

Theodore Dreiser

An American Tragedy II

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Теодор Драйзер

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«РИПОЛ Классик»

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An American Tragedy is the story of the corruption and destruction of one man, Clyde Griffiths, who forfeits his life in desperate pursuit of success. The novel represents a massive portrayal of the society whose values both shape Clyde's tawdry ambitions and seal his fate: It is an unsurpassed depiction of the harsh realities of American life and of the dark side of the American Dream.

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Содержание

Chapter 1	6
Chapter 2	11
Chapter 3	15
Chapter 4	21
Chapter 5	26
Chapter 6	34
Chapter 7	38
Chapter 8	41
Chapter 9	46
Chapter 10	53
Chapter 11	57
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	61

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Chapter 1

The home of Samuel Griffiths in Lycurgus, New York, a city of some twenty-five thousand inhabitants midway between Utica and Albany. Near the dinner hour and by degrees the family assembling for its customary meal. On this occasion the preparations were of a more elaborate nature than usual, owing to the fact that for the past four days Mr. Samuel Griffiths, the husband and father, had been absent attending a conference of shirt and collar manufacturers in Chicago, price-cutting by upstart rivals in the west having necessitated compromise and adjustment by those who manufactured in the east. He was but now returned and had telephoned earlier in the afternoon that he had arrived, and was going to his office in the factory where he would remain until dinner time.

Being long accustomed to the ways of a practical and convinced man who believed in himself and considered his judgment and his decision sound – almost final – for the most part, anyhow, Mrs. Griffiths thought nothing of this. He would appear and greet her in due order.

Knowing that he preferred leg of lamb above many other things, after due word with Mrs. Truesdale, her homely but useful housekeeper, she ordered lamb. And the appropriate vegetables and dessert having been decided upon, she gave herself over to thoughts of her eldest daughter Myra, who, having graduated from Smith College several years before, was still unmarried. And the reason for this, as Mrs. Griffiths well understood, though she was never quite willing to admit it openly, was that Myra was not very good looking. Her nose was too long, her eyes too close-set, her chin not sufficiently rounded to give her a girlish and pleasing appearance. For the most part she seemed too thoughtful and studious – as a rule not interested in the ordinary social life of that city. Neither did she possess that *savoir faire*, let alone that peculiar appeal for men, that characterized some girls even when they were not pretty. As her mother saw it, she was really too critical and too intellectual, having a mind that was rather above the world in which she found herself.

Brought up amid comparative luxury, without having to worry about any of the rough details of making a living, she had been confronted, nevertheless, by the difficulties of making her own way in the matter of social favor and love – two objectives which, without beauty or charm, were about as difficult as the attaining to extreme wealth by a beggar. And the fact that for twelve years now – ever since she had been fourteen – she had seen the lives of other youths and maidens in this small world in which she moved passing gayly enough, while hers was more or less confined to reading, music, the business of keeping as neatly and attractively arrayed as possible, and of going to visit friends in the hope of possibly encountering somewhere, somehow, the one temperament who would be interested in her, had saddened, if not exactly soured her. And that despite the fact that the material comfort of her parents and herself was exceptional.

Just now she had gone through her mother's room to her own, looking as though she were not very much interested in anything. Her mother had been trying to think of something to suggest that would take her out of herself, when the younger daughter, Bella, fresh from a passing visit to the home of the Finchleys, wealthy neighbors where she had stopped on her way from the Snedeker School, burst in upon her.

Contrasted with her sister, who was tall and dark and rather sallow, Bella, though shorter, was far more gracefully and vigorously formed. She had thick brown – almost black – hair, a brown and olive complexion tinted with red, and eyes brown and genial, that blazed with an eager, seeking light. In addition to her sound and lithe physique, she possessed vitality and animation. Her arms and legs were graceful and active. Plainly she was given to liking things as she found them – enjoying life as it was – and hence, unlike her sister, she was unusually attractive to men and boys – to men and women, old and young – a fact which her mother and father well knew. No danger of any lack of marriage offers for her when the time came. As her mother saw it, too many youths and men were already buzzing around, and so posing the question of a proper husband for her. Already she had displayed a

tendency to become thick and fast friends, not only with the scions of the older and more conservative families who constituted the ultra-respectable element of the city, but also, and this was more to her mother's distaste, with the sons and daughters of some of those later and hence socially less important families of the region – the sons and daughters of manufacturers of bacon, canning jars, vacuum cleaners, wooden and wicker ware, and typewriters, who constituted a solid enough financial element in the city, but who made up what might be considered the “fast set” in the local life.

In Mrs. Griffiths' opinion, there was too much dancing, cabareting, automobiling to one city and another, without due social supervision. Yet, as a contrast to her sister, Myra, what a relief. It was only from the point of view of proper surveillance, or until she was safely and religiously married, that Mrs. Griffiths troubled or even objected to most of her present contacts and yearnings and gayeties. She desired to protect her.

“Now, where have you been?” she demanded, as her daughter burst into the room, throwing down her books and drawing near to the open fire that burned there.

“Just think, Mamma,” began Bella most unconcernedly and almost irrelevantly. “The Finchleys are going to give up their place out at Greenwood Lake this coming summer and go up to Twelfth Lake near Pine Point. They're going to build a new bungalow up there. And Sondra says that this time it's going to be right down at the water's edge – not away from it, as it is out here. And they're going to have a great big verandah with a hardwood floor. And a boathouse big enough for a thirty-foot electric launch that Mr. Finchley is going to buy for Stuart. Won't that be wonderful? And she says that if you will let me, that I can come up there for all summer long, or for as long as I like. And Gil, too, if he will. It's just across the lake from the Emery Lodge, you know, and the East Gate Hotel. And the Phants' place, you know, the Phants of Utica, is just below theirs near Sharon. Isn't that just wonderful? Won't that be great? I wish you and Dad would make up your minds to build up there now sometime, Mamma. It looks to me now as though nearly everybody that's worth anything down here is moving up there.”

She talked so fast and swung about so, looking now at the open fire burning in the grate, then out of the two high windows that commanded the front lawn and a full view of Wykeagy Avenue, lit by the electric lights in the winter dusk, that her mother had no opportunity to insert any comment until this was over. However, she managed to observe: “Yes? Well, what about the Anthonys and the Nicholsons and the Taylors? I haven't heard of their leaving Greenwood yet.”

“Oh, I know, not the Anthonys or the Nicholsons or the Taylors. Who expects them to move? They're too old fashioned. They're not the kind that would move anywhere, are they? No one thinks they are. Just the same Greenwood isn't like Twelfth Lake. You know that yourself. And all the people that are anybody down on the South Shore are going up there for sure. The Cranstons next year, Sondra says. And after that, I bet the Harriets will go, too.”

“The Cranstons and the Harriets and the Finchleys and Sondra,” commented her mother, half amused and half irritated. “The Cranstons and you and Bertine and Sondra – that's all I hear these days.” For the Cranstons, and the Finchleys, despite a certain amount of local success in connection with this newer and faster set, were, much more than any of the others, the subject of considerable unfavorable comment. They were the people who, having moved the Cranston Wickwire Company from Albany, and the Finchley Electric Sweeper from Buffalo, and built large factories on the south bank of the Mohawk River, to say nothing of new and grandiose houses in Wykeagy Avenue and summer cottages at Greenwood, some twenty miles northwest, were setting a rather showy, and hence disagreeable, pace to all of the wealthy residents of this region. They were given to wearing the smartest clothes, to the latest novelties in cars and entertainments, and constituted a problem to those who with less means considered their position and their equipment about as fixed and interesting and attractive as such things might well be. The Cranstons and the Finchleys were in the main a thorn in the flesh of the remainder of the elite of Lycurgus – too showy and too aggressive.

“How often have I told you that I don’t want you to have so much to do with Bertine or that Letta Harriet or her brother either? They’re too forward. They run around and talk and show off too much. And your father feels the same as I do in regard to them. As for Sondra Finchley, if she expects to go with Bertine and you, too, then you’re not going to go with her either much longer. Besides I’m not sure that your father approves of your going anywhere without some one to accompany you. You’re not old enough yet. And as for your going to Twelfth Lake to the Finchleys, well, unless we all go together, there’ll be no going there, either.” And now Mrs. Griffiths, who leaned more to the manner and tactics of the older, if not less affluent families, stared complainingly at her daughter.

Nevertheless Bella was no more abashed that she was irritated by this. On the contrary she knew her mother and knew that she was fond of her; also that she was intrigued by her physical charm as well as her assured local social success as much as was her father, who considered her perfection itself and could be swayed by her least, as well as her much practised, smile.

“Not old enough, not old enough,” commented Bella reproachfully. “Will you listen? I’ll be eighteen in July. I’d like to know when you and Papa are going to think I’m old enough to go anywhere without you both. Wherever you two go, I have to go, and wherever I want to go, you two have to go, too.”

“Bella,” censured her mother. Then after a moment’s silence, in which her daughter stood there impatiently, she added, “Of course, what else would you have us do? When you are twenty-one or two, if you are not married by then, it will be time enough to think of going off by yourself. But at your age, you shouldn’t be thinking of any such thing.” Bella cocked her pretty head, for at the moment the side door downstairs was thrown open, and Gilbert Griffiths, the only son of this family and who very much in face and build, if not in manner or lack of force, resembled Clyde, his western cousin, entered and ascended.

He was at this time a vigorous, self-centered and vain youth of twenty-three who, in contrast with his two sisters, seemed much sterner and far more practical. Also, probably much more intelligent and aggressive in a business way – a field in which neither of the two girls took the slightest interest. He was brisk in manner and impatient. He considered that his social position was perfectly secure, and was utterly scornful of anything but commercial success. Yet despite this he was really deeply interested in the movements of the local society, of which he considered himself and his family the most important part. Always conscious of the dignity and social standing of his family in this community, he regulated his action and speech accordingly. Ordinarily he struck the passing observer as rather sharp and arrogant, neither as youthful or as playful as his years might have warranted. Still he was young, attractive and interesting. He had a sharp, if not brilliant, tongue in his head – a gift at times for making crisp and cynical remarks. On account of his family and position he was considered also the most desirable of all the young eligible bachelors in Lycurgus. Nevertheless he was so much interested in himself that he scarcely found room in his cosmos for a keen and really intelligent understanding of anyone else.

Hearing him ascend from below and enter his room, which was at the rear of the house next to hers, Bella at once left her mother’s room, and coming to the door, called: “Oh, Gil, can I come in?”

“Sure.” He was whistling briskly and already, in view of some entertainment somewhere, preparing to change to evening clothes.

“Where are you going?”

“Nowhere, for dinner. To the Wynants afterwards.”

“Oh, Constance to be sure.”

“No, not Constance, to be sure. Where do you get that stuff?”

“As though I didn’t know.”

“Lay off. Is that what you came in here for?”

“No, that isn’t what I came in here for. What do you think? The Finchleys are going to build a place up at Twelfth Lake next summer, right on the lake, next to the Phants, and Mr. Finchley’s

going to buy Stuart a thirty-foot launch and build a boathouse with a sun-parlor right over the water to hold it. Won't that be swell, huh?"

"Don't say 'swell.' And don't say 'huh.' Can't you learn to cut out the slang? You talk like a factory girl. Is that all they teach you over at that school?"

"Listen to who's talking about cutting out slang. How about yourself? You set a fine example around here, I notice."

"Well, I'm five years older than you are. Besides I'm a man. You don't notice Myra using any of that stuff."

"Oh, Myra. But don't let's talk about that. Only think of that new house they're going to build and the fine time they're going to have up there next summer. Don't you wish we could move up there, too? We could if we wanted to – if Papa and Mamma would agree to it."

"Oh, I don't know that it would be so wonderful," replied her brother, who was really very much interested just the same. "There are other places besides Twelfth Lake."

"Who said there weren't? But not for the people that we know around here. Where else do the best people from Albany and Utica go but there now, I'd like to know. It's going to become a regular center, Sondra says, with all the finest houses along the west shore. Just the same, the Cranstons, the Lamberts, and the Harriets are going to move up there pretty soon, too," Bella added most definitely and defiantly. "That won't leave so many out at Greenwood Lake, nor the very best people, either, even if the Anthonys and Nicholsons do stay here."

"Who says the Cranstons are going up there?" asked Gilbert, now very much interested.

"Why, Sondra!"

"Who told her?"

"Bertine."

"Gee, they're getting gayer and gayer," commented her brother oddly and a little enviously. "Pretty soon Lyncurgus'll be too small to hold 'em." He jerked at a bow tie he was attempting to center and grimaced oddly as his tight neck-band pinched him slightly.

For although Gilbert had recently entered into the collar and shirt industry with his father as general supervisor of manufacturing, and with every prospect of managing and controlling the entire business eventually, still he was jealous of young Grant Cranston, a youth of his own age, very appealing and attractive physically, who was really more daring with and more attractive to the girls of the younger set. Cranston seemed to be satisfied that it was possible to combine a certain amount of social pleasure with working for his father with which Gilbert did not agree. In fact, young Griffiths would have preferred, had it been possible, so to charge young Cranston with looseness, only thus far the latter had managed to keep himself well within the bounds of sobriety. And the Cranston Wickwire Company was plainly forging ahead as one of the leading industries of Lyncurgus.

"Well," he added, after a moment, "they're spreading out faster than I would if I had their business. They're not the richest people in the world, either." Just the same he was thinking that, unlike himself and his parents, the Cranstons were really more daring if not socially more avid of life. He envied them.

"And what's more," added Bella interestedly, "the Finchleys are to have a dance floor over the boathouse. And Sondra says that Stuart was hoping that you would come up there and spend a lot of time this summer."

"Oh, did he?" replied Gilbert, a little enviously and sarcastically. "You mean he said he was hoping you would come up and spend a lot of time. I'll be working this summer."

"He didn't say anything of the kind, smarty. Besides it wouldn't hurt us any if we did go up there. There's nothing much out at Greenwood any more that I can see. A lot of old hen parties."

"Is that so? Mother would like to hear that."

"And you'll tell her, of course"

“Oh, no, I won’t either. But I don’t think we’re going to follow the Finchleys or the Cranstons up to Twelfth Lake just yet, either. You can go up there if you want, if Dad’ll let you.”

Just then the lower door clicked again, and Bella, forgetting her quarrel with her brother, ran down to greet her father.

Chapter 2

The head of the Lycurgus branch of the Griffiths, as contrasted with the father of the Kansas City family, was most arresting. Unlike his shorter and more confused brother of the Door of Hope, whom he had not even seen for thirty years, he was a little above the average in height, very well-knit, although comparatively slender, shrewd of eye, and incisive both as to manner and speech. Long used to contending for himself, and having come by effort as well as results to know that he was above the average in acumen and commercial ability, he was inclined at times to be a bit intolerant of those who were not. He was not ungenerous or unpleasant in manner, but always striving to maintain a calm and judicial air. And he told himself by way of excuse for his mannerisms that he was merely accepting himself at the value that others placed upon him and all those who, like himself, were successful.

Having arrived in Lycurgus about twenty-five years before with some capital and a determination to invest in a new collar enterprise which had been proposed to him, he had succeeded thereafter beyond his wildest expectations. And naturally he was vain about it. His family at this time – twenty-five years later – unquestionably occupied one of the best, as well as the most tastefully constructed residences in Lycurgus. They were also esteemed as among the few best families of this region – being, if not the oldest, at least among the most conservative, respectable and successful in Lycurgus. His two younger children, if not the eldest, were much to the front socially in the younger and gayer set and so far nothing had happened to weaken or darken his prestige.

On returning from Chicago on this particular day, after having concluded several agreements there which spelled trade harmony and prosperity for at least one year, he was inclined to feel very much at ease and on good terms with the world. Nothing had occurred to mar his trip. In his absence the Griffiths Collar and Shirt Company had gone on as though he had been present. Trade orders at the moment were large.

Now as he entered his own door he threw down a heavy bag and fashionably made coat and turned to see what he rather expected – Bella hurrying toward him. Indeed she was his pet, the most pleasing and different and artistic thing, as he saw it, that all his years had brought to him – youth, health, gayety, intelligence and affection – all in the shape of a pretty daughter.

“Oh, Daddy,” she called most sweetly and enticingly as she saw him enter. “Is that you?”

“Yes. At least it feels a little like me at the present moment. How’s my baby girl?” And he opened his arms and received the bounding form of his last born. “There’s a good, strong, healthy girl, I’ll say,” he announced as he withdrew his affectionate lips from hers. “And how’s the bad girl been behaving herself since I left? No fibbing this time.”

“Oh, just fine, Daddy. You can ask any one. I couldn’t be better.”

“And your mother?”

“She’s all right, Daddy. She’s up in her room. I don’t think she heard you come in.”

“And Myra? Is she back from Albany yet?”

“Yes. She’s in her room. I heard her playing just now. I just got in myself a little while ago.”

“Ay, hai. Gadding about again. I know you.” He held up a genial forefinger, warningly, while Bella swung onto one of his arms and kept pace with him up the stairs to the floor above.

“Oh, no, I wasn’t either, now,” she cooed shrewdly and sweetly. “Just see how you pick on me, Daddy. I was only over with Sondra for a little while. And what do you think, Daddy? They’re going to give up the place at Greenwood and build a big handsome bungalow up on Twelfth Lake right away. And Mr. Finchley’s going to buy a big electric launch for Stuart and they’re going to live up there next summer, maybe all the time, from May until October. And so are the Cranstons, maybe.”

Mr. Griffiths, long used to his younger daughter’s wiles, was interested at the moment not so much by the thought that she wished to convey – that Twelfth Lake was more desirable, socially than

Greenwood – as he was by the fact that the Finchleys were able to make this sudden and rather heavy expenditure for social reasons only.

Instead of answering Bella he went on upstairs and into his wife's room. He kissed Mrs. Griffiths, looked in upon Myra, who came to the door to embrace him, and spoke of the successful nature of the trip. One could see by the way he embraced his wife that there was an agreeable understanding between them – no disharmony – by the way he greeted Myra that if he did not exactly sympathize with her temperament and point of view, at least he included her within the largess of his affection.

As they were talking Mrs. Truesdale announced that dinner was ready, and Gilbert, having completed his toilet, now entered.

“I say, Dad,” he called, “I have an interesting thing I want to see you about in the morning. Can I?”

“All right, I'll be there. Come in about noon.”

“Come on all, or the dinner will be getting cold,” admonished Mrs. Griffiths earnestly, and forthwith Gilbert turned and went down, followed by Griffiths, who still had Bella on his arm. And after him came Mrs. Griffiths and Myra, who now emerged from her room and joined them.

Once seated at the table, the family forthwith began discussing topics of current local interest. For Bella, who was the family's chief source of gossip, gathering the most of it from the Snedeker School, through which all the social news appeared to percolate most swiftly, suddenly announced: “What do you think, Mamma? Rosetta Nicholson, that niece of Mrs. Disston Nicholson, who was over here last summer from Albany – you know, she came over the night of the Alumnae Garden Party on our lawn – you remember – the young girl with the yellow hair and squinty blue eyes – her father owns that big wholesale grocery over there – well, she's engaged to that Herbert Tickham of Utica, who was visiting Mrs. Lambert last summer. You don't remember him, but I do. He was tall and dark and sorta awkward, and awfully pale, but very handsome – oh, a regular movie hero.”

“There you go, Mrs. Griffiths,” interjected Gilbert shrewdly and cynically to his mother. “A delegation from the Misses Snedeker's Select School sneaks off to the movies to brush up on heroes from time to time.”

Griffiths senior suddenly observed: “I had a curious experience in Chicago this time, something I think the rest of you will be interested in.” He was thinking of an accidental encounter two days before in Chicago between himself and the eldest son, as it proved to be, of his younger brother Asa. Also of a conclusion he had come to in regard to him.

“Oh, what is it, Daddy?” pleaded Bella at once. “Do tell me about it.”

“Spin the big news, Dad,” added Gilbert, who, because of the favor of his father, felt very free and close to him always.

“Well, while I was in Chicago at the Union League Club, I met a young man who is related to us, a cousin of you three children, by the way, the eldest son of my brother Asa, who is out in Denver now, I understand. I haven't seen or heard from him in thirty years.” He paused and mused dubiously.

“Not the one who is a preacher somewhere, Daddy?” inquired Bella, looking up.

“Yes, the preacher. At least I understand he was for a while after he left home. But his son tells me he has given that up now. He's connected with something in Denver – a hotel, I think.”

