Forester is still on the knees of the gods.

I began to say how it was that the Gift took care of itself while Forester was engrossing the family attention. He had had a year at the business college in Montecito, which was considered quite sufficient, and rather more, in fact, than his accepted vocation as the support of his mother seemed to call for. Any question that might naturally come up of a profession for him, seemed to have been quashed beforehand by the general notion of an immediate salary as the means to that end. I do not recall a voice lifted on behalf of a life of his own. He had worked up from driving the delivery wagon in vacations to being dry goods clerk at the Coöperative, where his affability and easy familiarity with the requirements of women, made him immensely popular.

Everybody liked to trade with Forester because he took such pains in matching things, and he was such a good boy to his mother. He paid the largest portion of his salary for his board, and took Effie, who adored him, about with him. I don't mean to say that he was not also good friends with Olivia, or that there was anything which prevented my doing my best with the three chocolate layer cakes and the angel's food I made for his party on his twenty-first birthday.

The real unpleasantness on that occasion came of my mother's notion of distinguishing it among all other birthdays by paying over to Forester a third of the not very considerable sum left by my father, derived chiefly from his back pay as an officer, which she had always held as particularly set aside for us children. It was owing perhaps to a form of secretiveness that in unprotected woman does duty for caution, that Effie and I had scarcely heard of this sum until it was flourished before us on the day before the birthday, much as if it had been my father's sword, supposing the occasion to have required it being girded on his son.

Forester was to have a third of that money in the form of a check under his plate on the morning of his birthday. Effie and I did full justice to the magnificence of the proposal. I was beating the whites of thirteen eggs by Pauline's recipe for angel food – mine called for only eleven – and Effie was rubbing up Mrs. Endsleigh's spoons, which had been borrowed for the party.

I was always happier in the kitchen than in any room of the house, with its plain tinted walls, the plain painted woodwork

(the parlour was hideously "grained"), and the red of Effie's geraniums at the window ledge. The stir of domesticity, all this talk of my father, intrigued me for the moment into the sense of being a valued and intrinsic part of the family.

"His father would have wanted Forester to have that money," said my mother, "now that he's of age."

"And when," I questioned, raised by the mention of thirds to the joyous inclusion, "are Effie and I to have ours?"

"Oh," my mother's interest waned, "when you are married, perhaps."

It had grown in my mind as I spoke, that I had been of age now more than a year and nothing had come of it. The suggestion that my father could have taken a less active interest in the event on my behalf, pressed upon a dying sensibility; I resented his being so committed to this posthumous slight and meant to defend him from it.

"He'd have wanted me to have mine on my birthday, the same as Forester," I insisted.

"Oh, Olivia!" My mother's tone intimated annoyance at my claim to being supported by my father in my absurdities, but her good humour was proof against it. "Girls have theirs when they are married," she soothed.

I held up the platter and whisked the stiff froth with the air of doing these things very dexterously; I wasn't going to admit by taking it seriously, that my brother's coming of age was any more important than mine, but I spare you the flippancies by which

I covered the hurt of realizing that to everybody except myself, it was.

"It is so like you, Olivia," said my mother, with tears in her eyes, "to want to spoil everything." What I had really spoiled was the free exercise of partiality by which she was enabled to distinguish Forester over her other children, according to her sense of his deserts; and, besides, what in the world would the child do with all that money?

"The same thing that Forester does," I maintained, and then quickly to forestall another objection which I saw rising in her face. "If you were old enough to be married at nineteen, I guess I am old enough to be trusted with a few hundred dollars."

But there I had struck again on the structure of tradition that kept Taylorville from direct contact with the issues of life; anybody was old enough to be married at eighteen, but money was a serious matter. Whenever I said things like that I could see my mother waver between a shocked wonder at having produced such unnaturalness, and the fear that somebody might overhear us. And I didn't know myself what I wanted with that money, except that I craved the sense of being important that went with the possession of it. And of course now that I had been refused it on the ground of sex, it was part of the general resistance that I opposed to things as they were, to have it on principle. Just when I had mother almost convinced that she ought to give it to me, she made it nearly impossible for me to accept, by asking Forester what she ought to do about it. When I had demanded it as the

evidence of my taking rank with my brother as a personage, it was insufferable that it should come to me as a concession of his amiability.

What I really wanted of course was to have it put under my plate with an affectionate speech about its being the legacy of a soldier and the witness of his integrity, coupled with the hope that I would spend it in a manner to give pleasure to my dear father, who was no doubt looking on at this happy incident.

There was nothing in me then – there is nothing now – which advised me of being inappropriately the object of such an address, or my replying to it as gallantly as the junior clerk of the Coöperative. To do Forester justice, he came out squarely on the question of my being entitled to the money if he was, but he contrived backhandedly to convey his sense of my obtuseness in not deferring sentimentally to a male ascendancy that I did not intrinsically feel; and I can go back now to these disquieting episodes as the beginning of that maladjustment of my earlier years, in not having a man about toward whom I could actually experience the deference I was expected to exhibit.

Well, I had my check for the same amount and on the same occasion as my brother's, but the feeling in the air of its being merely a concession to my forwardness, prevented me from making any return for it that interfered with Forester's carrying off the situation of coming into his father's legacy on coming of age, quite to my mother's satisfaction. What it might have made for graciousness for once in my life to have been the centre

of that dramatic affectionateness, I can only guess. Firm in the determination that since no sentiment went to its bestowal none should go to its acknowledgment, I carried my check upstairs and shook all of the rugs out of the window to account for my eyes being red at ten o'clock in the morning. And that was the way the Powers took to provide against the complete submergence of the actress in the young lady, for though it turned out that I did spend the greater part of the money on my wedding clothes, a portion of it went for the only technical training I ever had.