“But what's his son like?” interrogated Bella, who only knew such well groomed and ostensibly conservative youths and men as her present social status and supervision permitted, and in consequence was intensely interested. The son of a western hotel proprietor!

“A cousin? How old is he?” asked Gilbert instantly, curious as to his character and situation and ability.

“Well, he's a very interesting young man, I think,” continued Griffiths tentatively and somewhat dubiously, since up to this hour he had not truly made up his mind about Clyde. “He's quite good-looking and well-mannered, too – about your own age, I should say, Gil, and looks a lot like you –

very much so – same eyes and mouth and chin.” He looked at his son examiningly. “He’s a little bit taller, if anything, and looks a little thinner, though I don’t believe he really is.”

At the thought of a cousin who looked like him – possibly as attractive in every way as himself – and bearing his own name, Gilbert chilled and bristled slightly. For here in Lycurgus, up to this time, he was well and favourably known as the only son and heir presumptive to the managerial control of his father’s business, and to at least a third of the estate, if not more. And now, if by any chance it should come to light that there was a relative, a cousin of his own years and one who looked and acted like him, even – he bridled at the thought. Forthwith (a psychic reaction which he did not understand and could not very well control) he decided that he did not like him – could not like him.

“What’s he doing now?” he asked in a curt and rather sour tone, though he attempted to avoid the latter element in his voice.

“Well, he hasn’t much of a job, I must say,” smiled Samuel Griffiths, meditatively. “He’s only a bell-hop in the Union League Club in Chicago, at present, but a very pleasant and gentlemanly sort of a boy, I will say. I was quite taken with him. In fact, because he told me there wasn’t much opportunity for advancement where he was, and that he would like to get into something where there was more chance to do something and be somebody, I told him that if he wanted to come on here and try his luck with us, we might do a little something for him – give him a chance to show what he could do, at least.”

He had not intended to set forth at once the fact that he became interested in his nephew to this extent, but – rather to wait and thrash it out at different times with both his wife and son, but the occasion having seemed to offer itself, he had spoken. And now that he had, he felt rather glad of it, for because Clyde so much resembled Gilbert he did want to do a little something for him.

But Gilbert bristled and chilled, the while Bella and Myra, if not Mrs. Griffiths, who favored her only son in everything – even to preferring him to be without a blood relation or other rival of any kind, rather warmed to the idea. A cousin who was a Griffiths and good-looking and about Gilbert’s age – and who, as their father reported, was rather pleasant and well-mannered – that pleased Bella and Myra while Mrs. Griffiths, noting Gilbert’s face darken, was not so moved. He would not like him. But out of respect for her husband’s authority and general ability in all things, she now remained silent. But not so, Bella.

“Oh, you’re going to give him a place, are you, Dad?” she commented. “That’s interesting. I hope he’s better-looking than the rest of our cousins.”

“Bella,” chided Mrs. Griffiths, while Myra, recalling a gauche uncle and cousin who had come on from Vermont several years before to visit them a few days, smiled wisely. At the same time Gilbert, deeply irritated, was mentally fighting against the idea. He could not see it at all. “Of course we’re not turning away applicants who want to come in and learn the business right along now, as it is,” he said sharply.

“Oh, I know,” replied his father, “but not cousins and nephews exactly. Besides he looks very intelligent and ambitious to me. It wouldn’t do any great harm if we let at least one of our relatives come here and show what he can do. I can’t see why we shouldn’t employ him as well as another.”

“I don’t believe Gil likes the idea of any other fellow in Lycurgus having the same name and looking like him,” suggested Bella, slyly, and with a certain touch of malice due to the fact that her brother was always criticizing her.

“Oh, what rot!” Gilbert snapped irritably. “Why don’t you make a sensible remark once in a while? What do I care whether he has the same name or not – or looks like me, either?” His expression at the moment was particularly sour.

“Gilbert!” pleaded his mother, reprovingly. “How can you talk so? And to your sister, too?”

“Well, I don’t want to do anything in connection with this young man if it’s going to cause any hard feelings here,” went on Griffiths senior. “All I know is that his father was never very practical and I doubt if Clyde has ever had a real chance.” (His son winced at this friendly and familiar use of

his cousin's first name.) "My only idea in bringing him on here was to give him a start. I haven't the faintest idea whether he would make good or not. He might and again he might not. If he didn't – " He threw up one hand as much as to say, "If he doesn't, we will have to toss him aside, of course."

"Well, I think that's very kind of you, father," observed Mrs. Griffiths, pleasantly and diplomatically. "I hope he proves satisfactory."

"And there's another thing," added Griffiths wisely and sententiously. "I don't expect this young man, so long as he is in my employ and just because he's a nephew of mine, to be treated differently to any other employee in the factory. He's coming here to work – not play. And while he is here, trying, I don't expect any of you to pay him any social attention – not the slightest. He's not the sort of boy anyhow, that would want to put himself on us – at least he didn't impress me that way, and he wouldn't be coming down here with any notion that he was to be placed on an equal footing with any of us. That would be silly. Later on, if he proves that he is really worth while, able to take care of himself, knows his place and keeps it, and any of you wanted to show him any little attention, well, then it will be time enough to see, but not before then."

By then, the maid, Amanda, assistant to Mrs. Truesdale, was taking away the dinner plates and preparing to serve the dessert. But as Mr. Griffiths rarely ate dessert, and usually chose this period, unless company was present, to look after certain stock and banking matters which he kept in a small desk in the library, he now pushed back his chair, arose, excusing himself to his family, and walked into the library adjoining. The others remained.

"I would like to see what he's like, wouldn't you?" Myra asked her mother.

"Yes. And I do hope he measures up to all of your father's expectations. He will not feel right if he doesn't."

"I can't get this," observed Gilbert, "bringing people on now when we can hardly take care of those we have. And besides, imagine what the bunch around here will say if they find out that our cousin was only a bell-hop before coming here!"

"Oh, well, they won't have to know that, will they?" said Myra.

"Oh, won't they? Well, what's to prevent him from speaking about it – unless we tell him not to – or some one coming along who has seen him there." His eyes snapped viciously. "At any rate, I hope he doesn't. It certainly wouldn't do us any good around here."

And Bella added, "I hope he's not dull as Uncle Allen's two boys. They're the most uninteresting boys I ever did see."

"Bella," cautioned her mother once more.

Chapter 3

The Clyde whom Samuel Griffiths described as having met at the Union League Club in Chicago, was a somewhat modified version of the one who had fled from Kansas City three years before. He was now twenty, a little taller and more firmly but scarcely any more robustly built, and considerably more experienced, of course. For since leaving his home and work in Kansas City and coming in contact with some rough usage in the world – humble tasks, wretched rooms, no intimates to speak of, plus the compulsion to make his own way as best he might – he had developed a kind of self-reliance and smoothness of address such as one would scarcely have credited him with three years before. There was about him now, although he was not nearly so smartly dressed as when he left Kansas City, a kind of conscious gentility of manner which pleased, even though it did not at first arrest attention. Also, and this was considerably different from the Clyde who had crept away from Kansas City in a box car, he had much more of an air of caution and reserve.

For ever since he had fled from Kansas City, and by one humble device and another forced to make his way, he had been coming to the conclusion that on himself alone depended his future. His family, as he now definitely sensed, could do nothing for him. They were too impractical and too poor – his mother, father, Esta, all of them.

At the same time, in spite of all their difficulties, he could not now help but feel drawn to them, his mother in particular, and the old home life that had surrounded him as a boy – his brother and sisters, Esta included, since she, too, as he now saw it, had been brought no lower than he by circumstances over which she probably had no more control. And often, his thoughts and mood had gone back with a definite and disconcerting pang because of the way in which he had treated his mother as well as the way in which his career in Kansas City had been suddenly interrupted – his loss of Hortense Briggs – a severe blow; the troubles that had come to him since; the trouble that must have come to his mother and Esta because of him.

On reaching St. Louis two days later after his flight, and after having been most painfully bundled out into the snow a hundred miles from Kansas City in the gray of a winter morning, and at the same time relieved of his watch and overcoat by two brakemen who had found him hiding in the car, he had picked up a Kansas City paper – The Star – only to realize that his worst fear in regard to all that had occurred had come true. For there, under a two-column head, and with fully a column and a half of reading matter below, was the full story of all that had happened: a little girl, the eleven-year-old daughter of a well-to-do Kansas City family, knocked down and almost instantly killed – she had died an hour later; Sparser and Miss Sipe in a hospital and under arrest at the same time, guarded by a policeman sitting in the hospital awaiting their recovery; a splendid car very seriously damaged; Sparser's father, in the absence of the owner of the car for whom he worked, at once incensed and made terribly unhappy by the folly and seeming criminality and recklessness of his son.

But what was worse, the unfortunate Sparser had already been charged with larceny and homicide, and wishing, no doubt, to minimize his own share in this grave catastrophe, had not only revealed the names of all who were with him in the car – the youths in particular and their hotel address – but had charged that they along with him were equally guilty, since they had urged him to make speed at the time and against his will – a claim which was true enough, as Clyde knew. And Mr. Squires, on being interviewed at the hotel, had furnished the police and the newspapers with the names of their parents and their home addresses.

This last was the sharpest blow of all. For there followed disturbing pictures of how their respective parents or relatives had taken it on being informed of their sins. Mrs. Ratterer, Tom's mother, had cried and declared her boy was a good boy, and had not meant to do any harm, she was sure. And Mrs. Heggland – Oscar's devoted but aged mother – had said that there was not a more honest or generous soul and that he must have been drinking. And at his own home – The Star had

described his mother as standing, pale, very startled and very distressed, clasping and unclasping her hands and looking as though she were scarcely able to grasp what was meant, unwilling to believe that her son had been one of the party and assuring all that he would most certainly return soon and explain all, and that there must be some mistake.

However, he had not returned. Nor had he heard anything more after that. For, owing to his fear of the police, as well as of his mother – her sorrowful, hopeless eyes, he had not written for months, and then a letter to his mother only to say that he was well and that she must not worry. He gave neither name nor address. Later, after that he had wandered on, essaying one small job and another, in St. Louis, Peoria, Chicago, Milwaukee – dishwashing in a restaurant, soda-clerking in a small outlying drug-store, attempting to learn to be a shoe clerk, a grocer's clerk, and what not; and being discharged and laid off and quitting because he did not like it. He had sent her ten dollars once – another time five, having, as he felt, that much to spare. After nearly a year and a half he had decided that the search must have lessened, his own part in the crime being forgotten, possibly, or by then not deemed sufficiently important to pursue – and when he was once more making a moderate living as the driver of a delivery wagon in Chicago, a job that paid him fifteen dollars a week, he resolved that he would write his mother, because now he could say that he had a decent place and had conducted himself respectably for a long time, although not under his own name.

And so at that time, living in a hall bedroom on the West Side of Chicago – Paulina Street – he had written his mother the following letter:

DEAR MOTHER:

Are you still in Kansas City? I wish you would write and tell me. I would so like to hear from you again and to write you again, too, if you really want me to. Honestly I do, Ma. I have been so lonely here. Only be careful and don't let any one know where I am yet. It won't do any good and might do a lot of harm just when I am trying so hard to get a start again. I didn't do anything wrong that time, myself. Really I didn't, although the papers said so – just went along. But I was afraid they would punish me for something that I didn't do. I just couldn't come back then. I wasn't to blame and then I was afraid of what you and father might think. But they invited me, Ma. I didn't tell him to go any faster or to take that car like he said. He took it himself and invited me and the others to go along. Maybe we were all to blame for running down that little girl, but we didn't mean to. None of us. And I have been so terribly sorry ever since. Think of all the trouble I have caused you! And just at the time when you most needed me. Gee! Mother, I hope you can forgive me. Can you?

I keep wondering how you are. And Esta and Julia and Frank and Father. I wish I knew where you are and what you are doing. You know how I feel about you, don't you, Ma? I've got a lot more sense now, anyhow, I see things different than I used to. I want to do something in this world. I want to be successful. I have only a fair place now, not as good as I had in K. C., but fair, and not in the same line. But I want something better, though I don't want to go back in the hotel business either if I can help it. It's not so very good for a young man like me – too high-flying, I guess. You see I know a lot more than I did back there. They like me all right where I am, but I got to get on in this world. Besides I am not really making more than my expenses here now, just my room and board and clothes but I am trying to save a little in order to get into some line where I can work up and learn something. A person has to have a line of some kind these days. I see that now.

Won't you write me and tell me how you all are and what you are doing? I'd like to know. Give my love to Frank and Julia and Father and Esta, if they are all still there. I love you just the same and I guess you care for me a little, anyhow, don't you? I won't sign my real name, because it may be dangerous yet (I haven't been using it since I left K. C.) But I'll give you my other one, which I'm going to leave off pretty soon and take up my old one. Wish I could do it now, but I'm afraid to yet. You can address me, if you will, as

HARRY TENET,
General Delivery, Chicago

I'll call for it in a few days. I sign this way so as not to cause you or me any more trouble, see? But as soon as I feel more sure that this other thing has blown over, I'll use my own name again sure.

Lovingly,
YOUR SON.

He drew a line where his real name should be and underneath wrote "you know" and mailed the letter.

Following that, because his mother had been anxious about him all this time and wondering where he was, he soon received a letter, postmarked Denver, which surprised him very much, for he had expected to hear from her as still in Kansas City.

DEAR SON:

I was surprised and so glad to get my boy's letter and to know that you were alive and safe. I had hoped and prayed that you would return to the straight and narrow path – the only path that will ever lead you to success and happiness of any kind, and that God would let me hear from you as safe and well and working somewhere and doing well. And now he has rewarded my prayers. I knew he would. Blessed be His holy name.

Not that I blame you altogether for all that terrible trouble you got into and bringing so much suffering and disgrace on yourself and us – for well I know how the devil tempts and pursues all of us mortals and particularly just such a child as you. Oh, my son, if you only knew how you must be on your guard to avoid these pitfalls. And you have such a long road ahead of you. Will you be ever watchful and try always to cling to the teachings of our Saviour that your mother has always tried to impress upon the minds and hearts of all you dear children? Will you stop and listen to the voice of our Lord that is ever with us, guiding our footsteps safely up the rocky path that leads to a heaven more beautiful than we can ever imagine here? Promise me, my child, that you will hold fast to all your early teachings and always bear in mind that "right is might," and my boy, never, never, take a drink of any kind no matter who offers it to you. There is where the devil reigns in all his glory and is ever ready to triumph over the weak one. Remember always what I have told you so often "Strong drink is raging and wine is a mocker," and it is my earnest prayer that these words will ring in your ears every time you are tempted – for I am sure now that that was perhaps the real cause of that terrible accident.

I suffered terribly over that, Clyde, and just at the time when I had such a dreadful ordeal to face with Esta. I almost lost her. She had such an awful time. The poor child paid dearly for her sin. We had to go in debt so deep and it took so long to work it out – but finally we did and now things are not as bad as they were, quite.

As you see, we are now in Denver. We have a mission of our own here now with housing quarters for all of us. Besides we have a few rooms to rent which Esta, and you know she is now Mrs. Nixon, of course, takes care of. She has a fine little boy who reminds your father and me of you so much when you were a baby. He does little things that are you all over again so many times that we almost feel that you are with us again – as you were. It is comforting, too, sometimes.

Frank and Julie have grown so and are quite a help to me. Frank has a paper route and earns a little money which helps. Esta wants to keep them in school just as long as we can.

Your father is not very well, but of course, he is getting older, and he does the best he can.

I am awful glad, Clyde, that you are trying so hard to better yourself in every way and last night your father was saying again that your uncle, Samuel Griffiths, of Lycurgus, is so rich and successful and I thought that maybe if you wrote him and asked him to give you something there so that you could learn the business, perhaps he would. I don't see why he wouldn't. After all you are his nephew. You know he has a great collar business there in Lycurgus and he is very rich, so they say. Why don't you write him and see? Somehow I feel that perhaps he would find a place for you and then you would have something sure to work for. Let me know if you do and what he says.

I want to hear from you often, Clyde. Please write and let us know all about you and how you are getting along. Won't you? Of course we love you as much as ever, and will do our best always to try to guide you right. We want you to succeed more than you know, but we also want you to be a good boy, and live a clean, righteous life, for, my son, what matter it if a man gaineth the whole world and loseth his own soul?

Write your mother, Clyde, and bear in mind that her love is always with you – guiding you – pleading with you to do right in the name of the Lord.

Affectionately,
MOTHER.

And so it was that Clyde had begun to think of his uncle Samuel and his great business long before he encountered him. He had also experienced an enormous relief in learning that his parents were no longer in the same financial difficulties they were when he left, and safely housed in a hotel, or at least a lodging house, probably connected with this new mission.

Then two months after he had received his mother's first letter and while he was deciding almost every day that he must do something, and that forthwith, he chanced one day to deliver to the Union League Club on Jackson Boulevard a package of ties and handkerchiefs which some visitor to Chicago had purchased at the store, for which he worked. Upon entering, who should he come in contact with but Ratterer in the uniform of a club employee. He was in charge of inquiry and packages at the door. Although neither he nor Ratterer quite grasped immediately the fact that they were confronting one another again, after a moment Ratterer had exclaimed: "Clyde!" And then seizing him by an arm, he added enthusiastically and yet cautiously in a very low tone: "Well, of all things! The devil! Whaddya know? Put 'er there. Where do you come from anyhow?" And Clyde, equally excited, exclaimed, "Well, by jing, if it ain't Tom. Whaddya know? You working here?"

Ratterer, who (like Clyde) had for the moment quite forgotten the troublesome secret which lay between them, added: "That's right. Surest thing you know. Been here for nearly a year, now." Then with a sudden pull at Clyde's arm, as much as to say, "Silence!" he drew Clyde to one side, out of the hearing of the youth to whom he had been talking as Clyde came in, and added: "Ssh! I'm working here under my own name, but I'd rather not let 'em know I'm from K. C., see. I'm supposed to be from Cleveland."

And with that he once more pressed Clyde's arm genially and looked him over. And Clyde, equally moved, added: "Sure. That's all right. I'm glad you were able to connect. My name's Tenet, Harry Tenet. Don't forget that." And both were radiantly happy because of old times' sake.

But Ratterer, noticing Clyde's delivery uniform, observed: "Driving a delivery, eh? Gee, that's funny. You driving a delivery. Imagine. That kills me. What do you want to do that for?" Then seeing from Clyde's expression that his reference to his present position might not be the most pleasing thing in the world, since Clyde at once observed: "Well, I've been up against it, sorta," he added: "But say, I want to see you. Where are you living?" (Clyde told him.) "That's all right. I get off here at six. Why not drop around after you're through work. Or, I'll tell you – suppose we meet at – well, how about Henrici's on Randolph Street? Is that all right? At seven, say. I get off at six and I can be over there by then if you can."

Clyde, who was happy to the point of ecstasy in meeting Ratterer again, nodded a cheerful assent.

He boarded his wagon and continued his deliveries, yet for the rest of the afternoon his mind was on this approaching meeting with Ratterer. And at five-thirty he hurried to his barn and then to his boarding house on the west side, where he donned his street clothes, then hastened to Henrici's. He had not been standing on the corner a minute before Ratterer appeared, very genial and friendly and dressed, if anything, more neatly than ever.

"Gee, it's good to have a look at you, old socks!" he began. "Do you know you're the only one of that bunch that I've seen since I left K. C.? That's right. My sister wrote me after we left home

that no one seemed to know what became of either Higby or Heggie, or you, either. They sent that fellow Sparser up for a year – did you hear that? Tough, eh? But not so much for killing the little girl, but for taking the car and running it without a license and not stopping when signaled. That's what they got him for. But say," – he lowered his voice most significantly at this point – "we'da got that if they'd got us. Oh, gee, I was scared. And run?" And once more he began to laugh, but rather hysterically at that. "What a wallop, eh? An' us leavin' him and that girl in the car. Oh, say. Tough, what? Just what else could a fellow do, though? No need of all of us going up, eh? What was her name? Laura Sipe. An' you cut out before I saw you, even. And that little Briggs girl of yours did, too. Did you go home with her?"

Clyde shook his head negatively.

"I should say I didn't," he exclaimed.

"Well, where did you go then?" he asked.