The real business of a young lady in Taylorville was getting married, but to avoid an obviousness in the interim, she played the piano or painted on satin or became interested in missions. If my money had fallen in eight months earlier I should undoubtedly have spent it on the third year at Montecito; as it was I decided to study elocution. It appeared a wholly fortuitous choice. I was not supposed to have any talent for it, but I burned to spend some of my money sensibly, and it was admittedly sensible for a young lady to take lessons in something. Effie was having music, Flora Haines painted plaques; when Olivia joined Professor Winter's elocution classes at Temperance Hall mother said it looked like throwing money away, but of course I could teach in case anything happened, which meant in case of my not being married or being left a widow with young children.

Professor Winter was the kind of man who would have collected patch boxes and painted miniatures on ladies' fans; not that he could have done anything of the sort on his income, but

it would have suited the kind of man he was. He had small neat ways and nice little tricks of discrimination, and microscopic enthusiasms that hovered and fluttered, enough of them when it came to the rendering of a favourite passage, to produce a kind of haze of appreciation like a swarm of midges. Not being able to afford patch boxes or Louis XV enamels, he collected accents instead. The man's memory for phonic variations was extraordinary; all our accustomed speech was a wild garden over which he took little flights and drops and humming poises, extracting, as it were by sips, your private history, things you would have probably told for the asking, but objected to having wrested from your betraying tongue. He would come teetering forward on his neat little boots, upon the toes of which he appeared to elevate himself by pressing the tips of his fingers very firmly together, and when you committed yourself no farther than to remark on the state of the weather or the election outlook, he would want to know if you hadn't spent some time of your youth in the South, or if it was your maternal or paternal grandfather who was Norwegian. Either of which would be true and annoying, particularly as you weren't aware of speaking other than the rest of the world, for if there was anything quite and completely abhorrent to the Taylorville mind it was the implication of being different from other Taylorvillians.

Somewhere the Professor had picked up an adequate theory and practice of voice production, though I never knew anything of his training except that he had been an instructor in a

normal school and was aggrieved at his dismissal. After he had advertised himself as open for private instruction and tri-weekly classes at Temperance Hall, there was something almost like a concerted effort at keeping him in the town, because of the credit he afforded us against Montecito. With the exception of a much-whiskered personage who came over from the business college in the winter to conduct evening classes in penmanship, he was the only man addressed habitually as Professor, and the only one who wore evening dress at public functions.

His dress coat imparted a particular touch of elegance to occasions when he gave readings from "Evangeline" and "The Lady of the Lake" (Taylorville choice), and thoroughly discredited a disgruntled Montecitan who, on the basis of having been to Chicago on his wedding trip, insisted that such were only worn by waiters in hotels.

It would be interesting to record that Professor Winter lent himself with alacrity to the unfolding of my Gift, but, in fact, his imagination hardly strayed so far. He taught phonics and voice production and taught them very well; probably he had no more practical acquaintance with the stage than I had. Certainly he never suggested it for me, and for my part I could hardly have explained why with so little encouragement I was so devoted to the rather tedious drill. Pauline was still at the seminary, and the regular hours of practice made a bulwark against an insidious proprietary air which Tommy Bettersworth began to wear. Besides the voice training, I had a system of physical

culture, artificial and unsound as I have since learned, but serving to restrain my too exuberant gesture, and much memorizing of poems and plays for practice work. I hardly know if the Professor had any dramatic talent or not; probably not, as he made nothing, I remember, of stopping me in the middle of a great passion for the sake of a dropped consonant, and deprecated original readings on my part.

It was his relish for musical cadence as much as its intellectual appreciation that led him to select the Elizabethan drama, in the great scenes of which I was letter perfect by the time I had come to the end of the Professor's instruction, and at the end too, it seemed, of my devices for dodging the destiny of women.

## CHAPTER VIII

I have tried to sketch to you how in Taylorville we were allowed to stumble on the grown-up consciousness of sex, but I can give you no idea of the extent to which we were prevented from the grown-up judgment.

Somewhere between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, one was loosed on a free and lively social intercourse from which one was expected to emerge later, triumphantly mated. This was obligatory; otherwise your family sighed and said that somehow Olivia didn't seem to know how to catch a husband, and then painstakingly refrained from the subject in your presence; or your mother, if she was particularly loyal, said she had always thought there was no call for a girl to marry if she didn't feel to want to. But anything resembling maternal interference in your behalf was looked upon as worldly minded, or at the least unnecessary. The custom of chaperonage was unheard of; girls were supposed to be trusted.

I do not recall now that I ever had any particular instruction as to how to conduct myself toward young men except that they were never on any account to take liberties. Whatever else went to the difficult business of mating you were supposed to pick up. That I did not pass through this period in entire obliviousness was due to Pauline, who had the keenest appreciation of her effect on the opposite sex. She was the sort of girl who is described

as having always had a great deal of attention; she had a nice Procrustean notion of the sort of young man to be engaged to – our maiden imagination hardly went farther than that – and her young ladyhood appeared to be a process of trying it on the greatest possible number of eligible Taylorvillians. When she came home from Montecito she had already met Henry Mills at the house of a roommate where she had spent the Easter vacation, and he had sent her flowers at commencement and verses of his own composition.

It was Pauline who explained to me that unless I had some young man like Tommy Bettersworth who could be counted on, I could hardly hope to be "in" things – when they made up a party to go sleighing, for instance, or a picnic to Willesden Lake. I liked being in things and did not altogether dislike Tommy Bettersworth. He was a thoroughly creditable beau and required very little handling, for even as early as that I had an inkling of what I have long since concluded, that a man who requires overmuch to be played and baited, held off and on, is rather poor game after you have got him. It worried Pauline not a little that I forgave Tommy so lightly for small offences; she was afraid it might appear that I liked him too much, when in truth it was only that I liked him too little. And for complacence, if I had had any disposition toward it, I was saved by the shocking example of Forester, all of whose relations were tinged by his vocation of model son. He had acquired by this time a manner, by the intimacy, greater than is common in boys, with which

he lived into the feminine life of the household, and by his daily performance of measuring off petticoats and matching hose, which admitted him to families where we visited, on a footing that enabled him to flirt with the daughters under the very apron-strings of their mothers. You couldn't somehow maintain a strict virginal severity with a young man who had just taken an informed and personal interest in your mother's flannelette wrappers, the credit of whose dutifulness was a warrant for his not meaning anything in particular. In short, Forrie spooned.

I think now there was some excuse for him; he had been wrenched very early by his affections from the normal outbreaks of adolescence; he had never to my knowledge been "out with the boys." Unless he got it in the business of junior clerk at the Coöperative, he could hardly be said to have a male life at all; he was being shaped to a man's performance at the expense of his mannishness. But against his philandering rose up, not only the fastidiousness of girlhood, but some latent sense of rightness, as keen in me as the violinist's for the variation of tone; something that questioned the justice of pronouncing thoroughly moral a young man who, if he never went over the brink, was willing to spend a considerable portion of his time on the edge of it. I should have admired Forester more at this juncture if he had been a little wild – and I knew perfectly that my mother would have interdicted any social life for me whatever if I had permitted a tithe of the familiarities allowed to my brother.

Among the other things which a girl was expected to "pick

up," along with the art of attracting a husband, was the vital information with which she was expected to meet the occasion of marrying one. It was all a part of the general assumption of the truth as something not suitable for the young to know, that nobody told us any of these things if they could help it. I do not mean to say that there was not a certain amount of half information whispered about among the girls, who by the avidity for such whisperings established themselves as not quite nice. But Pauline Allingham and I were nice girls. What this meant was that nothing that pertained to the mystery of marriage reached us through all the suppression and evasions of the social conspiracy, except the obviousness of maternity. I remember how intimations of it as part of our legitimate experience, began to grow upon us with a profound and tender curiosity toward very young children, and, particularly on Pauline's part, a great shyness of being seen in their company. But we were not expected to possess ourselves of accurate information until we were already involved in it.

We had reached the age when matrons no longer avoided references to its most conspicuous phases in our presence, before we found words for mentioning it to one another. There was a young aunt of Pauline's lent something to that.

She was a sister of Mr. Allingham, come to stay with them while her husband was absent somewhere in the West. Pauline told me about it one of the week-ends she spent at home from Montecito; this was Saturday afternoon, and she had found the aunt in the house on her return the evening before.

"Do you know," she said, "it is very queer the way I feel about Aunt Alice – the way she is, you know. Mamma hadn't told me, and when I came into the sitting room and saw her, I thought I was going to cry; and it wasn't that I was sorry either ... I'm awfully fond of her. I just felt it."

"Yes, I know," I admitted.

"Aunt Alice is so sensible," Pauline explained a few weeks later, "she talks to me a great deal; she's only a few years older than I am. She has shown me all her things for the baby. Mamma didn't think she ought ... you know how mothers are. They're in the bureau drawer in the best room. I'll show them to you some time; Alice won't mind."

Alice didn't mind, it appeared, so it must have been shyness that led us to select the afternoon when the married women were away, and though I cannot forgive the conditions which led us so surreptitiously to touch the fringe of the great experience, I own still to some tenderness for the two girls with their heads together that bright hot afternoon, over the bureau drawer in Mrs. Allingham's best room. Pauline showed me a little sacque which she had crocheted.

"Mother thought I was too young, but Alice said I might."

"You must have liked to, awfully," I envied.

"That's one of the nice things about having children, I should think" – Pauline fingered a hemstitched slip – "you can make things for them."

"Which would you rather have, girls or boys?" I hazarded.

"Oh, girls; you can always dress them so prettily."

"But boys . . . they can do so many things when they grow up."

I felt rather strongly on that point.

"Alice says" – Pauline folded the little frock – "that she's so glad to have it she doesn't care which it is." Something, perhaps an echo of my mother's experience, pricked in me.

"They aren't always as glad as that."

"I suppose not. Alice is having this one because she wants it."

We looked at one another. We would have liked to have spoken further, to have defined ourselves, despoiled ourselves of tenderness, nobilities, but around the whole subject lay the blank expanse of our ignorance. We locked the drawer again and went out and played croquet. And that was how we stood toward our normal destiny that summer when Pauline was wondering if Henry Mills meant to propose to her, and I was wondering how much longer I could keep Tommy Betterworth from proposing to me.

I managed to stave it off until the end of September. On the twenty-second of that month there was a picnic at Willesden Lake. There were ten couples of us, and Flora Haines, who was wanted to count even with a young man who was to join us at the lake, a stranger to most of us, nephew to one of the wealthiest farmers in the township. We had always wished there might have been young people at the Garrett farm, and there was some talk of this nephew, who was to come on a visit, being adopted.

Some of our brothers had made his acquaintance, and

Pauline, who had met him at Montecito, had warranted him as "interesting." I believe Flora Haines was invited to pair with him because every girl felt that Flora would be eminently safe to trust her own young man to in the event of Helmeth Garrett proving more worth while.

Henry Mills, who was reading law at the county seat of the adjoining county, had come over for the picnic and was expected to bring matters to a crisis with Pauline, and Forester had a day off to take Belle Endsleigh, who was at the point of pitying him because, though he had such an affectionate disposition, so long as his mother depended on him he couldn't think of marrying. We had no chaperone of course; several of the couples were engaged, and there were brothers; we wouldn't have to put up with the implication that we were not able to manage by ourselves.