Clyde told him. And after he had set forth a full picture of his own wayfarings, Ratterer returned with: "Gee, you didn't know that that little Briggs girl left with a guy from out there for New York right after that, did you? Some fellow who worked in a cigar store, so Louise told me. She saw her afterwards just before she left with a new fur coat and all." (Clyde winced sadly.) "Gee, but you were a sucker to fool around with her. She didn't care for you or nobody. But you was pretty much gone on her, I guess, eh?" And he grinned at Clyde amusedly, and chucked him under the arm, in his old teasing way.

But in regard to himself, he proceeded to unfold a tale of only modest adventure, which was very different from the one Clyde had narrated, a tale which had less of nerves and worry and more of a sturdy courage and faith in his own luck and possibilities. And finally he had "caught on" to this, because, as he phrased it, "you can always get something in Chi."

And here he had been ever since – "very quiet, of course," but no one had ever said a word to him.

And forthwith, he began to explain that just at present there wasn't anything in the Union League, but that he would talk to Mr. Haley who was superintendent of the club – and that if Clyde wanted to, and Mr. Haley knew of anything, he would try and find out if there was an opening anywhere, or likely to be, and if so, Clyde could slip into it.

"But can that worry stuff," he said to Clyde toward the end of the evening. "It don't get you nothing."

And then only two days after this most encouraging conversation, and while Clyde was still debating whether he would resign his job, resume his true name and canvass the various hotels in search of work, a note came to his room, brought by one of the bell-boys of the Union League which read: "See Mr. Lightall at the Great Northern before noon to-morrow. There's a vacancy over there. It ain't the very best, but it'll get you something better later."

And accordingly Clyde, after telephoning his department manager that he was ill and would not be able to work that day, made his way to this hotel in his very best clothes. And on the strength of what references he could give, was allowed to go to work; and much to his relief under his own name. Also, to his gratification, his salary was fixed at twenty dollars a month, meals included. But the tips, as he now learned, aggregated not more than ten a week – yet that, counting meals was far more than he was now getting as he comforted himself; and so much easier work, even if it did take him back into the old line, where he still feared to be seen and arrested.

It was not so very long after this – not more than three months – before a vacancy occurred in the Union League staff. Ratterer, having some time before established himself as day assistant to the club staff captain, and being on good terms with him, was able to say to the latter that he knew exactly the man for the place – Clyde Griffiths – then employed at the Great Northern. And accordingly, Clyde was sent for, and being carefully coached beforehand by Ratterer as to how to approach his new superior, and what to say, he was given the place.

And here, very different from the Great Northern and superior from a social and material point of view, as Clyde saw it, to even the Green–Davidson, he was able once more to view at close range a type of life that most affected, unfortunately, his bump of position and distinction. For to this club from day to day came or went such a company of seemingly mentally and socially worldly elect as he had never seen anywhere before, the self-integrated and self-centered from not only all of the states of his native land but from all countries and continents. American politicians from the north, south, east, west – the principal politicians and bosses, or alleged statesmen of their particular regions – surgeons, scientists, arrived physicians, generals, literary and social figures, not only from America but from the world over.

Here also, a fact which impressed and even startled his sense of curiosity and awe, even – there was no faintest trace of that sex element which had characterized most of the phases of life to be seen in the Green–Davidson, and more recently the Great Northern. In fact, in so far as he could remember, had seemed to run through and motivate nearly, if not quite all of the phases of life that he had thus far contacted. But here was no sex – no trace of it. No women were admitted to this club. These various distinguished individuals came and went, singly as a rule, and with the noiseless vigor and reserve that characterizes the ultra successful. They often ate alone, conferred in pairs and groups, noiselessly – read their papers or books, or went here and there in swiftly driven automobiles – but for the most part seemed to be unaware of, or at least unaffected by, that element of passion, which, to his immature mind up to this time, had seemed to propel and disarrange so many things in those lesser worlds with which up to now he had been identified.

Probably one could not attain to or retain one's place in so remarkable a world as this unless one were indifferent to sex, a disgraceful passion, of course. And hence in the presence or under the eyes of such people one had to act and seem as though such thoughts as from time to time swayed one were far from one's mind.

After he had worked here a little while, under the influence of this organization and various personalities who came here, he had taken on a most gentlemanly and reserved air. When he was within the precincts of the club itself, he felt himself different from what he really was – more subdued, less romantic, more practical, certain that if he tried now, imitated the soberer people of the world, and those only, that some day he might succeed, if not greatly, at least much better than he had thus far. And who knows? What if he worked very steadily and made only the right sort of contacts and conducted himself with the greatest care here, one of these very remarkable men whom he saw entering or departing from here might take a fancy to him and offer him a connection with something important somewhere, such as he had never had before, and that might lift him into a world such as he had never known.

For to say the truth, Clyde had a soul that was not destined to grow up. He lacked decidedly that mental clarity and inner directing application that in so many permits them to sort out from the facts and avenues of life the particular thing or things that make for their direct advancement.

Chapter 4

However, as he now fancied, it was because he lacked an education that he had done so poorly. Because of those various moves from city to city in his early youth, he had never been permitted to collect such a sum of practical training in any field as would permit him, so he thought, to aspire to the great worlds of which these men appeared to be a part. Yet his soul now yearned for this. The people who lived in fine houses, who stopped at great hotels, and had men like Mr. Squires, and the manager of the bell-hops here, to wait on them and arrange for their comfort. And he was still a bell-hop. And close to twenty-one. At times it made him very sad. He wished and wished that he could get into some work where he could rise and be somebody – not always remain a bell-hop, as at times he feared he might.

About the time that he reached this conclusion in regard to himself and was meditating on some way to improve and safeguard his future, his uncle, Samuel Griffiths, arrived in Chicago. And having connections here which made a card to this club an obvious civility, he came directly to it and for several days was about the place conferring with individuals who came to see him, or hurrying to and fro to meet people and visit concerns whom he deemed it important to see.

And it was not an hour after he arrived before Ratterer, who had charge of the pegboard at the door by day and who had but a moment before finished posting the name of this uncle on the board, signaled to Clyde, who came over.

“Didn’t you say you had an uncle or something by the name of Griffiths in the collar business somewhere in New York State?”

“Sure,” replied Clyde. “Samuel Griffiths. He has a big collar factory in Lycurgus. That’s his ad you see in all the papers and that’s his fire sign over there on Michigan Avenue.”

“Would you know him if you saw him?”

“No,” replied Clyde. “I never saw him in all my life.”

“I’ll bet anything it’s the same fellow,” commented Ratterer, consulting a small registry slip that had been handed him. “Looka here – Samuel Griffiths, Lycurgus, N. Y. That’s probably the same guy, eh?”

“Surest thing you know,” added Clyde, very much interested and even excited, for this was the identical uncle about whom he had been thinking so long.

“He just went through here a few minutes ago,” went on Ratterer. “Devoy took his bags up to K. Swell-looking man, too. You better keep your eye open and take a look at him when he comes down again. Maybe it’s your uncle. He’s only medium tall and kinda thin. Wears a small gray mustache and a pearl gray hat. Good-lookin’. I’ll point him out to you. If it is your uncle you better shine up to him. Maybe he’ll do somepin’ for you – give you a collar or two,” he added, laughing.

Clyde laughed too as though he very much appreciated this joke, although in reality he was flustered. His uncle Samuel! And in this club! Well, then this was his opportunity to introduce himself to his uncle. He had intended writing him before ever he secured this place, but now he was here in this club and might speak to him if he chose.

But hold! What would his uncle think of him, supposing he chose to introduce himself? For he was a bell-boy again and acting in that capacity in this club. What, for instance, might be his uncle’s attitude toward boys who worked as bell-boys, particularly at his – Clyde’s – years. For he was over twenty now, and getting to be pretty old for a bell-boy, that is, if one ever intended to be anything else. A man of his wealth and high position might look on bell-hopping as menial, particularly bell-boys who chanced to be related to him. He might not wish to have anything to do with him – might not even wish him to address him in any way. It was in this state that he remained for fully twenty-four hours after he knew that his uncle had arrived at this club.

The following afternoon, however, after he had seen him at least half a dozen times and had been able to formulate the most agreeable impressions of him, since his uncle appeared to be so very quick, alert, incisive – so very different from his father in every way, and so rich and respected by every one here – he began to wonder, to fear even at times, whether he was going to let this remarkable opportunity slip. For after all, his uncle did not look to him to be at all unkindly – quite the reverse – very pleasant. And when, at the suggestion of Ratterer, he had gone to his uncle's room to secure a letter which was to be sent by special messenger, his uncle had scarcely looked at him, but instead had handed him the letter and half a dollar. "See that a boy takes that right away and keep the money for yourself," he had remarked.

Clyde's excitement was so great at the moment that he wondered that his uncle did not guess that he was his nephew. But plainly he did not. And he went away a little crest-fallen.

Later some half dozen letters for his uncle having been put in the key-box, Ratterer called Clyde's attention to them. "If you want to run in on him again, here's your chance. Take those up to him. He's in his room, I think." And Clyde, after some hesitation, had finally taken the letters and gone to his uncle's suite once more.

His uncle was writing at the time and merely called: "Come!" Then Clyde, entering and smiling rather enigmatically, observed: "Here's some mail for you, Mr. Griffiths."

"Thank you very much, my son," replied his uncle and proceeded to finger his vest pocket for change. but Clyde, seizing this opportunity, exclaimed: "Oh, no, I don't want anything for that." And then before his uncle could say anything more, although he proceeded to hold out some silver to him, he added: "I believe I'm related to you, Mr. Griffiths. You're Mr. Samuel Griffiths of the Griffiths Collar Company of Lycurgus, aren't you?"

"Yes, I have a little something to do with it, I believe. Who are you?" returned his uncle, looking at him sharply.

"My name's Clyde Griffiths. My father, Asa Griffiths, is your brother, I believe."

At the mention of this particular brother, who, to the knowledge of all the members of this family, was distinctly not a success materially, the face of Samuel Griffiths clouded the least trifle. For the mention of Asa brought rather unpleasingly before him the stocky and decidedly not well-groomed figure of his younger brother, whom he had not seen in so many years. His most recent distinct picture of him was as a young man of about Clyde's age about his father's house near Bertwick, Vermont. But how different! Clyde's father was then short, fat and poorly knit mentally as well as physically – oleaginous and a bit mushy, as it were. His chin was not firm, his eyes a pale watery blue, and his hair frizzled. Whereas this son of his was neat, alert, good-looking and seemingly well-mannered and intelligent, as most bell-hops were inclined to be as he noted. And he liked him.

However, Samuel Griffiths, who along with his elder brother Allen had inherited the bulk of his father's moderate property, and this because of Joseph Griffiths' prejudice against his youngest son, had always felt that perhaps an injustice had been done Asa. For Asa, not having proved very practical or intelligent, his father had first attempted to drive and then later ignore him, and finally had turned him out at about Clyde's age, and had afterward left the bulk of his property, some thirty thousand dollars, to these two elder brothers, share and share alike – willing Asa but a petty thousand.

It was this thought in connection with this younger brother that now caused him to stare at Clyde rather curiously. For Clyde, as he could see, was in no way like the younger brother who had been harried from his father's home so many years before. Rather he was more like his own son, Gilbert, whom, as he now saw he resembled. Also in spite of all of Clyde's fears he was obviously impressed by the fact that he should have any kind of place in this interesting club. For to Samuel Griffiths, who was more than less confined to the limited activities and environment of Lycurgus, the character and standing of this particular club was to be respected. And those young men who served the guests of such an institution as this, were, in the main, possessed of efficient and unobtrusive

manners. Therefore to see Clyde standing before him in his neat gray and black uniform and with the air of one whose social manners at least were excellent, caused him to think favorably of him.

“You don’t tell me!” he exclaimed interestedly. “So you’re Asa’s son. I do declare! Well, now, this is a surprise. You see I haven’t seen or heard from your father in at least – well, say, twenty-five or six years, anyhow. The last time I did hear from him he was living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I think, or here. He isn’t here now, I presume.”

“Oh, no, sir,” replied Clyde, who was glad to be able to say this. “The family live in Denver. I’m here all alone.”

“Your father and mother are living, I presume.”

“Yes, sir. They’re both alive.”

“Still connected with religious work, is he – your father?”

“Well, yes, sir,” answered Clyde, a little dubiously, for he was still convinced that the form of religious work his father essayed was of all forms the poorest and most inconsequential socially. “Only the church he has now,” he went on, “has a lodging house connected with it. About forty rooms, I believe. He and my mother run that and the mission too.”

“Oh, I see.”

He was so anxious to make a better impression on his uncle than the situation seemed to warrant that he was quite willing to exaggerate a little.

“Well, I’m glad they’re doing so well,” continued Samuel Griffiths, rather impressed with the trim and vigorous appearance of Clyde. “You like this kind of work, I suppose?”

“Well, not exactly. No, Mr. Griffiths, I don’t,” replied Clyde quickly, alive at once to the possibilities of this query. “It pays well enough. But I don’t like the way you have to make the money you get here. It isn’t my idea of a salary at all. But I got in this because I didn’t have a chance to study any particular work or get in with some company where there was a real chance to work up and make something of myself. My mother wanted me to write you once and ask whether there was any chance in your company for me to begin and work up, but I was afraid maybe that you might not like that exactly, and so I never did.”

He paused, smiling, and yet with an inquiring look in his eye.

His uncle looked solemnly at him for a moment, pleased by his looks and his general manner of approach in this instance, and then replied: “Well, that is very interesting. You should have written, if you wanted to – ” Then, as was his custom in all matters, he cautiously paused. Clyde noted that he was hesitating to encourage him.

“I don’t suppose there is anything in your company that you would let me do?” he ventured boldly, after a moment.

Samuel Griffiths merely stared at him thoughtfully. He liked and he did not like this direct request. However, Clyde appeared at least a very adaptable person for the purpose. He seemed bright and ambitious – so much like his own son, and he might readily fit into some department as head or assistant under his son, once he had acquired a knowledge of the various manufacturing processes. At any rate he might let him try it. There could be no real harm in that. Besides, there was his younger brother, to whom, perhaps, both he and his older brother Allen owed some form of obligation, if not exactly restitution.

“Well,” he said, after a moment, “that is something I would have to think over a little. I wouldn’t be able to say, offhand, whether there is or not. We wouldn’t be able to pay you as much as you make here to begin with,” he warned.

“Oh, that’s all right,” exclaimed Clyde, who was far more fascinated by the thought of connecting himself with his uncle than anything else. “I wouldn’t expect very much until I was able to earn it, of course.”

“Besides, it might be that you would find that you didn’t like the collar business once you got into it, or we might find we didn’t like you. Not every one is suited to it by a long way.”

“Well, all you’d have to do then would be to discharge me,” assured Clyde. “I’ve always thought I would be, though, ever since I heard of you and your big company.”

This last remark pleased Samuel Griffiths. Plainly he and his achievements had stood in the nature of an ideal to this youth.

“Very well,” he said. “I won’t be able to give any more time to this now. But I’ll be here for a day or two more, anyhow, and I’ll think it over. It may be that I will be able to do something for you. I can’t say now.” And he turned quite abruptly to his letters.

And Clyde, feeling that he had made as good an impression as could be expected under the circumstances and that something might come of it, thanked him profusely and beat a hasty retreat.

The next day, having thought it over and deciding that Clyde, because of his briskness and intelligence, was likely to prove as useful as another, Samuel Griffiths, after due deliberation as to the situation at home, informed Clyde that in case any small opening in the home factory occurred he would be glad to notify him. But he would not even go so far as to guarantee him that an opening would immediately be forthcoming. He must wait.

Accordingly Clyde was left to speculate as to how soon, if ever, a place in his uncle’s factory would be made for him.

In the meanwhile Samuel Griffiths had returned to Lycurgus. And after a later conference with his son, he decided that Clyde might be inducted into the very bottom of the business at least – the basement of the Griffiths plant, where the shrinking of all fabrics used in connection with the manufacture of collars was brought about, and where beginners in this industry who really desired to acquire the technique of it were placed, for it was his idea that Clyde by degrees was to be taught the business from top to bottom. And since he must support himself in some form not absolutely incompatible with the standing of the Griffiths family here in Lycurgus, it was decided to pay him the munificent sum of fifteen dollars to begin.

For while Samuel Griffiths, as well as his son Gilbert, realized that this was small pay (not for an ordinary apprentice but for Clyde, since he was a relative) yet so inclined were both toward the practical rather than the charitable in connection with all those who worked for them, that the nearer the beginner in this factory was to the clear mark of necessity and compulsion, the better. Neither could tolerate the socialistic theory relative to capitalistic exploitation. As both saw it, there had to be higher and higher social orders to which the lower social classes could aspire. One had to have castes. One was foolishly interfering with and disrupting necessary and unavoidable social standards when one tried to unduly favor any one – even a relative. It was necessary when dealing with the classes and intelligences below one, commercially or financially, to handle them according to the standards to which they were accustomed. And the best of these standards were those which held these lower individuals to a clear realization of how difficult it was to come by money – to an understanding of how very necessary it was for all who were engaged in what both considered the only really important constructive work of the world – that of material manufacture – to understand how very essential it was to be drilled, and that sharply and systematically, in all the details and processes which comprise that constructive work. And so to become inured to a narrow and abstemious life in so doing. It was good for their characters. It informed and strengthened the minds and spirits of those who were destined to rise. And those who were not should be kept right where they were.

Accordingly, about a week after that, the nature of Clyde’s work having been finally decided upon, a letter was dispatched to him to Chicago by Samuel Griffiths himself in which he set forth that if he chose he might present himself any time now within the next few weeks. But he must give due notice in writing of at least ten days in advance of his appearance in order that he might be properly arranged for. And upon his arrival he was to seek out Mr. Gilbert Griffiths at the office of the mill, who would look after him.

And upon receipt of this Clyde was very much thrilled and at once wrote to his mother that he had actually secured a place with his uncle and was going to Lycurgus. Also that he was going to

try to achieve a real success now. Whereupon she wrote him a long letter, urging him to be, oh, so careful of his conduct and associates. Bad companionship was at the root of nearly all of the errors and failures that befell an ambitious youth such as he. If he would only avoid evil-minded or foolish and headstrong boys and girls, all would be well. It was so easy for a young man of his looks and character to be led astray by an evil woman. He had seen what had befallen him in Kansas City. But now he was still young and he was going to work for a man who was very rich and who could do so much for him, if he would. And he was to write her frequently as to the outcome of his efforts here.

And so, after having notified his uncle as he had requested, Clyde finally took his departure for Lycurgus. But on his arrival there, since his original notification from his uncle had called for no special hour at which to call at the factory, he did not go at once, but instead sought out the important hotel of Lycurgus, the Lycurgus House.

Then finding himself with ample time on his hands, and very curious about the character of this city in which he was to work, and his uncle's position in it, he set forth to look it over, his thought being that once he reported and began work he might not soon have the time again. He now ambled out into Central Avenue, the very heart of Lycurgus, which in this section was crossed by several business streets, which together with Central Avenue for a few blocks on either side, appeared to constitute the business center – all there was to the life and gayety of Lycurgus.

Chapter 5

But once in this and walking about, how different it all seemed to the world to which so recently he had been accustomed. For here, as he had thus far seen, all was on a so much smaller scale. The depot, from which only a half hour before he had stepped down, was so small and dull, untroubled, as he could plainly see, by much traffic. And the factory section which lay opposite the small city – across the Mohawk – was little more than a red and gray assemblage of buildings with here and there a smokestack projecting upward, and connected with the city by two bridges – a half dozen blocks apart – one of them directly at this depot, a wide traffic bridge across which traveled a car-line following the curves of Central Avenue, dotted here and there with stores and small homes.

But Central Avenue was quite alive with traffic, pedestrians and automobiles. Opposite diagonally from the hotel, which contained a series of wide plate-glass windows, behind which were many chairs interspersed with palms and pillars, was the dry-goods emporium of Stark and Company, a considerable affair, four stories in height, and of white brick, and at least a hundred feet long, the various windows of which seemed bright and interesting, crowded with as smart models as might be seen anywhere. Also there were other large concerns, a second hotel, various automobile showrooms, a moving picture theater.