It was the sort of day ... soft Indian summer, painted woodlands, gossamer glinting high in the windless air ... on which Forester found it necessary to hope brotherly that I should be able to get through it without being silly. By that he meant that the submerged Olivia, however interestingly she might read in a book, was highly incomprehensible and nearly always ridiculous to her contemporaries.

Willesden Lake was properly a drainage pond of four or five acres in extent, drawn like a bow about the contour of two hills; water-lilies grew at the head where a stream came in, and muskrats built at the lower end. The picnic ground was in the

hollow between the two hills, by a spring, where the grass grew smooth like a lawn to the roots of oaks burning blood red from leaf to leaf. As it turned out, though we put off lunch for him for an hour, young Mr. Garrett did not come, and as the party sat about on the mossy hummocks in the quiet of repletion, I thought nothing could be so much worth while as to leave Tommy in care of Flora Haines and get away into the woods by myself. The soul of the weather had got into my soul and I felt I should discredit myself with Forester if I stayed. There was a little footpath that led down by a rill to the lake, and as I took it, there was scarcely a sound louder than the soft down-rustle of the painted leaves. There were two or three old boats, half water-logged, tied at the head of the lake, and one of these I found and paddled across to the opposite bank. I had not known there was a path there opening from the dewberry bushes that dipped along the border, but the spirit in my feet answered to its invitation. I followed it up the hill through the leaf drift that heaped whispering in the smoky wood. I spread out my arms as I went and began to move to the rhythm of chanted verse. Where the red and gold and russet banners brushed me I was touched delicately as with flame. I had on a very pretty dress that day, I remember, a thin organdy with a leaf pattern, made up over yellow sateen, and the consciousness of suitability worked happily on my mind. At the top of the hill I struck into an old wood road where it passed through a grove of young hickory, blazing yellow like a host. Here I went slowly and dropped the chanting to the measure of classic

English verse; it was the only means of expression Taylorville had provided me. Scene after scene I went through happy and oblivious. I had been at it half an hour perhaps, moving forward with the natural impetus of the play, in the faint old wagon tracks, and had got as far as when I was startled by the clapping of hands, and looked up to see a young man sitting on the top of a rail fence that ran straight across the way, as though he might have stopped there to rest in the act of climbing over.

– Flowers that affrighted she let fall  
From Dis's wagon! —

"I knew you would see me the next minute," he said, "and I wanted to be discovered in the act of appreciation." He sprang down from the fence and came toward me, taking off his hat. "I suppose you are from the picnic; I expected to find you somewhere about. I am Helmeth Garrett."

"They're at the spring – we waited lunch for you. I am Miss Lattimore; Olivia May," I supplemented. I was a little doubtful about that point, for at Taylorville we called one another by our first names. I was pleased with the swiftness with which he struck upon a permissible compromise.

"I owe you all sorts of apologies, Miss Olivia, but the mare I was to ride went lame and uncle couldn't spare me another, so I had an early lunch at the house and walked over." As he stood looking down at me I saw that he had a crop of unruly dark hair and what there was in his face that Pauline had found interesting. He wore a soft red tie, knotted loosely at the collar of a white

flannel shirt, and for the rest of him was dressed very much as other young men. All at once a spark of irrepressible friendliness flashed up in smiles between us.

It seemed the merest chance then that I had come across the wood to meet him. In the light of what has happened since, I see that the guardian of my submerged self was doing what it could for me; but against the embattled social forces of Taylorville what could even the gods do!

"If you will take me to the others," he suggested, "I can make my excuses, and then we can talk." It was remarkable, I thought, that he should have discovered so early that we would wish to talk. We began to move in the direction of the lake.

"Were you doing a play?" he asked. I nodded.

"How long were you watching me?"

"Since you passed the plum brush yonder; it was bully! Are you going on the stage?" I explained about Professor Winter and the elocution lessons.

"They don't approve of the stage in Taylorville," I finished, touched by the vanishing trace of a realization that up to this moment the objection would have been stated personally.

"And with all your talent! Oh, I know what I'm saying. I lived in Chicago four years and saw a lot of the theatre."

He began to talk to me of the stage, probably much of it neither informed nor profitable, but I had never heard it talked of before in unembarrassed relevancy to living, and he had that trick of speech that goes with the achieving propensity, of accelerating

his own energy as he talked, so that its backwater fairly floated us into the ease of intimacy. There was no doubt we were tremendously pleased with one another. I was throbbing still with the measure of verse and moved half trippingly to the rhythm of my blood.

"Do you dance too?" What went with that implied something personal and complimentary.

"Oh, no – a few steps I've picked up at school. That's another of the things we don't approve at Taylorville."

"I say, what a lot of old mossbacks there must be about here anyway. Take my uncle, now..." He went on to tell me how he had tried to induce his uncle, who could afford it, to advance the money for technical training in engineering. Uncle Garrett was of the opinion that Helmeth would do better to get a job with some good man and "pick up things ... always managed to get along by rule of thumb himself," said the nephew, "and thinks all the rest of us ought to. I said, 'How would it be with a doctor, now, just to scramble up his medicine?' but you can't get through to my uncle. He thinks a man who can run a thrashing machine is an engineer."

I remember that we found it necessary to sit down on the slope of the hill toward the pond while he sketched for me his notion of what an engineer's career might be. "But you've got to have technical training ... got to! Talk about rule of thumb ... it's like going at it with no thumbs at all." In the midst of this we remembered that we ought to be looking for the rest of the

picnickers. Once in the boat, however, there was a muskrat's nest which, as something new to him, had to be poked into, and we stopped to gather lilies, which I could not have done by myself without wetting my dress. When we came at last to the spring, we found the lunch baskets huddled under the oak and nobody about.