He found himself ambling on and on until suddenly he was out of the business district again and in touch with a wide and tree-shaded thoroughfare of residences, the houses of which, each and every one, appeared to possess more room space, lawn space, general ease and repose and dignity even than any with which he had ever been in contact. In short, as he sensed it from this brief inspection of its very central portion, it seemed a very exceptional, if small city street – rich, luxurious even. So many imposing wrought-iron fences, flower-bordered walks, grouped trees and bushes, expensive and handsome automobiles either beneath porte-cocheres within or speeding along the broad thoroughfare without. And in some neighboring shops – those nearest Central Avenue and the business heart where this wide and handsome thoroughfare began, were to be seen such expensive-looking and apparently smart displays of the things that might well interest people of means and comfort – motors, jewels, lingerie, leather goods and furniture.

But where now did his uncle and his family live? In which house? What street? Was it larger and finer than any of these he had seen in this street?

He must return at once, he decided, and report to his uncle. He must look up the factory address, probably in that region beyond the river, and go over there and see him. What would he say, how act, what would his uncle set him to doing? What would his cousin Gilbert be like? What would he be likely to think of him? In his last letter his uncle had mentioned his son Gilbert. He retraced his steps along Central Avenue to the depot and found himself quickly before the walls of the very large concern he was seeking. It was of red brick, six stories high – almost a thousand feet long. It was nearly all windows – at least that portion which had been most recently added and which was devoted to collars. An older section, as Clyde later learned, was connected with the newer building by various bridges. And the south walls of both these two structures, being built at the water's edge, paralleled the Mohawk. There were also, as he now found, various entrances along River Street, a hundred feet or more apart – and each one, guarded by an employee in uniform – entrances numbered one, two and three – which were labeled “for employees only” – an entrance numbered four which read “office” – and entrances five and six appeared to be devoted to freight receipts and shipments.

Clyde made his way to the office portion and finding no one to hinder him, passed through two sets of swinging doors and found himself in the presence of a telephone girl seated at a telephone desk behind a railing, in which was set a small gate – the only entrance to the main office apparently. And this she guarded. She was short, fat, thirty-five and unattractive.

“Well?” she called as Clyde appeared.

“I want to see Mr. Gilbert Griffiths,” Clyde began a little nervously.

“What about?”

“Well, you see, I’m his cousin. Clyde Griffiths is my name. I have a letter here from my uncle, Mr. Samuel Griffiths. He’ll see me, I think.”

As he laid the letter before her, he noticed that her quite severe and decidedly indifferent expression changed and became not so much friendly as awed. For obviously she was very much impressed not only by the information but his looks, and began to examine him slyly and curiously.

“I’ll see if he’s in,” she replied much more civilly, and plugging at the same time a switch which led to Mr. Gilbert Griffiths’ private office. Word coming back to her apparently that Mr. Gilbert Griffiths was busy at the moment and could not be disturbed, she called back: “It’s Mr. Gilbert’s cousin, Mr. Clyde Griffiths. He has a letter from Mr. Samuel Griffiths.” Then she said to Clyde: “Won’t you sit down? I’m sure Mr. Gilbert Griffiths will see you in a moment. He’s busy just now.”

And Clyde, noting the unusual deference paid him – a form of deference that never in his life before had been offered him – was strangely moved by it. To think that he should be a full cousin to this wealthy and influential family! This enormous factory! So long and wide and high – as he had seen – six stories. And walking along the opposite side of the river just now, he had seen through several open windows whole rooms full of girls and women hard at work. And he had been thrilled in spite of himself. For somehow the high red walls of the building suggested energy and very material success, a type of success that was almost without flaw, as he saw it.

He looked at the gray plaster walls of this outer waiting chamber – at some lettering on the inner door which read: “The Griffiths Collar & Shirt Company, Inc. Samuel Griffiths, Pres. Gilbert Griffiths, Sec’y.” – and wondered what it was all like inside – what Gilbert Griffiths would be like – cold or genial, friendly or unfriendly.

And then, as he sat there meditating, the woman suddenly turned to him and observed: “You can go in now. Mr. Gilbert Griffiths’ office is at the extreme rear of this floor, over toward the river. Any one of the clerks inside will show you.”

She half rose as if to open the door for him, but Clyde, sensing the intent, brushed by her. “That’s all right. Thanks,” he said most warmly, and opening the glass-plated door he gazed upon a room housing many over a hundred employees – chiefly young men and young women. And all were apparently intent on their duties before them. Most of them had green shades over their eyes. Quite all of them had on short alpaca office coats or sleeve protectors over their shirt sleeves. Nearly all of the young women wore clean and attractive gingham dresses or office slips. And all about this central space, which was partitionless and supported by round white columns, were offices labeled with the names of the various minor officials and executives of the company – Mr. Smillie, Mr. Latch, Mr. Gotboy, Mr. Burkey.

Since the telephone girl had said that Mr. Gilbert Griffiths was at the extreme rear, Clyde, without much hesitation, made his way along the railed-off aisle to that quarter, where upon a half-open door he read: “Mr. Gilbert Griffiths, Sec’y.” He paused, uncertain whether to walk in or not, and then proceeded to tap. At once a sharp, penetrating voice called: “Come,” and he entered and faced a youth who looked, if anything, smaller and a little older and certainly much colder and shrewder than himself – such a youth, in short, as Clyde would have liked to imagine himself to be – trained in an executive sense, apparently authoritative and efficient. He was dressed, as Clyde noted at once, in a bright gray suit of a very pronounced pattern, for it was once more approaching spring. His hair, of a lighter shade than Clyde’s, was brushed and glazed most smoothly back from his temples and forehead, and his eyes, which Clyde, from the moment he had opened the door had felt drilling him, were of a clear, liquid, grayish-green blue. He had on a pair of large horn-rimmed glasses which he wore at his desk only, and the eyes that peered through them went over Clyde swiftly and notatively, from his shoes to the round brown felt hat which he carried in his hand.

“You’re my cousin, I believe,” he commented, rather icily, as Clyde came forward and stopped – a thin and certainly not very favorable smile playing about his lips.

“Yes, I am,” replied Clyde, reduced and confused by this calm and rather freezing reception. On the instant, as he now saw, he could not possibly have the same regard and esteem for this cousin, as he could and did have for his uncle, whose very great ability had erected this important industry. Rather, deep down in himself he felt that this young man, an heir and nothing more to this great industry, was taking to himself airs and superiorities which, but for his father’s skill before him, would not have been possible.

At the same time so groundless and insignificant were his claims to any consideration here, and so grateful was he for anything that might be done for him, that he felt heavily obligated already and tried to smile his best and most ingratiating smile. Yet Gilbert Griffiths at once appeared to take this as a bit of presumption which ought not to be tolerated in a mere cousin, and particularly one who was seeking a favor of him and his father.

However, since his father had troubled to interest himself in him and had given him no alternative, he continued his wry smile and mental examination, the while he said: “We thought you would be showing up to-day or to-morrow. Did you have a pleasant trip?”

“Oh, yes, very,” replied Clyde, a little confused by this inquiry.

“So you think you’d like to learn something about the manufacture of collars, do you?” Tone and manner were infiltrated by the utmost condescension.

“I would certainly like to learn something that would give me a chance to work up, have some future in it,” replied Clyde, genially and with a desire to placate his young cousin as much as possible.

“Well, my father was telling me of his talk with you in Chicago. From what he told me I gather that you haven’t had much practical experience of any kind. You don’t know how to keep books, do you?”

“No, I don’t,” replied Clyde a little regretfully.

“And you’re not a stenographer or anything like that?”

“No, sir, I’m not.”

Most sharply, as Clyde said this, he felt that he was dreadfully lacking in every training. And now Gilbert Griffiths looked at him as though he were rather a hopeless proposition indeed from the viewpoint of this concern.

“Well, the best thing to do with you, I think,” he went on, as though before this his father had not indicated to him exactly what was to be done in this case, “is to start you in the shrinking room. That’s where the manufacturing end of this business begins, and you might as well be learning that from the ground up. Afterwards, when we see how you do down there, we can tell a little better what to do with you. If you had any office training it might be possible to use you up here.” (Clyde’s face fell at this and Gilbert noticed it. It pleased him.) “But it’s just as well to learn the practical side of the business, whatever you do,” he added rather coldly, not that he desired to comfort Clyde any but merely to be saying it as a fact. And seeing that Clyde said nothing, he continued: “The best thing, I presume, before you try to do anything around here is for you to get settled somewhere. You haven’t taken a room anywhere yet, have you?”

“No, I just came in on the noon train,” replied Clyde. “I was a little dirty and so I just went up to the hotel to brush up a little. I thought I’d look for a place afterwards.”

“Well, that’s right. Only don’t look for any place. I’ll have our superintendent see that you’re directed to a good boarding house. He knows more about the town than you do.” His thought here was that after all Clyde was a full cousin and that it wouldn’t do to have him live just anywhere. At the same time, he was greatly concerned lest Clyde get the notion that the family was very much concerned as to where he did live, which most certainly it was NOT, as he saw it. His final feeling was that he could easily place and control Clyde in such a way as to make him not very important to any one in any way – his father, the family, all the people who worked here.

He reached for a button on his desk and pressed it. A trim girl, very severe and reserved in a green gingham dress, appeared.

“Ask Mr. Whiggam to come here.”

She disappeared and presently there entered a medium-sized and nervous, yet moderately stout, man who looked as though he were under a great strain. He was about forty years of age – repressed and noncommittal – and looked curiously and suspiciously about as though wondering what new trouble impended. His head, as Clyde at once noticed, appeared chronically to incline forward, while at the same time he lifted his eyes as though actually he would prefer not to look up.

“Whiggam,” began young Griffiths authoritatively, “this is Clyde Griffiths, a cousin of ours. You remember I spoke to you about him.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, he’s to be put in the shrinking department for the present. You can show him what he’s to do. Afterwards you had better have Mrs. Braley show him where he can get a room.” (All this had been talked over and fixed upon the week before by Gilbert and Whiggam, but now he gave it the ring of an original suggestion.) “And you’d better give his name in to the timekeeper as beginning to-morrow morning, see?”

“Yes, sir,” bowed Whiggam deferentially. “Is that all?”

“Yes, that’s all,” concluded Gilbert smartly. “You go with Whiggam, Mr. Griffiths. He’ll tell you what to do.”

Whiggam turned. “If you’ll just come with me, Mr. Griffiths,” he observed deferentially, as Clyde could see – and that for all of his cousin’s apparently condescending attitude – and marched out with Clyde at his heels. And young Gilbert as briskly turned to his own desk, but at the same time shaking his head. His feeling at the moment was that mentally Clyde was not above a good bell-boy in a city hotel probably. Else why should he come on here in this way. “I wonder what he thinks he’s going to do here,” he continued to think, “where he thinks he’s going to get?”

And Clyde, as he followed Mr. Whiggam, was thinking what a wonderful place Mr. Gilbert Griffiths enjoyed. No doubt he came and went as he chose – arrived at the office late, departed early, and somewhere in this very interesting city dwelt with his parents and sisters in a very fine house – of course. And yet here he was – Gilbert’s own cousin, and the nephew of his wealthy uncle, being escorted to work in a very minor department of this great concern.

Nevertheless, once they were out of the sight and hearing of Mr. Gilbert Griffiths, he was somewhat diverted from this mood by the sights and sounds of the great manufactory itself. For here on this very same floor, but beyond the immense office room through which he had passed, was another much larger room filled with rows of bins, facing aisles not more than five feet wide, and containing, as Clyde could see, enormous quantities of collars boxed in small paper boxes, according to sizes. These bins were either being refilled by stock boys who brought more boxed collars from the boxing room in large wooden trucks, or were being as rapidly emptied by order clerks who, trundling small box trucks in front of them, were filling orders from duplicate check lists which they carried in their hands.

“Never worked in a collar factory before, Mr. Griffiths, I presume?” commented Mr. Whiggam with somewhat more spirit, once he was out of the presence of Gilbert Griffiths. Clyde noticed at once the Mr. Griffiths.

“Oh, no,” he replied quickly. “I never worked at anything like this before.”

“Expect to learn all about the manufacturing end of the game in the course of time, though, I suppose.” He was walking briskly along one of the long aisles as he spoke, but Clyde noticed that he shot sly glances in every direction.

“I’d like to,” he answered.

“Well, there’s a little more to it than some people think, although you often hear there isn’t very much to learn.” He opened another door, crossed a gloomy hall and entered still another room which, filled with bins as was the other, was piled high in every bin with bolts of white cloth.

“You might as well know a little about this as long as you re going to begin in the shrinking room. This is the stuff from which the collars are cut, the collars and the lining. They are called webs. Each of these bolts is a web. We take these down in the basement and shrink them because they can’t be used this way. If they are, the collars would shrink after they were cut. But you’ll see. We tub them and then dry them afterwards.”

He marched solemnly on and Clyde sensed once more that this man was not looking upon him as an ordinary employee by any means. His MR. Griffiths, his supposition to the effect that Clyde was to learn all about the manufacturing end of the business, as well as his condescension in explaining about these webs of cloth, had already convinced Clyde that he was looked upon as one to whom some slight homage at least must be paid.

He followed Mr. Whiggam, curious as to the significance of this, and soon found himself in an enormous basement which had been reached by descending a flight of steps at the end of a third hall. Here, by the help of four long rows of incandescent lamps, he discerned row after row of porcelain tubs or troughs, lengthwise of the room, and end to end, which reached from one exterior wall to the other. And in these, under steaming hot water apparently, were any quantity of those same webs he had just seen upstairs, soaking. And near-by, north and south of these tubs, and paralleling them for the length of this room, all of a hundred and fifty feet in length, were enormous drying racks or moving skeleton platforms, boxed, top and bottom and sides, with hot steam pipes, between which on rolls, but festooned in such a fashion as to take advantage of these pipes, above, below and on either side, were more of these webs, but unwound and wet and draped as described, yet moving along slowly on these rolls from the east end of the room to the west. This movement, as Clyde could see, was accompanied by an enormous rattle and clatter of ratchet arms which automatically shook and moved these lengths of cloth forward from east to west. And as they moved they dried, and were then automatically re-wound at the west end of these racks into bolt form once more upon a wooden spool and then lifted off by a youth whose duty it was to “take” from these moving platforms. One youth, as Clyde saw, “took” from two of these tracks at the west end, while at the east end another youth of about his own years “fed.” That is, he took bolts of this now partially shrunk yet still wet cloth and attaching one end of it to some moving hooks, saw that it slowly and properly unwound and fed itself over the drying racks for the entire length of these tracks. As fast as it had gone the way of all webs, another was attached.

Between each two rows of tubs in the center of the room were enormous whirling separators or dryers, into which these webs of cloth, as they came from the tubs in which they had been shrinking for twenty-four hours, were piled and as much water as possible centrifugally extracted before they were spread out on the drying racks.

Primarily little more than this mere physical aspect of the room was grasped by Clyde – its noise, its heat, its steam, the energy with which a dozen men and boys were busying themselves with various processes. They were, without exception, clothed only in armless undershirts, a pair of old trousers belted in at the waist, and with canvas-topped and rubber-soled sneakers on their bare feet. The water and the general dampness and the heat of the room seemed obviously to necessitate some such dressing as this.

“This is the shrinking room,” observed Mr. Whiggam, as they entered. “It isn’t as nice as some of the others, but it’s where the manufacturing process begins. Kemerer!” he called.

A short, stocky, full-chested man, with a pate, full face and white, strong-looking arms, dressed in a pair of dirty and wrinkled trousers and an armless flannel shirt, now appeared. Like Whiggam in the presence of Gilbert, he appeared to be very much overawed in the presence of Whiggam.

“This is Clyde Griffiths, the cousin of Gilbert Griffiths. I spoke to you about him last week, you remember?”

“Yes, sir.”

“He’s to begin down here. He’ll show up in the morning.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Better put his name down on your check list. He’ll begin at the usual hour.”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr. Whiggam, as Clyde noticed, held his head higher and spoke more directly and authoritatively than at any time so far. He seemed to be master, not underling, now.

“Seven-thirty is the time every one goes to work here in the morning,” went on Mr. Whiggam to Clyde informatively, “but they all ring in a little earlier – about seven-twenty or so, so as to have time to change their clothes and get to the machines.

“Now, if you want to,” he added, “Mr. Kemerer can show you what you’ll have to do to-morrow before you leave today. It might save a little time. Or, you can leave it until then if you want to. It don’t make any difference to me. Only, if you’ll come back to the telephone girl at the main entrance about five-thirty I’ll have Mrs. Braley there for you. She’s to show you about your room, I believe. I won’t be there myself, but you just ask the telephone girl for her. She’ll know.” He turned and added, “Well, I’ll leave you now.”

He lowered his head and started to go away just as Clyde began. “Well, I’m very much obliged to you, Mr. Whiggam.” Instead of answering, he waved one fishy hand slightly upward and was gone – down between the tubs toward the west door. And at once Mr. Kemerer – still nervous and overawed apparently – began.

“Oh, that’s all right about what you have to do, Mr. Griffiths. I’ll just let you bring down webs on the floor above to begin with to-morrow. But if you’ve got any old clothes, you’d better put ’em on. A suit like that wouldn’t last long here.” He eyed Clyde’s very neat, if inexpensive suit, in an odd way. His manner quite like that of Mr. Whiggam before him, was a mixture of uncertainty and a very small authority here in Clyde’s case – of extreme respect and yet some private doubt, which only time might resolve. Obviously it was no small thing to be a Griffiths here, even if one were a cousin and possibly not as welcome to one’s powerful relatives as one might be.

At first sight, and considering what his general dreams in connection with this industry were, Clyde was inclined to rebel. For the type of youth and man he saw here were in his estimation and at first glance rather below the type of individuals he hoped to find here – individuals neither so intelligent nor alert as those employed by the Union League and the Green–Davidson by a long distance. And still worse he felt them to be much more subdued and sly and ignorant – mere clocks, really. And their eyes, as he entered with Mr. Whiggam, while they pretended not to be looking, were very well aware, as Clyde could feel, of all that was going on. Indeed, he and Mr. Whiggam were the center of all their secret looks. At the same time, their spare and practical manner of dressing struck dead at one blow any thought of refinement in connection with the work in here. How unfortunate that his lack of training would not permit his being put to office work or something like that upstairs.

He walked with Mr. Kemerer, who troubled to say that these were the tubs in which the webs were shrunk over night – these the centrifugal dryers – these the rack dryers. Then he was told that he could go. And by then it was only three o’clock.

He made his way out of the nearest door and once outside he congratulated himself on being connected with this great company, while at the same time wondering whether he was going to prove satisfactory to Mr. Kemerer and Mr. Whiggam. Supposing he didn’t. Or supposing he couldn’t stand all this? It was pretty rough. Well, if worst came to worst, as he now thought, he could go back to Chicago, or on to New York, maybe, and get work.

But why hadn't Samuel Griffiths had the graciousness to receive and welcome him? Why had that young Gilbert Griffiths smiled so cynically? And what sort of a woman was this Mrs. Braley? Had he done wisely to come on here? Would this family do anything for him now that he was here?

It was thus that, strolling west along River Street on which were a number of other kinds of factories, and then north through a few other streets that held more factories – tinware, wickwire, a big vacuum carpet cleaning plant, a rug manufacturing company, and the like – that he came finally upon a miserable slum, the like of which, small as it was, he had not seen outside of Chicago or Kansas City. He was so irritated and depressed by the poverty and social angularity and crudeness of it – all spelling but one thing, social misery, to him – that he at once retraced his steps and recrossing the Mohawk by a bridge farther west soon found himself in an area which was very different indeed – a region once more of just such homes as he had been admiring before he left for the factory. And walking still farther south, he came upon that same wide and tree-lined avenue – which he had seen before – the exterior appearance of which alone identified it as the principal residence thoroughfare of Lycurgus. It was so very broad and wellpaved and lined by such an arresting company of houses. At once he was very much alive to the personnel of this street, for it came to him immediately that it must be in this street very likely that his uncle Samuel lived. The houses were nearly all of French, Italian or English design, and excellent period copies at that, although he did not know it.

Impressed by their beauty and spaciousness, however, he walked along, now looking at one and another, and wondering which, if any, of these was occupied by his uncle, and deeply impressed by the significance of so much wealth. How superior and condescending his cousin Gilbert must feel, walking out of some such place as this in the morning.

Then pausing before one which, because of trees, walks, newly-groomed if bloomless flower beds, a large garage at the rear, a large fountain to the left of the house as he faced it, in the center of which was a boy holding a swan in his arms, and to the right of the house one lone cast iron stag pursued by some cast iron dogs, he felt especially impelled to admire, and charmed by the dignity of this place, which was a modified form of old English, he now inquired of a stranger who was passing – a middle-aged man of a rather shabby working type, “Whose house is that, mister?” and the man replied: “Why, that's Samuel Griffiths' residence. He's the man who owns the big collar factory over the river.”

At once Clyde straightened up, as though dashed with cold water. His uncle's! His residence! Then that was one of his automobiles standing before the garage at the rear there. And there was another visible through the open door of the garage.

Indeed in his immature and really psychically unilluminated mind it suddenly evoked a mood which was as of roses, perfumes, lights and music. The beauty! The ease! What member of his own immediate family had ever even dreamed that his uncle lived thus! The grandeur! And his own parents so wretched – so poor, preaching on the streets of Kansas City and no doubt Denver. Conducting a mission! And although thus far no single member of this family other than his chill cousin had troubled to meet him, and that at the factory only, and although he had been so indifferently assigned to the menial type of work that he had, still he was elated and uplifted. For, after all, was he not a Griffiths, a full cousin as well as a full nephew to the two very important men who lived here, and now working for them in some capacity at least? And must not that spell a future of some sort, better than any he had known as yet? For consider who the Griffiths were here, as opposed to “who” the Griffiths were in Kansas City, say – or Denver. The enormous difference! A thing to be as carefully concealed as possible. At the same time, he was immediately reduced again, for supposing the Griffiths here – his uncle or his cousin or some friend or agent of theirs – should now investigate his parents and his past? Heavens! The matter of that slain child in Kansas City! His parents' miserable makeshift life! Esta! At once his face fell, his dreams being so thickly clouded over. If they should guess! If they should sense!

Oh, the devil – who was he anyway? And what did he really amount to? What could he hope for from such a great world as this really, once they knew why he had troubled to come here?

A little disgusted and depressed he turned to retrace his steps, for all at once he felt himself very much of a nobody.

Chapter 6

The room which Clyde secured this same day with the aid of Mrs. Braley, was in Thorpe Street, a thoroughfare enormously removed in quality if not in distance from that in which his uncle resided. Indeed the difference was sufficient to decidedly qualify his mounting notions of himself as one who, after all, was connected with him. The commonplace brown or gray or tan colored houses, rather smoked or decayed, which fronted it – the leafless and winter harried trees which in spite of smoke and dust seemed to give promise of the newer life so near at hand – the leaves and flowers of May. Yet as he walked into it with Mrs. Braley, many drab and commonplace figures of men and girls, and elderly spinsters resembling Mrs. Braley in kind, were making their way home from the several factories beyond the river. And at the door Mrs. Braley and himself were received by a none-too-polished woman in a clean gingham apron over a dark brown dress, who led the way to a second floor room, not too small or uncomfortably furnished – which she assured him he could have for four dollars without board or seven and one-half dollars with – a proposition which, seeing that he was advised by Mrs. Braley that this was somewhat better than he would get in most places for the same amount, he decided to take. And here, after thanking Mrs. Braley, he decided to remain – later sitting down to dinner with a small group of mill-town store and factory employees, such as partially he had been accustomed to in Paulina Street in Chicago, before moving to the better atmosphere of the Union League. And after dinner he made his way out into the principal thoroughfares of Lycurgus, only to observe such a crowd of nondescript mill-workers as, judging these streets by day, he would not have fancied swarmed here by night – girls and boys, men and women of various nationalities, and types – Americans, Poles, Hungarians, French, English – and for the most part – if not entirely touched with a peculiar something – ignorance or thickness of mind or body, or with a certain lack of taste and alertness or daring, which seemed to mark them one and all as of the basement world which he had seen only this afternoon. Yet in some streets and stores, particularly those nearer Wykeagy Avenue, a better type of girl and young man who might have been and no doubt were of the various office groups of the different companies over the river – neat and active.

And Clyde, walking to and fro, from eight until ten, when as though by pre-arrangement, the crowd in the more congested streets seemed suddenly to fade away, leaving them quite vacant. And throughout this time contrasting it all with Chicago and Kansas City. (What would Ratterer think if he could see him now – his uncle's great house and factory?) And perhaps because of its smallness, liking it – the Lycurgus Hotel, neat and bright and with a brisk local life seeming to center about it. And the post-office and a handsomely spired church, together with an old and interesting graveyard, cheek by jowl with an automobile salesroom. And a new moving picture theater just around the corner in a side street. And various boys and girls, men and women, walking here and there, some of them flirting as Clyde could see. And with a suggestion somehow hovering over it all of hope and zest and youth – the hope and zest and youth that is at the bottom of all the constructive energy of the world everywhere. And finally returning to his room in Thorpe Street with the conclusion that he did like the place and would like to stay here. That beautiful Wykeagy Avenue! His uncle's great factory! The many pretty and eager girls he had seen hurrying to and fro!

In the meantime, in so far as Gilbert Griffiths was concerned, and in the absence of his father, who was in New York at the time (a fact which Clyde did not know and of which Gilbert did not trouble to inform him) he had conveyed to his mother and sisters that he had met Clyde, and if he were not the dullest, certainly he was not the most interesting person in the world, either. Encountering Myra, as he first entered at five-thirty, the same day that Clyde had appeared, he troubled to observe: “Well, that Chicago cousin of ours blew in to-day.”

“Yes!” commented Myra. “What's he like?” The fact that her father had described Clyde as gentlemanly and intelligent had interested her, although knowing Lycurgus and the nature of the mill

life here and its opportunities for those who worked in factories such as her father owned, she had wondered why Clyde had bothered to come.

“Well, I can’t see that he’s so much,” replied Gilbert. “He’s fairly intelligent and not bad-looking, but he admits that he’s never had any business training of any kind. He’s like all those young fellows who work for hotels. He thinks clothes are the whole thing, I guess. He had on a light brown suit and a brown tie and hat to match and brown shoes. His tie was too bright and he had on one of those bright pink striped shirts like they used to wear three or four years ago. Besides his clothes aren’t cut right. I didn’t want to say anything because he’s just come on, and we don’t know whether he’ll hold out or not. But if he does, and he’s going to pose around as a relative of ours, he’d better tone down, or I’d advise the governor to have a few words with him. Outside of that I guess he’ll do well enough in one of the departments after a while, as foreman or something. He might even be made into a salesman later on, I suppose. But what he sees in all that to make it worth while to come here is more than I can guess. As a matter of fact, I don’t think the governor made it clear to him just how few the chances are here for any one who isn’t really a wizard or something.”

He stood with his back to the large open fireplace.

“Oh, well, you know what Mother was saying the other day about his father. She thinks Daddy feels that he’s never had a chance in some way. He’ll probably do something for him whether he wants to keep him in the mill or not. She told me that she thought that Dad felt that his father hadn’t been treated just right by their father.”

Myra paused, and Gilbert, who had had this same hint from his mother before now, chose to ignore the implication of it.

“Oh, well, it’s not my funeral,” he went on. “If the governor wants to keep him on here whether he’s fitted for anything special or not, that’s his look-out. Only he’s the one that’s always talking about efficiency in every department and cutting and keeping out dead timber.”

Meeting his mother and Bella later, he volunteered the same news and much the same ideas. Mrs. Griffiths sighed; for after all, in a place like Lycurgus and established as they were, any one related to them and having their name ought to be most circumspect and have careful manners and taste and judgment. It was not wise for her husband to bring on any one who was not all of that and more.

On the other hand, Bella was by no means satisfied with the accuracy of her brother’s picture of Clyde. She did not know Clyde, but she did know Gilbert, and as she knew he could decide very swiftly that this or that person was lacking in almost every way, when, as a matter of fact, they might not be at all as she saw it.

“Oh, well,” she finally observed, after hearing Gilbert comment on more of Clyde’s peculiarities at dinner, “if Daddy wants him, I presume he’ll keep him, or do something with him eventually.” At which Gilbert winced internally for this was a direct slap at his assumed authority in the mill under his father, which authority he was eager to make more and more effective in every direction, as his younger sister well knew.

In the meanwhile on the following morning, Clyde, returning to the mill, found that the name, or appearance, or both perhaps – his resemblance to Mr. Gilbert Griffiths – was of some peculiar advantage to him which he could not quite sufficiently estimate at present. For on reaching number one entrance, the doorman on guard there looked as though startled.

“Oh, you’re Mr. Clyde Griffiths?” he queried. “You’re goin’ to work under Mr. Kemerer? Yes, I know. Well, that man there will have your key,” and he pointed to a stodgy, stuffy old man whom later Clyde came to know as “Old Jeff,” the time-clock guard, who, at a stand farther along this same hall, furnished and reclaimed all keys between seven-thirty and seven-forty.

When Clyde approached him and said: “My name’s Clyde Griffiths and I’m to work downstairs with Mr. Kemerer,” he too started and then said: “Sure, that’s right. Yes, sir. Here you are, Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Kemerer spoke to me about you yesterday. Number seventy-one is to be yours.

I'm giving you Mr. Duveny's old key." When Clyde had gone down the stairs into the shrinking department, he turned to the doorman who had drawn near and exclaimed: "Don't it beat all how much that fellow looks like Mr. Gilbert Griffiths? Why, he's almost his spittin' image. What is he, do you suppose, a brother or a cousin, or what?"

"Don't ask me," replied the doorman. "I never saw him before. But he's certainly related to the family all right. When I seen him first, I thought it was Mr. Gilbert. I was just about to tip my hat to him when I saw it wasn't."

And in the shrinking room when he entered, as on the day before, he found Kemerer as respectful and evasive as ever. For, like Whiggam before him, Kemerer had not as yet been able to decide what Clyde's true position with this company was likely to be. For, as Whiggam had informed Kemerer the day before, Mr. Gilbert had said no least thing which tended to make Mr. Whiggam believe that things were to be made especially easy for him, nor yet hard, either. On the contrary, Mr. Gilbert had said: "He's to be treated like all the other employees as to time and work. No different." Yet in introducing Clyde he had said: "This is my cousin, and he's going to try to learn this business," which would indicate that as time went on Clyde was to be transferred from department to department until he had surveyed the entire manufacturing end of the business.

Whiggam, for this reason, after Clyde had gone, whispered to Kemerer as well as to several others, that Clyde might readily prove to be some one who was a protege of the chief – and therefore they determined to "watch their step," at least until they knew what his standing here was to be. And Clyde, noticing this, was quite set up by it, for he could not help but feel that this in itself, and apart from whatever his cousin Gilbert might either think or wish to do, might easily presage some favor on the part of his uncle that might lead to some good for him. So when Kemerer proceeded to explain to him that he was not to think that the work was so very hard or that there was so very much to do for the present, Clyde took it with a slight air of condescension. And in consequence Kemerer was all the more respectful.

"Just hang up your hat and coat over there in one of those lockers," he proceeded mildly and ingratiatingly even. "Then you can take one of those crate trucks back there and go up to the next floor and bring down some webs. They'll show you where to get them."

The days that followed were diverting and yet troublesome enough to Clyde, who to begin with was puzzled and disturbed at times by the peculiar social and workaday worlds and position in which he found himself. For one thing, those by whom now he found himself immediately surrounded at the factory were not such individuals as he would ordinarily select for companions – far below bell-boys or drivers or clerks anywhere. They were, one and all, as he could now clearly see, meaty or stodgy mentally and physically. They wore such clothes as only the most common laborers would wear – such clothes as are usually worn by those who count their personal appearance among the least of their troubles – their work and their heavy material existence being all. In addition, not knowing just what Clyde was, or what his coming might mean to their separate and individual positions, they were inclined to be dubious and suspicious.

After a week or two, however, coming to understand that Clyde was a nephew of the president, a cousin of the secretary of the company, and hence not likely to remain here long in any menial capacity, they grew more friendly, but inclined in the face of the sense of subserviency which this inspired in them, to become jealous and suspicious of him in another way. For, after all, Clyde was not one of them, and under such circumstances could not be. He might smile and be civil enough – yet he would always be in touch with those who were above them, would he not – or so they thought. He was, as they saw it, part of the rich and superior class and every poor man knew what that meant. The poor must stand together everywhere.

For his part, however, and sitting about for the first few days in this particular room eating his lunch, he wondered how these men could interest themselves in what were to him such dull and uninteresting items – the quality of the cloth that was coming down in the webs – some minute

flaws in the matter of weight or weave – the last twenty webs hadn't looked so closely shrunk as the preceding sixteen; or the Cranston Wickwire Company was not carrying as many men as it had the month before – or the Anthony Woodenware Company had posted a notice that the Saturday half-holiday would not begin before June first this year as opposed to the middle of May last year. They all appeared to be lost in the humdrum and routine of their work.

In consequence his mind went back to happier scenes. He wished at times he were back in Chicago or Kansas City. He thought of Ratterer, Heggland, Higby, Louise Ratterer, Larry Doyle, Mr. Squires, Hortense – all of the young and thoughtless company of which he had been a part, and wondered what they were doing. What had become of Hortense? She had got that fur coat after all – probably from that cigar clerk and then had gone away with him after she had protested so much feeling for him – the little beast. After she had gotten all that money out of him. The mere thought of her and all that she might have meant to him if things had not turned as they had, made him a little sick at times. To whom was she being nice now? How had she found things since leaving Kansas City? And what would she think if she saw him here now or knew of his present high connections? Gee! That would cool her a little. But she would not think much of his present position. That was true. But she might respect him more if she could see his uncle and his cousin and this factory and their big house. It would be like her then to try to be nice to him. Well, he would show her, if he ever ran into her again – snub her, of course, as no doubt he very well could by then.

Chapter 7

In so far as his life at Mrs. Cuppy's went, he was not so very happily placed there, either. For that was but a commonplace rooming and boarding house, which drew to it, at best, such conservative mill and business types as looked on work and their wages, and the notions of the middle class religious world of Lycurgus as most essential to the order and well being of the world. From the point of view of entertainment or gayety, it was in the main a very dull place.

At the same time, because of the presence of one Walter Dillard – a brainless sprig who had recently come here from Fonda, it was not wholly devoid of interest for Clyde. The latter – a youth of about Clyde's own age and equally ambitious socially – but without Clyde's tact or discrimination anent the governing facts of life, was connected with the men's furnishing department of Stark and Company. He was spry, avid, attractive enough physically, with very light hair, a very light and feeble mustache, and the delicate airs and ways of a small town Beau Brummell. Never having had any social standing or the use of any means whatsoever – his father having been a small town dry goods merchant before him, who had failed – he was, because of some atavistic spur or fillip in his own blood, most anxious to attain some sort of social position.

But failing that so far, he was interested in and envious of those who had it – much more so than Clyde, even. The glory and activity of the leading families of this particular city had enormous weight with him – the Nicholsons, the Starks, the Harriets, Griffiths, Finchleys, et cetera. And learning a few days after Clyde's arrival of his somewhat left-handed connection with this world, he was most definitely interested. What? A Griffiths! The nephew of the rich Samuel Griffiths of Lycurgus! And in this boarding house! Beside him at this table! At once his interest rose to where he decided that he must cultivate this stranger as speedily as possible. Here was a real social opportunity knocking at his very door – a connecting link to one of the very best families! And besides was he not young, attractive and probably ambitious like himself – a fellow to play around with if one could? He proceeded at once to make overtures to Clyde. It seemed almost too good to be true.

In consequence he was quick to suggest a walk, the fact that there was a certain movie just on at the Mohawk, which was excellent – very snappy. Didn't Clyde want to go? And because of his neatness, smartness – a touch of something that was far from humdrum or the heavy practicality of the mill and the remainder of this boarding house world, Clyde was inclined to fall in with him.

But, as he now thought, here were his great relatives and he must watch his step here. Who knew but that he might be making a great mistake in holding such free and easy contacts as this. The Griffiths – as well as the entire world of which they were a part – as he guessed from the general manner of all those who even contacted him, must be very removed from the commonalty here. More by instinct than reason, he was inclined to stand off and look very superior – more so since those, including this very youth on whom he practised this seemed to respect him the more. And although upon eager – and even – after its fashion, supplicating request, he now went with this youth – still he went cautiously. And his aloof and condescending manner Dillard at once translated as “class” and “connection.” And to think he had met him in this dull, dubby boarding house here. And on his arrival – at the very inception of his career here.

And so his manner was that of the sycophant – although he had a better position and was earning more money than Clyde was at this time, twenty-two dollars a week.

“I suppose you'll be spending a good deal of your time with your relatives and friends here,” he volunteered on the occasion of their first walk together, and after he had extracted as much information as Clyde cared to impart, which was almost nothing, while he volunteered a few, most decidedly furbished bits from his own history. His father owned a dry goods store NOW. He had come over here to study other methods, et cetera. He had an uncle here – connected with Stark and

Company. He had met a few – not so many as yet – nice people here, since he hadn't been here so very long himself – four months all told.

But Clyde's relatives!

“Say your uncle must be worth over a million, isn't he? They say he is. Those houses in Wykeagy Avenue are certainly the cats'. You won't see anything finer in Albany or Utica or Rochester either. Are you Samuel Griffiths' own nephew? You don't say! Well, that'll certainly mean a lot to you here. I wish I had a connection like that. You bet I'd make it count.”

He beamed on Clyde eagerly and hopefully, and through him Clyde sensed even more how really important this blood relation was. Only think how much it meant to this strange youth.

“Oh, I don't know,” replied Clyde dubiously, and yet very much flattered by this assumption of intimacy. “I came on to learn the collar business, you know. Not to play about very much. My uncle wants me to stick to that, pretty much.”

“Sure, sure. I know how that is,” replied Dillard, “that's the way my uncle feels about me, too. He wants me to stick close to the work here and not play about very much. He's the buyer for Stark and Company, you know. But still a man can't work all the time, either. He's got to have a little fun.”

“Yes, that's right,” said Clyde – for the first time in his life a little condescendingly.

They walked along in silence for a few moments. Then:

“Do you dance?”

“Yes,” answered Clyde.

“Well, so do I. There are a lot of cheap dance halls around here, but I never go to any of those. You can't do it and keep in with the nice people. This is an awfully close town that way, they say. The best people won't have anything to do with you unless you go with the right crowd. It's the same way up at Fonda. You have to ‘belong’ or you can't go out anywhere at all. And that's right, I guess. But still there are a lot of nice girls here that a fellow can go with – girls of right nice families – not in society, of course – but still, they're not talked about, see. And they're not so slow, either. Pretty hot stuff, some of them. And you don't have to marry any of 'em, either.” Clyde began to think of him as perhaps a little too lusty for his new life here, maybe. At the same time he liked him some. “By the way,” went on Dillard, “what are you doing next Sunday afternoon?”

“Well, nothing in particular, that I know of just now,” replied Clyde, sensing a new problem here. “I don't know just what I may have to do by then, but I don't know of anything now.”

“Well, how'd you like to come with me, if you're not too busy. I've come to know quite a few girls since I've been here. Nice ones. I can take you out and introduce you to my uncle's family, if you like. They're nice people. And afterwards – I know two girls we can go and see – peaches. One of 'em did work in the store, but she don't now – she's not doing anything now. The other is her pal. They have a Victrola and they can dance. I know it isn't the thing to dance here on Sundays but no one need know anything about that. The girls' parents don't mind. Afterwards we might take 'em to a movie or something – if you want to – not any of those things down near the mill district but one of the better ones – see?”

There formulated itself in Clyde's mind the question as to what, in regard to just such proposals as this, his course here was to be. In Chicago, and recently – because of what happened in Kansas City – he had sought to be as retiring and cautious as possible. For – after that and while connected with the club, he had been taken with the fancy of trying to live up to the ideals with which the seemingly stern face of that institution had inspired him – conservatism – hard work – saving one's money – looking neat and gentlemanly. It was such an Eveless paradise, that.

In spite of his quiet surroundings here, however, the very air of the city seemed to suggest some such relaxation as this youth was now suggesting – a form of diversion that was probably innocent enough but still connected with girls and their entertainment – there were so many of them here, as he could see. These streets, after dinner, here, were so alive with good-looking girls, and young men, too. But what might his new found relatives think of him in case he was seen stepping about in the

manner and spirit which this youth's suggestions seemed to imply? Hadn't he just said that this was an awfully close town and that everybody knew nearly everything about everybody else? He paused in doubt. He must decide now. And then, being lonely and hungry for companionship, he replied:

“Yes – well – I think that's all right.” But he added a little dubiously: “Of course my relatives here – ”

“Oh, sure, that's all right,” replied Dillard smartly. “You have to be careful, of course. Well, so do I.” If he could only go around with a Griffiths, even if he was new around here and didn't know many people – wouldn't it reflect a lot of credit on him? It most certainly would – did already, as he saw it.