I think we must have been very far gone by this time in the young rapture of intimacy. The wood was smokily still, and we scuffed great heaps of the leaves together as we walked about pretending to look for the others. I remember it seemed a singular flame-touched circumstance that the leaves flew up from under our feet and fell lightly on our faces and our hair.

"I suppose we can't help finding them; the wonder is they haven't been spoiling our good talk before now."

"Oh," I protested, "if you hadn't been coming to look for them you wouldn't have met me."

"And now that we have met, we are going to keep on. I'm coming to see you. May I?"

"If you care so much..." A little spiral of wind rising fountain-wise out of the breathlessness whirled up a smother of brightening leaves; it caught my skirts and whipped them against his knees. It seemed to have blown our hands together too, though I am at a loss to know how that was.

"Care!" he said. "If I care? Oh, you beauty, you wonder!" All at once he had kissed me.

The electrical moment hung in the air, poised, took flight

upward in dizzying splendour. Suddenly from within the wood came a little snigger of laughter.

## CHAPTER IX

I do not know how long it took for the certainty that I had been kissed by an utter stranger in the presence of the entire picnic, to work through the singing flames in which that kiss had wrapped me. We must have walked on almost immediately in the direction of the snigger; I remember a kind of clutch of my spirit toward the mere mechanical act of walking, to hold me fast to the time and place from which there was an inward rush to escape. We walked on. They were all sitting together under a bank of hazel and the girls' laps were filled with the brown clusters. Out of my whirling dimness I heard Helmeth Garrett explaining, as I introduced him, how he had come across me in the wood, looking for them.

"And of course," suggested Charlie Gower, "in such good company you weren't in a hurry about looking for the rest of us." I remembered the asparagus bed and was glad I had slapped him.

"No," my companion looked him over very coolly, "now that I've seen some of the rest of you I'm glad I didn't hurry." Plainly it wasn't going to do to try to take it out of Helmeth Garrett.

As we began by common consent to move back to the spring, Forester drew me by the arm behind the hazel. He was divided between a brotherly disgust at my lapse, and delight to have caught the prim Olivia tripping.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you *have* done it!" Considering what I

knew of Forester's affairs this was unbearable.

"Oh! it isn't for *you* to talk – "

"What I want to know is, whether I am to thrash him or not?"

"Thrash him?" I wondered.

"For getting you talked about ... off there in the woods all afternoon!"

"We weren't – " I began, but suddenly I saw the white bolls of the sycamores redden with the westering sun; we must have been three hours covering what was at most a half hour's walk. "Don't be vulgar, Forester," I went on, with my chin in the air.

"Oh, well," was my brother's parting shot, "I don't know as I ought to make any objection, seeing you didn't."

That, I felt, was the weakness of my position; I not only hadn't made any objection, I hadn't felt any shame; the annoyance, the hurt of outraged maidenliness, whatever was the traditional attitude, hadn't come. Inwardly I burned with the woods afire, the red west, the white star like a torch that came out above it. On the way home Helmeth Garrett rode with us as far as the main road and was particularly attentive to Pauline and Flora Haines. I remember it came to me dimly that there was something designedly protective in this; there was more or less veiled innuendo flying about which failed to get through to me. Pauline put it quite plainly for me when she came to talk things over the day after the picnic. She was sympathetic.

"Oh, my dear, it must be dreadful for you," she cooed; "a perfect stranger, and getting you talked about that way!"

"So I am talked about?"

"My *dear*, what could you expect? And in plain sight of us. If you had only pushed him away, or something."

"I couldn't," I said, "I was so . . . astonished." In the night I had found myself explaining to Pauline how this affair of Helmeth Garrett had differed importantly from all similar instances; now I saw its shining surfaces dimmed with comment like unwiped glass.

"That's just what I *said!*" Pauline was pleased with herself. "I told Belle Endsleigh you weren't used to that sort of thing . . . you were *completely* overcome. But of course he wasn't really a gentleman or he wouldn't have done it." I do not know why at this moment it occurred to me that probably Henry Mills hadn't proposed to Pauline after all, but before I could frame a discreet question she was off in another direction.

"What will Tommy Betterworth say?"

"Why, what has he got to do with it?"

"O-*liv*-ia! After the way you've encouraged him . . ."

"You mean because I went to the picnic with him? Well, what can he do about it?" Pauline gave me up with a gesture.

"Tommy is the soul of chivalry," she said, "and anybody can see he is crazy about you, simply crazy." What I really wanted was that she should go on talking about Helmeth Garrett. I wanted ground for putting to her that since all we had been sedulously taught about kissing and all "that sort of thing" – that it was horrid, cheapening, insufferable – had failed to establish

itself, had in fact come as a sword, divining mystery, it couldn't be dealt with on the accepted Taylorville basis. I felt the quality of achievement in Helmeth Garrett's right to kiss me, a right which I was sure he lacked only the occasion to establish. But when the occasion came it went all awry.

It was the next Sunday morning, and all down Polk Street the frost-bitten flower borders were a little made up for by the passage between the shoals of maple leaves that lined the walks, of whole flocks of bright winged, new fall hats on their way to church. Mother and Effie were in front and two of my Sunday-school scholars had scurried up like rabbits out of the fallen leafage and tucked themselves on either side of my carefully held skirts. Suddenly there was a rattle of buggy wheels on the winter roughed road; it turned in by Niles's corner and drove directly toward us; the top was down and I made out by the quick pricking of my blood, the Garrett bays and Helmeth with his hat off, his hair tousled, and a bright soft tie swinging free of his vest. You saw heads turning all along the block in discreet censure of his unsabbatical behaviour. He recognized me almost immediately and turned the team with intention to our side of the street. He was going to speak to me ... he was speaking. My mother's back stiffened, she didn't know of course. Forrie wouldn't have had the face to tell her, but how many eyes on us up and down the street did know? A Sunday-school teacher in the midst of her scholars ... and he had kissed me on Thursday!