And forthwith he offered to buy Clyde some cigarettes – a soda – anything he liked. But Clyde, still feeling very strange and uncertain, excused himself, after a time, because this youth with his complacent worship of society and position, annoyed him a little, and made his way back to his room. He had promised his mother a letter and he thought he had better go back and write it, and incidentally to think a little on the wisdom of this new contact.

Chapter 8

Nevertheless, the next day being a Saturday and half holiday the year round in this concern, Mr. Whiggam came through with the pay envelopes.

“Here you are, Mr. Griffiths,” he said, as though he were especially impressed with Clyde’s position.

Clyde, taking it, was rather pleased with this mistering, and going back toward his locker, promptly tore it open and pocketed the money. After that, taking his hat and coat, he wandered off in the direction of his room, where he had his lunch. But, being very lonely, and Dillard not being present because he had to work, he decided upon a trolley ride to Gloversville, which was a city of some twenty thousand inhabitants and reported to be as active, if not as beautiful, as Lycurgus. And that trip amused and interested him because it took him into a city very different from Lycurgus in its social texture.

But the next day – Sunday – he spent idly in Lycurgus, wandering about by himself. For, as it turned out, Dillard was compelled to return to Fonda for some reason and could not fulfill the Sunday understanding. Encountering Clyde, however, on Monday evening, he announced that on the following Wednesday evening, in the basement of the Diggby Avenue Congregational Church, there was to be held a social with refreshments. And according to young Dillard, at least this promised to prove worth while.

“We can just go out there,” was the way he put it to Clyde, and buzz the girls a little. I want you to meet my uncle and aunt. They’re nice people all right. And so are the girls. They’re no slouches. Then we can edge out afterwards, about ten, see, and go around to either Zella or Rita’s place. Rita has more good records over at her place, but Zella has the nicest place to dance. By the way, you didn’t chance to bring along your dress suit with you, did you?” he inquired. For having already inspected Clyde’s room, which was above his own on the third floor, in Clyde’s absence and having discovered that he had only a dress suit case and no trunk, and apparently no dress suit anywhere, he had decided that in spite of Clyde’s father conducting a hotel and Clyde having worked in the Union League Club in Chicago, he must be very indifferent to social equipment. Or, if not, must be endeavoring to make his own way on some character-building plan without help from any one. This was not to his liking, exactly. A man should never neglect these social essentials. Nevertheless, Clyde was a Griffiths and that was enough to cause him to overlook nearly anything, for the present anyhow.

“No, I didn’t,” replied Clyde, who was not exactly sure as to the value of this adventure – even yet – in spite of his own loneliness – “but I intend to get one.” He had already thought since coming here of his lack in this respect, and was thinking of taking at least thirty-five of his more recently hard-earned savings and indulging in a suit of this kind.

Dillard buzzed on about the fact that while Zella Shuman’s family wasn’t rich – they owned the house they lived in – still she went with a lot of nice girls here, too. So did Rita Dickerman. Zella’s father owned a little cottage upon Eckert Lake, near Fonda. When next summer came – and with it the holidays and pleasant week-ends, he and Clyde, supposing that Clyde liked Rita, might go up there some time for a visit, for Rita and Zella were inseparable almost. And they were pretty, too. “Zella’s dark and Rita’s light,” he added enthusiastically.

Clyde was interested by the fact that the girls were pretty and that out of a clear sky and in the face of his present loneliness, he was being made so much of by this Dillard. But, was it wise for him to become very much involved with him? That was the question – for, after all, he really knew nothing of him. And he gathered from Dillard’s manner, his flighty enthusiasm for the occasion, that he was far more interested in the girls as girls – a certain freedom or concealed looseness that characterized them – than he was in the social phase of the world which they represented. And wasn’t that what

brought about his downfall in Kansas City? Here in Lycurgus, of all places, he was least likely to forget it – aspiring to something better as he now did.

None-the-less, at eight-thirty on the following Wednesday evening – they were off, Clyde full of eager anticipation. And by nine o'clock they were in the midst of one of those semi-religious, semi-social and semi-emotional church affairs, the object of which was to raise money for the church – the general service of which was to furnish an occasion for gossip among the elders, criticism and a certain amount of enthusiastic, if disguised courtship and flirtation among the younger members. There were booths for the sale of quite everything from pies, cakes and ice cream to laces, dolls and knickknacks of every description, supplied by the members and parted with for the benefit of the church. The Reverend Peter Isreals, the minister, and his wife were present. Also Dillard's uncle and aunt, a pair of brisk and yet uninteresting people whom Clyde could sense were of no importance socially here. They were too genial and altogether social in the specific neighborhood sense, although Grover Wilson, being a buyer for Stark and Company, endeavored to assume a serious and important air at times.

He was an undersized and stocky man who did not seem to know how to dress very well or could not afford it. In contrast to his nephew's almost immaculate garb, his own suit was far from perfect-fitting. It was unpressed and slightly soiled. And his tie the same. He had a habit of rubbing his hands in a clerkly fashion, of wrinkling his brows and scratching the back of his head at times, as though something he was about to say had cost him great thought and was of the utmost importance. Whereas, nothing that he uttered, as even Clyde could see, was of the slightest importance.

And so, too, with the stout and large Mrs. Wilson, who stood beside him while he was attempting to rise to the importance of Clyde. She merely beamed a fatty beam. She was almost ponderous, and pink, with a tendency to a double chin. She smiled and smiled, largely because she was naturally genial and on her good behavior here, but incidentally because Clyde was who he was. For as Clyde himself could see, Walter Dillard had lost no time in impressing his relatives with the fact that he was a Griffiths. Also that he had encountered and made a friend of him and that he was now chaperoning him locally.

“Walter has been telling us that you have just come on here to work for your uncle. You're at Mrs. Cuppy's now, I understand. I don't know her but I've always heard she keeps such a nice, refined place. Mr. Parsley, who lives here with her, used to go to school with me. But I don't see much of him any more. Did you meet him yet?”

“No, I didn't,” said Clyde in return.

“Well, you know, we expected you last Sunday to dinner, only Walter had to go home. But you must come soon. Any time at all. I would love to have you.” She beamed and her small grayish brown eyes twinkled.

Clyde could see that because of the fame of his uncle he was looked upon as a social find, really. And so it was with the remainder of this company, old and young – the Rev. Peter Isreals and his wife; Mr. Micah Bumpus, a local vendor of printing inks, and his wife and son; Mr. and Mrs. Maximilian Pick, Mr. Pick being a wholesale and retail dealer in hay, grain and feed; Mr. Witness, a florist, and Mrs. Throop, a local real estate dealer. All knew Samuel Griffiths and his family by reputation and it seemed not a little interesting and strange to all of them that Clyde, a real nephew of so rich a man, should be here in their midst. The only trouble with this was that Clyde's manner was very soft and not as impressive as it should be – not so aggressive and contemptuous. And most of them were of that type of mind that respects insolence even where it pretends to condemn it.

In so far as the young girls were concerned, it was even more noticeable. For Dillard was making this important relationship of Clyde's perfectly plain to every one. “This is Clyde Griffiths, the nephew of Samuel Griffiths, Mr. Gilbert Griffiths' cousin, you know. He's just come on here to study the collar business in his uncle's factory.” And Clyde, who realized how shallow was this pretense, was still not a little pleased and impressed by the effect of it all. This Dillard's effrontery.

The brassy way in which, because of Clyde, he presumed to patronize these people. On this occasion, he kept guiding Clyde here and there, refusing for the most part to leave him alone for an instant. In fact he was determined that all whom he knew and liked among the girls and young men should know who and what Clyde was and that he was presenting him. Also that those whom he did not like should see as little of him as possible – not be introduced at all. “She don’t amount to anything. Her father only keeps a small garage here. I wouldn’t bother with her if I were you.” Or, “He isn’t much around here. Just a clerk in our store.” At the same time, in regard to some others, he was all smiles and compliments, or at worst apologetic for their social lacks.

And then he was introduced to Zella Shuman and Rita Dickerman, who, for reasons of their own, not the least among which was a desire to appear a little wise and more sophisticated than the others here, came a little late. And it was true, as Clyde was to find out afterwards, that they were different, too – less simple and restricted than quite all of the girls whom Dillard had thus far introduced him to. They were not as sound religiously and morally as were these others. And as even Clyde noted on meeting them, they were as keen for as close an approach to pagan pleasure without admitting it to themselves, as it was possible to be and not be marked for what they were. And in consequence, there was something in their manner, the very spirit of the introduction, which struck him as different from the tone of the rest of this church group – not exactly morally or religiously unhealthy but rather much freer, less repressed, less reserved than were these others.

“Oh, so you’re Mr. Clyde Griffiths,” observed Zella Shuman. “My, you look a lot like your cousin, don’t you? I see him driving down Central Avenue ever so often. Walter has been telling us all about you. Do you like Lycurgus?”

The way she said “Walter,” together with something intimate and possessive in the tone of her voice, caused Clyde to feel at once that she must feel rather closer to and freer with Dillard than he himself had indicated. A small scarlet bow of velvet ribbon at her throat, two small garnet earrings in her ears, a very trim and tight-fitting black dress, with a heavily flounced skirt, seemed to indicate that she was not opposed to showing her figure, and prized it, a mood which except for a demure and rather retiring poise which she affected, would most certainly have excited comment in such a place as this.

Rita Dickerman, on the other hand, was lush and blonde, with pink cheeks, light chestnut hair, and bluish gray eyes. Lacking the aggressive smartness which characterized Zella Shuman, she still radiated a certain something which to Clyde seemed to harmonize with the liberal if secret mood of her friend. Her manner, as Clyde could see, while much less suggestive of masked bravado was yielding and to him designedly so, as well as naturally provocative. It had been arranged that she was to intrigue him. Very much fascinated by Zella Shuman and in tow of her, they were inseparable. And when Clyde was introduced to her, she beamed upon him in a melting and sensuous way which troubled him not a little. For here in Lycurgus, as he was telling himself at the time, he must be very careful with whom he became familiar. And yet, unfortunately, as in the case of Hortense Briggs, she evoked thoughts of intimacy, however unproblematic or distant, which troubled him. But he must be careful. It was just such a free attitude as this suggested by Dillard as well as these girls’ manners that had gotten him into trouble before.

“Now we’ll just have a little ice cream and cake,” suggested Dillard, after the few preliminary remarks were over, “and then we can get out of here. You two had better go around together and hand out a few hellos. Then we can meet at the ice cream booth. After that, if you say so, we’ll leave, eh? What do you say?”

He looked at Zella Shuman as much as to say: “You know what is the best thing to do,” and she smiled and replied:

“That’s right. We can’t leave right away. I see my cousin Mary over there. And Mother. And Fred Bruckner. Rita and I’ll just go around by ourselves for a while and then we’ll meet you, see.” And Rita Dickerman forthwith bestowed upon Clyde an intimate and possessive smile.

After about twenty minutes of drifting and browsing, Dillard received some signal from Zella, and he and Clyde paused near the ice cream booth with its chairs in the center of the room. In a few moments they were casually joined by Zella and Rita, with whom they had some ice cream and cake. And then, being free of all obligations and as some of the others were beginning to depart, Dillard observed: "Let's beat it. We can go over to your place, can't we?"

"Sure, sure," whispered Zella, and together they made their way to the coat room. Clyde was still so dubious as to the wisdom of all this that he was inclined to be a little silent. He did not know whether he was fascinated by Rita or not. But once out in the street out of view of the church and the homing amusement seekers, he and Rita found themselves together, Zella and Dillard having walked on ahead. And although Clyde had taken her arm, as he thought fit, she maneuvered it free and laid a warm and caressing hand on his elbow. And she nudged quite close to him, shoulder to shoulder, and half leaning on him, began pattering of the life of Lycurgus.

There was something very furry and caressing about her voice now. Clyde liked it. There was something heavy and languorous about her body, a kind of ray or electron that intrigued and lured him in spite of himself. He felt that he would like to caress her arm and might if he wished – that he might even put his arm around her waist, and so soon. Yet here he was, a Griffiths, he was shrewd enough to think – a Lycurgus Griffiths – and that was what now made a difference – that made all those girls at this church social seem so much more interested in him and so friendly. Yet in spite of this thought, he did squeeze her arm ever so slightly and without reproach or comment from her.

And once in the Shuman home, which was a large old-fashioned square frame house with a square cupola, very retired among some trees and a lawn, they made themselves at home in a general living room which was much more handsomely furnished than any home with which Clyde had been identified heretofore. Dillard at once began sorting the records, with which he seemed most familiar, and to pull two rather large rugs out of the way, revealing a smooth, hardwood floor.

"There's one thing about this house and these trees and these soft-toned needles," he commented for Clyde's benefit, of course, since he was still under the impression that Clyde might be and probably was a very shrewd person who was watching his every move here. "You can't hear a note of this Victrola out in the street, can you, Zell? Nor upstairs, either, really, not with the soft needles. We've played it down here and danced to it several times, until three and four in the morning and they didn't even know it upstairs, did they, Zell?"

"That's right. But then Father's a little hard of hearing. And Mother don't hear anything, either, when she gets in her room and gets to reading. But it is hard to hear at that."

"Why do people object so to dancing here?" asked Clyde.

"Oh, they don't – not the factory people – not at all," put in Dillard, "but most of the church people do. My uncle and aunt do. And nearly everyone else we met at the church tonight, except Zell and Rita." He gave them a most approving and encouraging glance. "And they're too broadminded to let a little thing like that bother them. Ain't that right, Zell?"

This young girl, who was very much fascinated by him, laughed and nodded, "You bet, that's right. I can't see any harm in it."

"Nor me, either," put in Rita, "nor my father and mother. Only they don't like to say anything about it or make me feel that they want me to do too much of it."

Dillard by then had started a piece entitled "Brown Eyes" and immediately Clyde and Rita and Dillard and Zella began to dance, and Clyde found himself insensibly drifting into a kind of intimacy with this girl which boded he could scarcely say what. She danced so warmly and enthusiastically – a kind of weaving and swaying motion which suggested all sorts of repressed enthusiasms. And her lips were at once wreathed with a kind of lyric smile which suggested a kind of hunger for this thing. And she was very pretty, more so dancing and smiling than at any other time.

“She is delicious,” thought Clyde, “even if she is a little soft. Any fellow would do almost as well as me, but she likes me because she thinks I’m somebody.” And almost at the same moment she observed: “Isn’t it just too gorgeous? And you’re such a good dancer, Mr. Griffiths.”

“Oh, no,” he replied, smiling into her eyes, “you’re the one that’s the dancer. I can dance because you’re dancing with me.”

He could feel now that her arms were large and soft, her bosom full for one so young. Exhilarated by dancing, she was quite intoxicating, her gestures almost provoking.

“Now we’ll put on ‘The Love Boat,’” called Dillard the moment “Brown Eyes” was ended, “and you and Zella can dance together and Rita and I will have a spin, eh, Rita?”

He was so fascinated by his own skill as a dancer, however, as well as his natural joy in the art, that he could scarcely wait to begin another, but must take Rita by the arms before putting on another record, gliding here and there, doing steps and executing figures which Clyde could not possibly achieve and which at once established Dillard as the superior dancer. Then, having done so, he called to Clyde to put on “The Love Boat.”

But as Clyde could see after dancing with Zella once, this was planned to be a happy companionship of two mutually mated couples who would not interfere with each other in any way, but rather would aid each other in their various schemes to enjoy one another’s society. For while Zella danced with Clyde, and danced well and talked to him much, all the while he could feel that she was interested in Dillard and Dillard only and would prefer to be with him. For, after a few dances, and while he and Rita lounged on a settee and talked, Zella and Dillard left the room to go to the kitchen for a drink. Only, as Clyde observed, they stayed much longer than any single drink would have required.

And similarly, during this interval, it seemed as though it was intended even, by Rita, that he and she should draw closer to one another. For, finding the conversation on the settee lagging for a moment, she got up and apropos of nothing – no music and no words – motioned him to dance some more with her. She had danced certain steps with Dillard which she pretended to show Clyde. But because of their nature, these brought her and Clyde into closer contact than before – very much so. And standing so close together and showing Clyde by elbow and arm how to do, her face and cheek came very close to him – too much for his own strength of will and purpose. He pressed his cheek to hers and she turned smiling and encouraging eyes upon him. On the instant, his self-possession was gone and he kissed her lips. And then again – and again. And instead of withdrawing them, as he thought she might, she let him – remained just as she was in order that he might kiss her more.

And suddenly now, as he felt this yielding of her warm body so close to him, and the pressure of her lips in response to his own, he realized that he had let himself in for a relationship which might not be so very easy to modify or escape. Also that it would be a very difficult thing for him to resist, since he now liked her and obviously she liked him.

Chapter 9

Apart from the momentary thrill and zest of this, the effect was to throw Clyde, as before, speculatively back upon the problem of his proper course here. For here was this girl, and she was approaching him in this direct and suggestive way. And so soon after telling himself and his mother that his course was to be so different here – no such approaches or relationships as had brought on his downfall in Kansas City. And yet – and yet –

He was sorely tempted now, for in his contact with Rita he had the feeling that she was expecting him to suggest a further step – and soon. But just how and where? Not in connection with this large, strange house. There were other rooms apart from the kitchen to which Dillard and Zella had ostensibly departed. But even so, such a relationship once established! What then? Would he not be expected to continue it, or let himself in for possible complications in case he did not? He danced with and fondled her in a daring and aggressive fashion, yet thinking as he did so, “But this is not what I should be doing either, is it? This is Lycurgus. I am a Griffiths, here. I know how these people feel toward me – their parents even. Do I really care for her? Is there not something about her quick and easy availability which, if not exactly dangerous in so far as my future here is concerned, is not quite satisfactory – too quickly intimate?” He was experiencing a sensation not unrelated to his mood in connection with the lupanar in Kansas City – attracted and yet repulsed. He could do no more than kiss and fondle her here in a somewhat restrained way until at last Dillard and Zella returned, whereupon the same degree of intimacy was no longer possible.

A clock somewhere striking two, it suddenly occurred to Rita that she must be going – her parents would object to her staying out so late. And since Dillard gave no evidence of deserting Zella, it followed, of course, that Clyde was to see her home, a pleasure that now had been allayed by a vague suggestion of disappointment or failure on the part of both. He had not risen to her expectations, he thought. Obviously he lacked the courage yet to follow up the proffer of her favors, was the way she explained it to herself.

At her own door, not so far distant, and with a conversation which was still tinged with intimations of some future occasions which might prove more favorable, her attitude was decidedly encouraging, even here. They parted, but with Clyde still saying to himself that this new relationship was developing much too swiftly. He was not sure that he should undertake a relationship such as this here – so soon, anyhow. Where now were all his fine decisions made before coming here? What was he going to decide? And yet because of the sensual warmth and magnetism of Rita, he was irritated by his resolution and his inability to proceed as he otherwise might.

Two things which eventually decided him in regard to this came quite close together. One related to the attitude of the Griffiths themselves, which, apart from that of Gilbert, was not one of opposition or complete indifference, so much as it was a failure on the part of Samuel Griffiths in the first instance and the others largely because of him to grasp the rather anomalous, if not exactly lonely position in which Clyde would find himself here unless the family chose to show him at least some little courtesy or advise him cordially from time to time. Yet Samuel Griffiths, being always very much pressed for time, had scarcely given Clyde a thought during the first month, at least. He was here, properly placed, as he heard, would be properly looked after in the future – what more, just now, at least?

And so for all of five weeks before any action of any kind was taken, and with Gilbert Griffiths comforted thereby, Clyde was allowed to drift along in his basement world wondering what was being intended in connection with himself. The attitude of others, including Dillard and these girls, finally made his position here seem strange.

However, about a month after Clyde had arrived, and principally because Gilbert seemed so content to say nothing regarding him, the elder Griffiths inquired one day:

“Well, what about your cousin? How’s he doing by now?” And Gilbert, only a little worried as to what this might bode, replied, “Oh, he’s all right. I started him off in the shrinking room. Is that all right?”

“Yes, I think so. That’s as good a place as any for him to begin, I believe. But what do you think of him by now?”

“Oh,” answered Gilbert very conservatively and decidedly independently – a trait for which his father had always admired him – “Not so much. He’s all right, I guess. He may work out. But he does not strike me as a fellow who would ever make much of a stir in this game. He hasn’t had much of an education of any kind, you know. Any one can see that. Besides, he’s not so very aggressive or energetic-looking. Too soft, I think. Still I don’t want to knock him. He may be all right. You like him and I may be wrong. But I can’t help but think that his real idea in coming here is that you’ll do more for him than you would for someone else, just because he is related to you.”

“Oh, you think he does. Well, if he does, he’s wrong.” But at the same time, he added, and that with a bantering smile: “He may not be as impractical as you think, though. He hasn’t been here long enough for us to really tell, has he? He didn’t strike me that way in Chicago. Besides there are a lot of little corners into which he might fit, aren’t there, without any great waste, even if he isn’t the most talented fellow in the world? If he’s content to take a small job in life, that’s his business. I can’t prevent that. But at any rate, I don’t want him sent away yet, anyhow, and I don’t want him put on piece work. It wouldn’t look right. After all, he is related to us. Just let him drift along for a little while and see what he does for himself.”

“All right, governor,” replied his son, who was hoping that his father would absent-mindedly let him stay where he was – in the lowest of all the positions the factory had to offer.

But, now, and to his dissatisfaction, Samuel Griffiths proceeded to add, “We’ll have to have him out to the house for dinner pretty soon, won’t we? I have thought of that but I haven’t been able to attend to it before. I should have spoken to Mother about it before this. He hasn’t been out yet, has he?”

“No, sir, not that I know of,” replied Gilbert dourly. He did not like this at all, but was too tactful to show his opposition just here. “We’ve been waiting for you to say something about it, I suppose.”

“Very well,” went on Samuel, “you’d better find out where he’s stopping and have him out. Next Sunday wouldn’t be a bad time, if we haven’t anything else on.” Noting a flicker of doubt or disapproval in his son’s eyes, he added: “After all, Gil, he’s my nephew and your cousin, and we can’t afford to ignore him entirely. That wouldn’t be right, you know, either. You’d better speak to your mother to-night, or I will, and arrange it.” He closed the drawer of a desk in which he had been looking for certain papers, got up and took down his hat and coat and left the office.

In consequence of this discussion, an invitation was sent to Clyde for the following Sunday at six-thirty to appear and participate in a Griffiths family meal. On Sunday at one-thirty was served the important family dinner to which usually was invited one or another of the various local or visiting friends of the family. At six-thirty nearly all of these guests had departed, and sometimes one or two of the Griffiths themselves, the cold collation served being partaken of by Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths and Myra – Bella and Gilbert usually having appointments elsewhere.

On this occasion, however, as Mrs. Griffiths and Myra and Bella decided in conference, they would all be present with the exception of Gilbert, who, because of his opposition as well as another appointment, explained that he would stop in for only a moment before leaving. Thus Clyde as Gilbert was pleased to note would be received and entertained without the likelihood of contacts, introductions and explanations to such of their more important connections who might chance to stop in during the afternoon. They would also have an opportunity to study him for themselves and see what they really did think without committing themselves in any way.

But in the meantime in connection with Dillard, Rita and Zella there had been a development which, because of the problem it had posed, was to be affected by this very decision on the part of the Griffiths. For following the evening at the Shuman home, and because, in spite of Clyde’s hesitation

at the time, all three including Rita herself, were still convinced that he must or would be smitten with her charms, there had been various hints, as well as finally a direct invitation or proposition on the part of Dillard to the effect that because of the camaraderie which had been established between himself and Clyde and these two girls, they make a week-end trip somewhere – preferably to Utica or Albany. The girls would go, of course. He could fix that through Zella with Rita for Clyde if he had any doubts or fears as to whether it could be negotiated or not. “You know she likes you. Zell was telling me the other day that she said she thought you were the candy. Some ladies’ man, eh?” And he nudged Clyde genially and intimately – a proceeding in this newer and grander world in which he now found himself – and considering who he was here, was not as appealing to Clyde as it otherwise might have been. These fellows who were so pushing where they thought a fellow amounted to something more than they did! He could tell.

At the same time, the proposition he was now offering – as thrilling and intriguing as it might be from one point of view – was likely to cause him endless trouble – was it not? In the first place he had no money – only fifteen dollars a week here so far – and if he was going to be expected to indulge in such expensive outings as these, why, of course, he could not manage. Carfare, meals, a hotel bill, maybe an automobile ride or two. And after that he would be in close contact with this Rita whom he scarcely knew. And might she not take it on herself to become intimate here in Lycurgus, maybe – expect him to call on her regularly – and go places – and then – well, gee – supposing the Griffiths – his cousin Gilbert, heard of or saw this. Hadn’t Zella said that she saw him often on the street here and there in Lycurgus? And wouldn’t they be likely to encounter him somewhere – sometime – when they were all together? And wouldn’t that fix him as being intimate with just another store clerk like Dillard who didn’t amount to so much after all? It might even mean the end of his career here! Who could tell what it might lead to?

He coughed and made various excuses. Just now he had a lot of work to do. Besides – a venture like that – he would have to see first. His relatives, you know. Besides next Sunday and the Sunday after, some extra work in connection with the factory was going to hold him in Lycurgus. After that time he would see. Actually, in his wavering way – and various disturbing thoughts as to Rita’s charm returning to him at moments, he was wondering if it was not desirable – his other decision to the contrary notwithstanding, to skimp himself as much as possible over two or three weeks and so go anyhow. He had been saving something toward a new dress suit and collapsible silk hat. Might he not use some of that – even though he knew the plan to be all wrong?

The fair, plump, sensuous Rita!

But then, not at that very moment – but in the interim following, the invitation from the Griffiths. Returning from his work one evening very tired and still cogitating this gay adventure proposed by Dillard, he found lying on the table in his room a note written on very heavy and handsome paper which had been delivered by one of the servants of the Griffiths in his absence. It was all the more arresting to him because on the flap of the envelope was embossed in high relief the initials “E. G.” He at once tore it open and eagerly read:

“MY DEAR NEPHEW:

“Since your arrival my husband has been away most of the time, and although we have wished to have you with us before, we have thought it best to await his leisure. He is freer now and we will be very glad if you can find it convenient to come to supper with us at six o’clock next Sunday. We dine very informally – just ourselves – so in case you can or cannot come, you need not bother to write or telephone. And you need not dress for this occasion either. But come if you can. We will be happy to see you.

“Sincerely, your aunt,

“ELIZABETH GRIFFITHS”

On reading this Clyde, who, during all this silence and the prosecution of a task in the shrinking room which was so eminently distasteful to him, was being more and more weighed upon by the

thought that possibly, after all, this quest of his was going to prove a vain one and that he was going to be excluded from any real contact with his great relatives, was most romantically and hence impractically heartened. For only see – here was this grandiose letter with its “very happy to see you,” which seemed to indicate that perhaps, after all, they did not think so badly of him. Mr. Samuel Griffiths had been away all the time. That was it. Now he would get to see his aunt and cousins and the inside of that great house. It must be very wonderful. They might even take him up after this – who could tell? But how remarkable that he should be taken up now, just when he had about decided that they would not.

And forthwith his interest in, as well as his weakness for, Rita, if not Zella and Dillard began to evaporate. What! Mix with people so far below him – a Griffiths – in the social scale here and at the cost of endangering his connection with that important family. Never! It was a great mistake. Didn't this letter coming just at this time prove it? And fortunately – (how fortunately!) – he had had the good sense not to let himself in for anything as yet. And so now, without much trouble, and because, most likely from now on it would prove necessary for him so to do he could gradually eliminate himself from this contact with Dillard – move away from Mrs. Cuppy's – if necessary, or say that his uncle had cautioned him – anything, but not go with this crowd any more, just the same. It wouldn't do. It would endanger his prospects in connection with this new development. And instead of troubling over Rita and Utica now, he began to formulate for himself once more the essential nature of the private life of the Griffiths, the fascinating places they must go, the interesting people with whom they must be in contact. And at once he began to think of the need of a dress suit, or at least a tuxedo and trousers. Accordingly the next morning, he gained permission from Mr. Kemerer to leave at eleven and not return before one, and in that time he managed to find coat, trousers and a pair of patent leather shoes, as well as a white silk muffler for the money he had already saved. And so arrayed he felt himself safe. He must make a good impression.

And for the entire time between then and Sunday evening, instead of thinking of Rita or Dillard or Zella any more, he was thinking of this opportunity. Plainly it was an event to be admitted to the presence of such magnificence.

The only drawback to all this, as he well sensed now, was this same Gilbert Griffiths, who surveyed him always whenever he met him anywhere with such hard, cold eyes. He might be there, and then he would probably assume that superior attitude, to make him feel his inferior position, if he could – and Clyde had the weakness at times of admitting to himself that he could. And no doubt, if he (Clyde) sought to carry himself with too much of an air in the presence of this family, Gilbert most likely would seek to take it out of him in some way later in connection with the work in the factory. He might see to it, for instance, that his father heard only unfavorable things about him. And, of course, if he were retained in this wretched shrinking room, and given no show of any kind, how could he expect to get anywhere or be anybody? It was just his luck that on arriving here he should find this same Gilbert looking almost like him and being so opposed to him for obviously no reason at all.

However, despite all his doubts, he decided to make the best of this opportunity, and accordingly on Sunday evening at six set out for the Griffiths' residence, his nerves decidedly taut because of the ordeal before him. And when he reached the main gate, a large, arched wrought iron affair which gave in on a wide, winding brick walk which led to the front entrance, he lifted the heavy latch which held the large iron gates in place, with almost a quaking sense of adventure. And as he approached along the walk, he felt as though he might well be the object of observant and critical eyes. Perhaps Mr. Samuel or Mr. Gilbert Griffiths or one or the other of the two sisters was looking at him now from one of those heavily curtained windows. On the lower floor several lights glowed with a soft and inviting radiance.

This mood, however, was brief. For soon the door was opened by a servant who took his coat and invited him into the very large living room, which was very impressive. To Clyde, even after the Green–Davidson and the Union League, it seemed a very beautiful room. It contained so

many handsome pieces of furniture and such rich rugs and hangings. A fire burned in the large, high fireplace before which was circled a number of divans and chairs. There were lamps, a tall clock, a great table. No one was in the room at the moment, but presently as Clyde fidgeted and looked about he heard a rustling of silk to the rear, where a great staircase descended from the rooms above. And from there he saw Mrs. Griffiths approaching him, a bland and angular and faded-looking woman. But her walk was brisk, her manner courteous, if non-committal, as was her custom always, and after a few moments of conversation he found himself peaceful and fairly comfortable in her presence.

“My nephew, I believe,” she smiled.

“Yes,” replied Clyde simply, and because of his nervousness, with unusual dignity. “I am Clyde Griffiths.”

“I’m very glad to see you and to welcome you to our home,” began Mrs. Griffiths with a certain amount of aplomb which years of contact with the local high world had given her at last. “And my children will be, too, of course. Bella is not here just now or Gilbert, either, but then they will be soon, I believe. My husband is resting, but I heard him stirring just now, and he’ll be down in a moment. Won’t you sit here?” She motioned to a large divan between them. “We dine nearly always alone here together on Sunday evening, so I thought it would be nice if you came just to be alone with us. How do you like Lycurgus now?”

She arranged herself on one of the large divans before the fire and Clyde rather awkwardly seated himself at a respectful distance from her.

“Oh, I like it very much,” he observed, exerting himself to be congenial and to smile. “Of course I haven’t seen so very much of it yet, but what I have I like. This street is one of the nicest I have ever seen anywhere,” he added enthusiastically. “The houses are so large and the grounds so beautiful.”

“Yes, we here in Lycurgus pride ourselves on Wykeagy Avenue,” smiled Mrs. Griffiths, who took no end of satisfaction in the grace and rank of her own home in this street. She and her husband had been so long climbing up to it. “Every one who sees it seems to feel the same way about it. It was laid out many years ago when Lycurgus was just a village. It is only within the last fifteen years that it has come to be as handsome as it is now.

“But you must tell me something about your mother and father. I never met either of them, you know, though, of course, I have heard my husband speak of them often – that is, of his brother, anyhow,” she corrected. “I don’t believe he ever met your mother. How is your father?”

“Oh, he’s quite well,” replied Clyde, simply. “And Mother, too. They’re living in Denver now. We did live for a while in Kansas City, but for the last three years they’ve been out there. I had a letter from Mother only the other day. She says everything is all right.”

“Then you keep up a correspondence with her, do you? That’s nice.” She smiled, for by now she had become interested by and, on the whole, rather taken with Clyde’s appearance. He looked so neat and generally presentable, so much like her own son that she was a little startled at first and intrigued on that score. If anything, Clyde was taller, better built and hence better looking, only she would never have been willing to admit that. For to her Gilbert, although he was intolerant and contemptuous even to her at times, simulating an affection which was as much a custom as a reality, was still a dynamic and aggressive person putting himself and his conclusions before everyone else. Whereas Clyde was more soft and vague and fumbling. Her son’s force must be due to the innate ability of her husband as well as the strain of some relatives in her own line who had not been unlike Gilbert, while Clyde probably drew his lesser force from the personal unimportance of his parents.

But having settled this problem in her son’s favor, Mrs. Griffiths was about to ask after his sisters and brothers, when they were interrupted by Samuel Griffiths who now approached. Measuring Clyde, who had risen, very sharply once more, and finding him very satisfactory in appearance at least, he observed: “Well, so here you are, eh? They’ve placed you, I believe, without my ever seeing you.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Clyde, very deferentially and half bowing in the presence of so great a man.

“Well, that’s all right. Sit down! Sit down! I’m very glad they did. I hear you’re working down in the shrinking room at present. Not exactly a pleasant place, but not such a bad place to begin, either – at the bottom. The best people start there sometimes.” He smiled and added: “I was out of the city when you came on or I would have seen you.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Clyde, who had not ventured to seat himself again until Mr. Griffiths had sunk into a very large stuffed chair near the divan. And the latter, now that he saw Clyde in an ordinary tuxedo with a smart pleated shirt and black tie, as opposed to the club uniform in which he had last seen him in Chicago, was inclined to think him even more attractive than before – not quite as negligible and unimportant as his son Gilbert had made out. Still, not being dead to the need of force and energy in business and sensing that Clyde was undoubtedly lacking in these qualities, he did now wish that Clyde had more vigor and vim in him. It would reflect more handsomely on the Griffiths end of the family and please his son more, maybe.

“Like it where you are now?” he observed condescendingly.

“Well, yes, sir, that is, I wouldn’t say that I like it exactly,” replied Clyde quite honestly. “But I don’t mind it. It’s as good as any other way to begin, I suppose.” The thought in his mind at the moment was that he would like to impress on his uncle that he was cut out for something better. And the fact that his cousin Gilbert was not present at the moment gave him the courage to say it.

“Well, that’s the proper spirit,” commented Samuel Griffiths, pleased. “It isn’t the most pleasant part of the process, I will admit, but it’s one of the most essential things to know, to begin with. And it takes a little time, of course, to get anywhere in any business these days.”

From this Clyde wondered how long he was to be left in that dim world below stairs.

But while he was thinking this Myra came forward, curious about him and what he would be like, and very pleased to see that he was not as uninteresting as Gilbert had painted him. There was something, as she now saw, about Clyde’s eyes – nervous and somewhat furtive and appealing or seeking – that at once interested her, and reminded her, perhaps, since she was not much of a success socially either, of something in herself.

“Your cousin, Clyde Griffiths, Myra,” observed Samuel rather casually, as Clyde arose. “My daughter Myra,” he added, to Clyde. “This is the young man I’ve been telling you about.”

Clyde bowed and then took the cool and not very vital hand that Myra extended to him, but feeling it just the same to be more friendly and considerate than the welcome of the others.

“Well, I hope you’ll like it, now that you’re here,” she began, genially. “We all like Lycurgus, only after Chicago I suppose it will not mean so very much to you.” She smiled and Clyde, feeling very formal and stiff in the presence of all these very superior relatives, now returned a stiff “thank you,” and was just about to seat himself when the outer door opened and Gilbert Griffiths strode in. The whirring of a motor had preceded this – a motor that had stopped outside the large east side entrance. “Just a minute, Dolge,” he called to some one outside. “I won’t be long.” Then turning to the family, he added: “Excuse me, folks, I’ll be back in a minute.” He dashed up the rear stairs, only to return after a time and confront Clyde, if not the others, with that same rather icy and inconsiderate air that had so far troubled him at the factory. He was wearing a light, belted motoring coat of a very pronounced stripe, and a dark leather cap and gauntlets which gave him almost a military air. After nodding to Clyde rather stiffly, and adding, “How do you do,” he laid a patronizing hand on his father’s shoulder and observed: “Hi, Dad. Hello, Mother. Sorry I can’t be with you to-night. But I just came over from Amsterdam with Dolge and Eustis to get Constance and Jacqueline. There’s some doings over at the Bridgemans’. But I’ll be back again before morning. Or at the office, anyhow. Everything all right with you, Mr. Griffiths?” he observed to his father.

“Yes, I have nothing to complain of,” returned his father. “But it seems to me you’re making a pretty long night of it, aren’t you?”

“Oh, I don’t mean that,” returned his son, ignoring Clyde entirely. “I just mean that if I can’t get back by two, I’ll stay over, that’s all, see.” He tapped his father genially on the shoulder again.

“I hope you’re not driving that car as fast as usual,” complained his mother. “It’s not safe at all.”

“Fifteen miles an hour, Mother. Fifteen miles an hour. I know the rules.” He smiled loftily.

Clyde did not fail to notice the tone of condescension and authority that went with all this. Plainly here, as at the factory, he was a person who had to be reckoned with. Apart from his father, perhaps, there was no one here to whom he offered any reverence. What a superior attitude, thought Clyde!

How wonderful it must be to be a son who, without having had to earn all this, could still be so much, take oneself so seriously, exercise so much command and authority. It might be, as it plainly was, that this youth was very superior and indifferent in tone toward him. But think of being such a youth, having so much power at one’s command!

Chapter 10

At this point a maid announced that supper was served and instantly Gilbert took his departure. At the same time the family arose and Mrs. Griffiths asked the maid: "Has Bella telephoned yet?"

"No, ma'am," replied the servant, "not yet."

"Well, have Mrs. Truesdale call up the Finchleys and see if she's there. You tell her I said that she is to come home at once."

The maid departed for a moment while the group proceeded to the dining room, which lay to the west of the stairs at the rear. Again, as Clyde saw, this was another splendidly furnished room done in a very light brown, with a long center table of carved walnut, evidently used only for special occasions. It was surrounded by high-backed chairs and lighted by candelabras set at even spaces upon it. In a lower ceilinged and yet ample circular alcove beyond this, looking out on the garden to the south, was a smaller table set for six. It was in this alcove that they were to dine, a different thing from what Clyde had expected for some reason.

Seated in a very placid fashion, he found himself answering questions principally as to his own family, the nature of its life, past and present; how old was his father now? His mother? What had been the places of their residence before moving to Denver? How many brothers and sisters had he? How old was his sister, Esta? What did she do? And the others? Did his father like managing a hotel? What had been the nature of his father's work in Kansas City? How long had the family lived there?

Clyde was not a little troubled and embarrassed by this chain of questions which flowed rather heavily and solemnly from Samuel Griffiths or his wife. And from Clyde's hesitating replies, especially in regard to the nature of the family life in Kansas City, both gathered that he was embarrassed and troubled by some of the questions. They laid it to the extreme poverty of their relatives, of course. For having asked, "I suppose you began your hotel work in Kansas City, didn't you, after you left school?" Clyde blushed deeply, bethinking himself of the incident of the stolen car and of how little real schooling he had had. Most certainly he did not like the thought of having himself identified with hotel life in Kansas City, and more especially the Green-Davidson.