"Olivia," said my mother, "do you know that young man?"

Such manners ... Sunday morning, too. Well, I am glad that you had the sense to ignore him;" and I did not know until that moment that I had.

It was because of my habit of living inwardly, I suppose, that it never occurred to me that the incident could have any other bearing on our relations than the secret one of confirming me in my impression of our intimacy being on a superior, excluding footing. He had come, as I was perfectly aware, to renew it at the point of breaking off, and this security quite blinded me to the effect my cold reception might have upon him. That he would fail to understand how I was hemmed and pinned in by Taylorville, hadn't occurred to me, not even when he passed us again on the way home from church, driving recklessly. His hat was on this time, determinedly to one side, and he was smoking, smoking a cigar. I thought at first he had not seen me, but he turned suddenly when he was quite past and swept me a flourish with it held between two fingers of the hand that touched his hat.

At that time in Taylorville no really nice young man smoked, at least not when he would get found out. This offensiveness in the face of the returning church-goers was too flagrant to admit even the appearance of noticing it, but that it would be noticed, taken stock of in the general summing up of our relation, I was sickeningly aware.

Tommy Betterworth put one version of it for me comfortingly when he came in the evening to take me to church.

"I saw you turn down that Garrett fellow this morning. Served

him right ... that and the way you behaved Thursday ... just as if you did not find him worth rowing about. A lot of girls make a fuss, and it's only to draw a fellow on; and now you're going to church with me the same as usual; that'll show 'em what *I* think of it." Now, I had clean forgotten that Tommy might come that evening. I was whelmed with the certainty that Helmeth Garrett had gone back to the farm after all without seeing me; and the moment Tommy came through the gate I had one of those rifts of lucidity in which I saw him whole and limited, pasted flat against the background of Taylorville without any perspective of imagination, and was taken mightily with the wish to explain to him where he stood, once for all, outside and disconnected with anything that was vital and important to me. But quite unexpectedly, before I could frame a beginning, he had presented himself to me in a new light. He was cover, something to get behind in order to exercise myself more freely in the things he couldn't understand.

Something more was bound to come out of my relation to Helmeth Garrett; the incident couldn't go on hanging in the air that way; and in the meantime here was an opportunity to put it out of public attention by going out with Tommy. It did hang in the air, however, for three days, during which I pulsed and sickened with expectancy; by Thursday it had reached a point where I knew that if Helmeth Garrett didn't come and kiss me again I shouldn't be able to bear it. It was soon after sundown that I felt him coming.

I took a great many turns in the garden, which, carrying me occasionally out of reach of the click of the gate latch, afforded me the relief of thinking that he might have arrived in the interval when I was out of hearing. His approaching tread was within me. When it was just seven my mother came out and called:

"Olivia, I promised Mrs. Endsleigh a starter of yeast; I have just remembered. Could you take it to her?"

The Endsleigh backyard was separated from ours by a vacant lot, the houses fronting on parallel streets; there was no sound at the gate and mother had the bowl in a white napkin held out to me, with a long message about where the sewing circle was to meet next Thursday.

"If any body comes," – for the life of me I couldn't have kept that back, – "you can tell them I'll be back in a minute," I cautioned her.

"Are you expecting anybody?"

"Only Tommy," I prevaricated, instantly and unaccountably. I saw my mother look at me rather oddly over the tops of the glasses she had lately assumed. On the Endsleigh's back porch I found Belle in evening dress gathering ivy berries for her hair.

"Oh," she said, to my plain appearance, "aren't you going?"

"Going where?"

"Oh, if you don't know ... to Flora's." Belle was embarrassed.

"I hadn't heard of it."

"It's just a few friends," Belle wavered between sympathy and superiority. "Flora is so particular..."

"I couldn't have gone anyway," I interpolated, "I have an engagement." I had to find Mrs. Endsleigh after that and deliver my errand.

When I reached home mother was sitting placidly just outside the circle of the lamp, knitting. She only looked up as I entered and I had to drag it out of her at last.

"Has anybody been here?"

"Nobody that you would care to see."

"But who?"

"That fast-looking young man who tried to speak to you on Sunday. I'm glad you have a proper feeling about such things. Mr. Garrett's nephew, didn't you say? I told him you were engaged."

"Oh, mother!" I was out in panting haste. At the gate I ran square into Tommy Bettersworth.

"Did you see anybody?"

"Nobody. I came through by Davis's. I was coming in," he suggested, as I stood peering into the dark.

"I thought you'd be going to Flora's." A wild hope flashed in me that maybe he was going and I should be rid of him.

"Oh, I don't care much for that crowd. I told her I had an engagement with you." So he had known I was not to be invited. I resented the liberty of his defence. "Let's go down to Niles's and have some ice cream," Tommy propitiated.

"It's too cold for ice cream." I led the way back to the house. I was satisfied there was no one in the street. When we stepped into the fan of light from the lit window, Tommy saw my face.

"Oh, I say, Ollie, you mustn't take it like that. Beastly cats girls are! Flora's just jealous because she thought she was invited to the picnic for that Garrett chap, and you got him; she wants to have a chance at him herself to-night." There was a green-painted garden seat on the porch between the front windows. I sat down in it.

"It's not Flora I'm crying about ... it is being so misunderstood." I was thinking that Helmeth Garrett would suppose I had stayed away from Flora's on his account; she would never dare to say she had not invited me. Tommy's arm came comfortingly along the back of the bench.

"It's just because they do understand that they are mad; they know a fellow would give his eyes to kiss you. Infernal cad! to snatch it like that; and I've never even asked you for one." His voice was very close to my ear. "I tell you, Olivia, I've thought of something. If you were to be engaged to me ... you know I've always wanted ... then nobody would have a right to say anything. They'd see that you just left it to me."

"Oh," I blurted, "it's not so bad as that!"

"You think about it," he urged. "I don't want to bother you, but if you need it, why here I am." It was because I was thinking of him so little that I hadn't noticed where Tommy's arm had got by this time. That unfulfilled kiss had seemed somehow to leave me unimaginably exposed, assailed. I was needing desperately then to be kissed again, to find myself revalued.

"It's awfully good of you, Tommy..."

I do not know how it was that neither of us heard Forester come up from the gate; all at once there was his foot on the step; as he came into the porch a soft sound drew him, he stared blankly on us for a moment and then laughed shortly.

"Oh! it's you this time, Bettersworth. I thought it might be that Garrett chap."

That was unkind of Forester, but there were extenuations. I found afterward that Belle had teased Flora to ask him and he had refused, thinking it unbrotherly when I was not to be invited, and he and Belle had quarrelled.

"I don't know as it matters to you" – Tommy was valiant – "whom she kisses, if I don't mind it."

"You? What have you got to do with it?"

"Well, a lot. I'm engaged to her."

# BOOK II

## CHAPTER I

The first notion of an obligation I had in writing this part of my story, was that if it is to be serviceable, no lingering sentiment should render it less than literal, and none of that egotism turned inside out which makes a kind sanctity of the personal experience, prevent me from offering it whole. And the next was that the only way in which it could be made to appear in its complete pitiableness, would be to write it from the point of view of Tommy Bettersworth. For after all, I have emerged – retarded, crippled in my affectional capacities, bodily the worse, but still with wings to spread and some disposition toward flying. And when I think of the dreams Tommy had, how he must have figured in them to himself, large between me and all misadventure, adored, dependable; and then how he blundered and lost himself in the mazes of unsuitability, I find bitterness augmenting in me not on my account but his. The amazing pity of it was that it might all have turned out very well if I had been what I seemed to him and to my family at the time when I let him engage himself to me to save me from imminent embarrassment.

My mother, though she took on for the occasion an appropriate solemnity, was frankly relieved to have me so well

disposed. Tommy had been brought up in the church, had no bad habits, and was earning a reasonable salary with Burton Brothers, Tailors and Outfitters.

There was nobody whose business it was to tell me that I did not love Tommy enough to marry him. I have often wondered, supposing a medium of communication had been established between my mother and me, if I had told her how much more that other kiss had meant to me than Tommy's mild osculation, she would have understood or made a fight for me? I am afraid she would only have seen in it evidence of an infatuation for an undesirable young man, one who smoked and drove rakishly about town in red neckties on Sunday morning. But in fact I liked Tommy immensely. The mating instinct was awake; all our world clapped us forward to the adventure.

If you ask what the inward monitor was about on this occasion, I will say that it is always and singularly inept at human estimates. If, often in search of companionship, its eye is removed from the Mark, to fix upon the personal environment, it is still unfurnished to divine behind which plain exterior lives another like itself! I took Tommy's community of interest for granted on the evidence of his loving me, though, indeed, after all these years I am not quite clear why he, why Forester and Pauline couldn't have walked in the way with me toward the Shining Destiny. I was not conscious of any private advantage; certainly so far as our beginnings were concerned, none showed, and I should have been glad of their company ... and here at the end I am walking in

it alone.

About a month after my engagement, Henry Mills proposed to Pauline, and she began preparations to be married the following June. Tommy's salary not being thought to justify it so soon, the idea of my own marriage had not come very close to me until I began to help Pauline work initials on table linen.

The chief difference between Pauline and me had been that she had lived all her life, so to speak, at home; nothing exigent to her social order had ever found her "out"; but Olivia seemed always to be at the top of the house or somewhere in the back garden, to whom the normal occasions presented themselves as a succession of cards under the door. I do not mean to say that I actually missed any of these appointed visitors, but all my early life comes back to me as a series of importunate callers whose names I was not sure of, and who distracted me frightfully from something vastly more pleasant and important that I wanted very much to do, without knowing very well what it was. But it was in the long afternoons when Pauline and I sat upstairs together sewing on our white things that I began to take notice of the relation of what happened to me to the things that went on inside, and to be intrigued away from the Vision by the possibility of turning it into facts of line and colour and suitability. It was the beginning of my realizing what came afterward to be such a bitter and engrossing need with me, the need of money.

Much that had struck inharmoniously on me in the furnishings of Taylorville, had identified itself so with the point of view

there, that I had come to think of the one as being the natural and inevitable expression of the other; now, with the growing appreciation of a home of my own as a medium of self-realization, I accepted its possibility of limitation by the figure of my husband's income without being entirely daunted thereby. For I was still of the young opinion that getting rich involved no more serious matter than setting about it. As I saw it then, Men's Tailoring and Outfitting did not appear an unlikely beginning; if Tommy had achieved the magnificence I planned for him, it wouldn't have been on the whole more remarkable than what has happened. What I had to reckon with later was the astonishing fact that Tommy liked plush furniture, and liked it red for choice.