But fortunately at this moment, the door opened and Bella entered, accompanied by two girls such as Clyde would have assumed at once belonged to this world. How different to Rita and Zella with whom his thought so recently had been disturbedly concerned. He did not know Bella, of course, until she proceeded most familiarly to address her family. But the others – one was Sondra Finchley, so frequently referred to by Bella and her mother – as smart and vain and sweet a girl as Clyde had ever laid his eyes upon – so different to any he had ever known and so superior. She was dressed in a close-fitting tailored suit which followed her form exactly and which was enhanced by a small dark leather hat, pulled fetchingly low over her eyes. A leather belt of the same color encircled her neck. By a leather leash she led a French bull and over one arm carried a most striking coat of black and gray checks – not too pronounced and yet having the effect of a man's modish overcoat. To Clyde's eyes she was the most adorable feminine thing he had seen in all his days. Indeed her effect on him was electric – thrilling – arousing in him a curiously stinging sense of what it was to want and not to have – to wish to win and yet to feel, almost agonizingly that he was destined not even to win a glance from her. It tortured and flustered him. At one moment he had a keen desire to close his eyes and shut her out – at another to look only at her constantly – so truly was he captivated.

Yet, whether she saw him or not, she gave no sign at first, exclaiming to her dog: "Now, Bissell, if you're not going to behave, I'm going to take you out and tie you out there. Oh, I don't believe I can stay a moment if he won't behave better than this." He had seen a family cat and was tugging to get near her.

Beside her was another girl whom Clyde did not fancy nearly so much, and yet who, after her fashion, was as smart as Sondra and perhaps as alluring to some. She was blonde – tow-headed – with

clear almond-shaped, greenish-gray eyes, a small, graceful, catlike figure, and a slinky feline manner. At once, on entering, she sidled across the room to the end of the table where Mrs. Griffiths sat and leaning over her at once began to purr.

“Oh, how are you, Mrs. Griffiths? I’m so glad to see you again. It’s been some time since I’ve been over here, hasn’t it? But then Mother and I have been away. She and Grant are over at Albany to-day. And I just picked up Bella and Sondra here at the Lamberts’. You’re just having a quiet little supper by yourselves, aren’t you? How are you, Myra?” she called, and reaching over Mrs. Griffiths’ shoulder touched Myra quite casually on the arm, as though it were more a matter of form than anything else.

In the meantime Bella, who next to Sondra seemed to Clyde decidedly the most charming of the three, was exclaiming: “Oh, I’m late. Sorry, Mamma and Daddy. Won’t that do this time?” Then noting Clyde, and as though for the first time, although he had risen as they entered and was still standing, she paused in semi-mock modesty as did the others. And Clyde, oversensitive to just such airs and material distinctions, was fairly tremulous with a sense of his own inadequacy, as he waited to be introduced. For to him, youth and beauty in such a station as this represented the ultimate triumph of the female. His weakness for Hortense Briggs, to say nothing of Rita, who was not so attractive as either of these, illustrated the effect of trim femininity on him, regardless of merit.

“Bella,” observed Samuel Griffiths, heavily, noting Clyde still standing, “your cousin, Clyde.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Bella, observing that Clyde looked exceedingly like Gilbert. “How are you? Mother has been saying that you were coming to call one of these days.” She extended a finger or two, then turned toward her friends. “My friends, Miss Finchley and Miss Cranston, Mr. Griffiths.”

The two girls bowed, each in the most stiff and formal manner, at the same time studying Clyde most carefully and rather directly, “Well, he does look like Gil a lot, doesn’t he?” whispered Sondra to Bertine, who had drawn near to her. And Bertine replied: “I never saw anything like it. He’s really better-looking, isn’t he – a lot?”

Sondra nodded, pleased to note in the first instance that he was somewhat better-looking than Bella’s brother, whom she did not like – next that he was obviously stricken with her, which was her due, as she invariably decided in connection with youths thus smitten with her. But having thus decided, and seeing that his glance was persistently and helplessly drawn to her, she concluded that she need pay no more attention to him, for the present anyway. He was too easy.

But now Mrs. Griffiths, who had not anticipated this visitation and was a little irritated with Bella for introducing her friends at this time since it at once raised the question of Clyde’s social position here, observed: “Hadn’t you two better lay off your coats and sit down? I’ll just have Nadine lay extra plates at this end. Bella, you can sit next to your father.”

“Oh, no, not at all,” and “No, indeed, we’re just on our way home ourselves. I can’t stay a minute,” came from Sondra and Bertine. But now that they were here and Clyde had proved to be as attractive as he was, they were perversely interested to see what, if any, social flair there was to him. Gilbert Griffiths, as both knew, was far from being popular in some quarters – their own in particular, however much they might like Bella. He was, for two such self-centered beauties as these, too aggressive, self-willed and contemptuous at times. Whereas Clyde, if one were to judge by his looks, at least was much more malleable. And if it were to prove now that he was of equal station, or that the Griffiths thought so, decidedly he would be available locally, would he not? At any rate, it would be interesting to know whether he was rich. But this thought was almost instantly satisfied by Mrs. Griffiths, who observed rather definitely and intentionally to Bertine: “Mr. Griffiths is a nephew of ours from the West who has come on to see if he can make a place for himself in my husband’s factory. He’s a young man who has to make his own way in the world and my husband has been kind enough to give him an opportunity.”

Clyde flushed, since obviously this was a notice to him that his social position here was decidedly below that of the Griffiths or these girls. At the same time, as he also noticed, the look

of Bertine Cranston, who was only interested in youths of means and position, changed from one of curiosity to marked indifference. On the other hand, Sondra Finchley, by no means so practical as her friend, though of a superior station in her set, since she was so very attractive and her parents possessed of even more means – re-surveyed Clyde with one thought written rather plainly on her face, that it was too bad. He really was so attractive.

At the same time Samuel Griffiths, having a peculiar fondness for Sondra, if not Bertine, whom Mrs. Griffiths also disliked as being too tricky and sly, was calling to her: “Here, Sondra, tie up your dog to one of the dining-room chairs and come and sit by me. Throw your coat over that chair. Here’s room for you.” He motioned to her to come.

“But I can’t, Uncle Samuel!” called Sondra, familiarly and showily and yet somehow sweetly, seeking to ingratiate herself by this affected relationship. “We’re late now. Besides Bissell won’t behave. Bertine and I are just on our way home, truly.”

“Oh, yes, Papa,” put in Bella, quickly, “Bertine’s horse ran a nail in his foot yesterday and is going lame to-day. And neither Grant nor his father is home. She wants to know if you know anything that’s good for it.”

“Which foot is it?” inquired Griffiths, interested, while Clyde continued to survey Sondra as best he might. She was so delicious, he thought – her nose so tiny and tilted – her upper lip arched so roguishly upward toward her nose.

“It’s the left fore. I was riding out on the East Kingston road yesterday afternoon. Jerry threw a shoe and must have picked up a splinter, but John doesn’t seem to be able to find it.”

“Did you ride him much with the nail, do you think?”

“About eight miles – all the way back.”

“Well, you had better have John put on some liniment and a bandage and call a veterinary. He’ll come around all right, I’m sure.”

The group showed no signs of leaving and Clyde, left quite to himself for the moment, was thinking what an easy, delightful world this must be – this local society. For here they were without a care, apparently, between any of them. All their talk was of houses being built, horses they were riding, friends they had met, places they were going to, things they were going to do. And there was Gilbert, who had left only a little while before – motoring somewhere with a group of young men. And Bella, his cousin, trifling around with these girls in the beautiful homes of this street, while he was shunted away in a small third-floor room at Mrs. Cuppy’s with no place to go. And with only fifteen dollars a week to live on. And in the morning he would be working in the basement again, while these girls were rising to more pleasure. And out in Denver were his parents with their small lodging house and mission, which he dared not even describe accurately here.

Suddenly the two girls declaring they must go, they took themselves off. And he and the Griffiths were once more left to themselves – he with the feeling that he was very much out of place and neglected here, since Samuel Griffiths and his wife and Bella, anyhow, if not Myra, seemed to be feeling that he was merely being permitted to look into a world to which he did not belong; also, that because of his poverty it would be impossible to fit him into – however much he might dream of associating with three such wonderful girls as these. And at once he felt sad – very – his eyes and his mood darkening so much that not only Samuel Griffiths, but his wife as well as Myra noticed it. If he could enter upon this world, find some way. But of the group it was only Myra, not any of the others, who sensed that in all likelihood he was lonely and depressed. And in consequence as all were rising and returning to the large living room (Samuel chiding Bella for her habit of keeping her family waiting) it was Myra who drew near to Clyde to say: “I think after you’ve been here a little while you’ll probably like Lycurgus better than you do now, even. There are quite a number of interesting places to go and see around here – lakes and the Adirondacks are just north of here, about seventy miles. And when the summer comes and we get settled at Greenwood, I’m sure Father and Mother will like you to come up there once in a while.”

She was by no means sure that this was true, but under the circumstances, whether it was or not, she felt like saying it to Clyde. And thereafter, since he felt more comfortable with her, he talked with her as much as he could without neglecting either Bella or the family, until about half-past nine, when, suddenly feeling very much out of place and alone, he arose saying that he must go, that he had to get up early in the morning. And as he did so, Samuel Griffiths walked with him to the front door and let him out. But he, too, by now, as had Myra before him, feeling that Clyde was rather attractive and yet, for reasons of poverty, likely to be neglected from now on, not only by his family, but by himself as well, observed most pleasantly, and, as he hoped, compensatively: "It's rather nice out, isn't it? Wykeagy Avenue hasn't begun to show what it can do yet because the spring isn't quite here. But in a few weeks," and he looked up most inquiringly at the sky and sniffed the late April air, "we must have you out. All the trees and flowers will be in bloom then and you can see how really nice it is. Good night."

He smiled and put a very cordial note into his voice, and once more Clyde felt that, whatever Gilbert Griffiths' attitude might be, most certainly his father was not wholly indifferent to him.

Chapter 11

The days lapsed and, although no further word came from the Griffiths, Clyde was still inclined to exaggerate the importance of this one contact and to dream from time to time of delightful meetings with those girls and how wonderful if a love affair with one of them might eventuate for him. The beauty of that world in which they moved. The luxury and charm as opposed to this of which he was a part. Dillard! Rita! Tush! They were really dead for him. He aspired to this other or nothing as he saw it now and proceeded to prove as distant to Dillard as possible, an attitude which by degrees tended to alienate that youth entirely for he saw in Clyde a snob which potentially he was if he could have but won to what he desired. However, as he began to see afterwards, time passed and he was left to work until, depressed by the routine, meager pay and commonplace shrinking-room contacts, he began to think not so much of returning to Rita or Dillard – he could not quite think of them now with any satisfaction, but of giving up this venture here and returning to Chicago or going to New York, where he was sure that he could connect himself with some hotel if need be. But then, as if to revive his courage and confirm his earlier dreams, a thing happened which caused him to think that certainly he was beginning to rise in the estimation of the Griffiths – father and son – whether they troubled to entertain him socially or not. For it chanced that one Saturday in spring, Samuel Griffiths decided to make a complete tour of inspection of the factory with Joshua Whiggam at his elbow. Reaching the shrinking department about noon, he observed for the first time with some dismay, Clyde in his undershirt and trousers working at the feeding end of two of the shrinking racks, his nephew having by this time acquired the necessary skill to “feed” as well as “take.” And recalling how very neat and generally presentable he had appeared at his house but a few weeks before, he was decidedly disturbed by the contrast. For one thing he had felt about Clyde, both in Chicago and here at his home, was that he had presented a neat and pleasing appearance. And he, almost as much as his son, was jealous, not only of the name, but the general social appearance of the Griffiths before the employees of this factory as well as the community at large. And the sight of Clyde here, looking so much like Gilbert and in an armless shirt and trousers working among these men, tended to impress upon him more sharply than at any time before the fact that Clyde was his nephew, and that he ought not to be compelled to continue at this very menial form of work any longer. To the other employees it might appear that he was unduly indifferent to the meaning of such a relationship.

Without, however, saying a word to Whiggam or anyone else at the time, he waited until his son returned on Monday morning, from a trip that he had taken out of town, when he called him into his office and observed: “I made a tour of the factory Saturday and found young Clyde still down in the shrinking room.”

“What of it, Dad?” replied his son, curiously interested as to why his father should at this time wish to mention Clyde in this special way. “Other people before him have worked down there and it hasn’t hurt them.”

“All true enough, but they weren’t nephews of mine. And they didn’t look as much like you as he does” – a comment which irritated Gilbert greatly. “It won’t do, I tell you. It doesn’t look quite right to me, and I’m afraid it won’t look right to other people here who see how much he looks like you and know that he is your cousin and my nephew. I didn’t realize that at first, because I haven’t been down there, but I don’t think it wise to keep him down there any longer doing that kind of thing. It won’t do. We’ll have to make a change, switch him around somewhere else where he won’t look like that.”

His eyes darkened and his brow wrinkled. The impression that Clyde made in his old clothes and with beads of sweat standing out on his forehead had not been pleasant.

“But I’ll tell you how it is, Dad,” Gilbert persisted, anxious and determined because of his innate opposition to Clyde to keep him there if possible. “I’m not so sure that I can find just the right place

for him now anywhere else – at least not without moving someone else who has been here a long time and worked hard to get there. He hasn't had any training in anything so far, but just what he's doing.”

“Don't know or don't care anything about that,” replied Griffiths senior, feeling that his son was a little jealous and in consequence disposed to be unfair to Clyde. “That's no place for him and I won't have him there any longer. He's been there long enough. And I can't afford to have the name of any of this family come to mean anything but just what it does around here now – reserve and ability and energy and good judgment. It's not good for the business. And anything less than that is a liability. You get me, don't you?”

“Yes, I get you all right, governor.”

“Well, then, do as I say. Get hold of Whiggam and figure out some other place for him around here, and not as piece worker or a hand either. It was a mistake to put him down there in the first place. There must be some little place in one of the departments where he can be fitted in as the head of something, first or second or third assistant to some one, and where he can wear a decent suit of clothes and look like somebody. And, if necessary, let him go home on full pay until you find something for him. But I want him changed. By the way, how much is he being paid now?”

“About fifteen, I think,” replied Gilbert blandly.

“Not enough, if he's to make the right sort of an appearance here. Better make it twenty-five. It's more than he's worth, I know, but it can't be helped now. He has to have enough to live on while he's here, and from now on, I'd rather pay him that than have any one think we were not treating him right.”

“All right, all right, governor. Please don't be cross about it, will you?” pleaded Gilbert, noting his father's irritation. “I'm not entirely to blame. You agreed to it in the first place when I suggested it, didn't you? But I guess you're right at that. Just leave it to me. I'll find a decent place for him,” and turning, he proceeded in search of Whiggam, although at the same time thinking how he was to effect all this without permitting Clyde to get the notion that he was at all important here – to make him feel that this was being done as a favor to him and not for any reasons of merit in connection with himself.

And at once, Whiggam appearing, he, after a very diplomatic approach on the part of Gilbert, racked his brains, scratched his head, went away and returned after a time to say that the only thing he could think of, since Clyde was obviously lacking in technical training, was that of assistant to Mr. Liggett, who was foreman in charge of five big stitching rooms on the fifth floor, but who had under him one small and very special, though by no means technical, department which required the separate supervision of either an assistant forelady or man.

This was the stamping room – a separate chamber at the west end of the stitching floor, where were received daily from the cutting room above from seventy-five to one hundred thousand dozen unstitched collars of different brands and sizes. And here they were stamped by a group of girls according to the slips or directions attached to them with the size and brand of the collar. The sole business of the assistant foreman in charge here, as Gilbert well knew, after maintaining due decorum and order, was to see that this stamping process went uninterruptedly forward. Also that after the seventy-five to one hundred thousand dozen collars were duly stamped and transmitted to the stitchers, who were just outside in the larger room, to see that they were duly credited in a book of entry. And that the number of dozens stamped by each girl was duly recorded in order that her pay should correspond with her services.

For this purpose a little desk and various entry books, according to size and brand, were kept here. Also the cutters' slips, as taken from the bundles by the stampers were eventually delivered to this assistant in lots of a dozen or more and filed on spindles. It was really nothing more than a small clerkship, at times in the past held by young men or girls or old men or middle-aged women, according to the exigencies of the life of the place.

The thing that Whiggam feared in connection with Clyde and which he was quick to point out to Gilbert on this occasion was that because of his inexperience and youth Clyde might not, at first,

prove as urgent and insistent a master of this department as the work there required. There were nothing but young girls there – some of them quite attractive. Also was it wise to place a young man of Clyde's years and looks among so many girls? For, being susceptible, as he might well be at that age, he might prove too easy – not stern enough. The girls might take advantage of him. If so, it wouldn't be possible to keep him there very long. Still there was this temporary vacancy, and it was the only one in the whole factory at the moment. Why not, for the time being, send him upstairs for a tryout? It might not be long before either Mr. Liggett or himself would know of something else or whether or not he was suited for the work up there. In that case it would be easy to make a re-transfer.

Accordingly, about three in the afternoon of this same Monday, Clyde was sent for and after being made to wait for some fifteen minutes, as was Gilbert's method, he was admitted to the austere presence.

"Well, how are you getting along down where you are now?" asked Gilbert coldly and inquisitorially. And Clyde, who invariably experienced a depression whenever he came anywhere near his cousin, replied, with a poorly forced smile, "Oh, just about the same, Mr. Griffiths. I can't complain. I like it well enough. I'm learning a little something, I guess."

"You guess?"

"Well, I know I've learned a few things, of course," added Clyde, flushing slightly and feeling down deep within himself a keen resentment at the same time that he achieved a half-ingratiating and half-apologetic smile.

"Well, that's a little better. A man could hardly be down there as long as you've been and not know whether he had learned anything or not." Then deciding that he was being too severe, perhaps, he modified his tone slightly, and added: "But that's not why I sent for you. There's another matter I want to talk to you about. Tell me, did you ever have charge of any people or any other person than yourself, at any time in your life?"

"I don't believe I quite understand," replied Clyde, who, because he was a little nervous and flustered, had not quite registered the question accurately.

"I mean have you ever had any people work under you – been given a few people to direct in some department somewhere? Been a foreman or an assistant foreman in charge of anything?"

"No, sir, I never have," answered Clyde, but so nervous that he almost stuttered. For Gilbert's tone was very severe and cold – highly contemptuous. At the same time, now that the nature of the question was plain, its implication came to him. In spite of his cousin's severity, his ill manner toward him, still he could see his employers were thinking of making a foreman of him – putting him in charge of somebody – people. They must be! At once his ears and fingers began to tingle – the roots of his hair to tingle: "But I've seen how it's done in clubs and hotels," he added at once. "And I think I might manage if I were given a trial." His cheeks were now highly colored – his eyes crystal clear.

"Not the same thing. Not the same thing," insisted Gilbert sharply. "Seeing and doing are two entirely different things. A person without any experience can think a lot, but when it comes to doing, he's not there. Anyhow, this is one business that requires people who do know."

He stared at Clyde critically and quizzically while Clyde, feeling that he must be wrong in his notion that something was going to be done for him, began to quiet himself. His cheeks resumed their normal pallor and the light died from his eyes.

"Yes, sir, I guess that's true, too," he commented.

"But you don't need to guess in this case," insisted Gilbert. "You know. That's the trouble with people who don't know. They're always guessing."

The truth was that Gilbert was so irritated to think that he must now make a place for his cousin, and that despite his having done nothing at all to deserve it, that he could scarcely conceal the spleen that now colored his mood.

"You're right, I know," said Clyde placatingly, for he was still hoping for this hinted-at promotion.

“Well, the fact is,” went on Gilbert, “I might have placed you in the accounting end of the business when you first came if you had been technically equipped for it.” (The phrase “technically equipped” overawed and terrorized Clyde, for he scarcely understood what that meant.) “As it was,” went on Gilbert, nonchalantly, “we had to do the best we could for you. We knew it was not very pleasant down there, but we couldn’t do anything more for you at the time.” He drummed on his desk with his fingers. “But the reason I called you up here today is this. I want to discuss with you a temporary vacancy that has occurred in one of our departments upstairs and which we are wondering – my father and I – whether you might be able to fill.” Clyde’s spirits rose amazingly. “Both my father and I,” he went on, “have been thinking for some little time that we would like to do a little something for you, but as I say, your lack of practical training of any kind makes it very difficult for both of us. You haven’t had either a commercial or a trade education of any kind, and that makes it doubly hard.” He paused long enough to allow that to sink in – give Clyde the feeling that he was an interloper indeed. “Still,” he added after a moment, “so long as we have seen fit to bring you on here, we have decided to give you a tryout at something better than you are doing. It won’t do to let you stay down there indefinitely. Now, let me tell you a little something about what I have in mind,” and he proceeded to explain the nature of the work on the fifth floor.

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