I do not know why it should have taken me by surprise to find him in harmony with his bringing up; there was no reason for the case being otherwise except as I seemed to find one in his being fond of me. His mother's house was not unlike other Taylorvillian homes, more austerely kept; the blinds were always pulled down in the best room, and they never opened the piano except when there was company, or for the little girls to practise their music lessons. Mrs. Bettersworth was a large, fair woman with pale, prominent eyes, and pale hair pulled back from a corrugated forehead, and his sisters, who were all younger than Tommy, were exactly like her, their eyes if possible more protruded, which you felt to be owing to their hair being braided very tightly in two braids as far apart as possible at the corners of their heads.

They treated me always with the greatest respect. If there had been anybody who could have thrown any light on the situation it would have been Mr. Bettersworth. He was a dry man, with what passed in Taylorville for an eccentric turn of mind. He had, for instance, been known to justify himself for putting Tommy to the Men's Outfitters rather than to his own business of building and contracting, on the ground that Tommy wanted the imagination for it. Just as if an imagination could be of use to anybody!

"So you are going to undertake to make Tommy happy?" he said to me on the occasion of my taking supper with the family as a formal acknowledgment of my engagement.

"Don't you think I can do it?" He was looking at me rather quizzically, and I really wished to know.

"Oh! I was wondering," he said, "what you would do with what you had left over." But it was years before I understood what he meant by that.

About the time I was bridesmaid for Pauline, Tommy had an advantageous offer that put our marriage almost immediately within reach. Burton Brothers was a branch house, one of a score with the Head at Chicago, to whom Tommy had so commended himself under the stimulus of being engaged, that on the establishment of a new store in Higgleston they offered him the sales department. There was also to be a working tailor and a superintendent visiting it regularly from Chicago, which its nearness to the metropolis allowed.

All that we knew of Higgleston was that it was a long

settled farming community, which, having discovered itself at the junction of two railway lines that approached Chicago from the southeast, conceived itself to have arrived there by some native superiority, and awoke to the expectation of importance.

It lay, as respects Taylorville, no great distance beyond the flat horizon of the north, where the prairie broke into wooded land again, far enough north not to have been fanned by the hot blast of the war and the spiritual struggle that preceded it, and so to have missed the revitalizing processes that crowded the few succeeding years. Whatever difference there was between it and Taylorville besides population, was just the difference between a community that has fought whole-heartedly and one that stood looking on at the fight.

It was not far enough from Taylorville to have struck out anything new for itself in manners or furniture, but the necessity of going south two or three hours to change cars, and north again several hours more, set up an illusion of change which led to a disappointment in its want of variety. Tommy went out in July, and in a month wrote me that he would be able to come for me as soon as I was ready, and hoping it would not be long. If I had looked, as in the last hesitations of girlhood I believe I did, for my mother to have raised an objection to my going so far from home, I found myself, instead, almost with the feeling of being pushed out of the nest. It seemed as if in hastening me out of the family she would be the sooner free to give herself without reproach to a new and extraordinary scheme of Forester's. What

I guess now to have been in part the motive, was that she already had been touched by the warning of that disorder which finally carried her off, which, with the curious futility of timid women, she hoped, by not mentioning, to postpone.

For a long time now Forester had found himself in the situation of having grown beyond his virtues. That assumption of mannishness which sat so prettily on his nonage was rendered inconspicuous by his majority. People who had forgotten that he had never had any boyhood, found nothing especially commendable in the mild soberness of twenty-three. I have a notion, too, that the happy circumstance of my marriage lit up for him some personal phases which he could hardly have regarded with complacency, for by this time he had passed, in his character of philanderer, from being hopefully regarded as reclaimable to constancy, to a sort of public understudy in the practice of the affections. However it had come about, the young ladies who still took on Forester at intervals, no longer looked on him so much as privileged but as eminently safe; and the number of girls in a given community who can be counted on for such a performance, is limited. That summer before I was married, after Belle Endsleigh had run away from home with a commercial traveller who disappointed the moral instance by making her a very good husband afterward, my brother found himself, as regards the young people's world, in a situation of uneasy detachment. And there was no doubt that the Coöperative, where he had been seven years, bored him excessively. It was then he

conceived the idea of reinstating himself in the atmosphere of importance by setting himself up in business.

Adjacent to Niles's Ice Cream Parlours, there was a small stationery and news agency which might be bought and enlarged to creditable proportions. There was, I believe, actually nothing to be urged against this as a matter of business; the difficulty was that to accomplish it my mother would be obliged to hypothecate the whole of her small capital. What my mother really thought about her property was that she held it in trust for the family interest, and that, with the secret intimation of her end which I surmise must have reached her by this time, she believed to be served by Forester's plan. It was so much the general view that by marrying I took myself out of the family altogether, that I felt convinced that she meant, so soon as that was accomplished, to undertake what, in the face of my protesting attitude, she had not the courage to begin. I remember how shocked she was at my telling her that this tying up of the two ends of life in a monetary obligation, would put her and Forester very much in the situation of a young man married to a middle-aged woman. I mention this here because the implication that grew out of it, of my marriage being looked forward to as a relief, had much to do with the failure out of my life at this juncture, of informing intimacy.

A great deal of necessary information had come my way through Pauline's marriage, through the comment set free by Belle Endsleigh's affair, through the natural awakening of my mind toward the intimations of books. Marriage I began to

perceive as an engulfing personal experience. Until now I hadn't been able to think of it except as a means of providing pleasant companionship on the way toward that large and shining world for which I felt myself forever and unassailably fit. It began to exhibit now, through vistas that allured, the aspect of a vast inhuman grin. Somewhere out of this prospect of sympathy and understanding, arose upon you the tremendous inundation of Life. Dimly beyond the point of Tommy's joyous possession of me, I was aware of an incalculable force by which the whole province of my being was assailed, very different from the girlish prevision of motherhood which had floated with the fragrance of orris root from Aunt Alice's bureau drawer in the Allingham's spare room.

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