EDWARDS ALBERT

COMRADE YETTA

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Содержание

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I
BENJAMIN'S BOOK-STORE

The girlhood of Yetta Rayefsky was passed in her father's second-hand book-store on East Broadway. In the late nineties the fame of his kindly philosophy had attracted a circle of followers, and the store became almost prosperous.

It was in a basement – four steps down from the sidewalk. The close-packed cases around the walls were filled with the wildest assortment of second-hand English books. You were likely to find a novel of Laura Jean Libby cheek by jowl with "The Book of Mormon," between two volumes of "Browning's Poems." The tables in the centre were piled chaotically with books and periodicals in Russian and Hebrew.

Every night in the week you would have found Benjamin Rayefsky and his little daughter Yetta perched on high stools back of the desk to the left of the door. He would have greeted you with his sad, wistful smile, and would have gotten down to shake hands with you. It would have surprised and hurt him if you had asked at once for a book, paid for it, and gone out. It was customary to take plenty of time and to make quite sure that he did not have in stock some book you would prefer to the one you had come after.

When he had succeeded in making you feel at home, he would have returned to his desk, and Yetta would have gone on reading aloud to him. Very likely you would have wanted to laugh at the discussions they had over how various English words should be pronounced. When they could not agree, Benjamin would write down the word on a slip of paper for Yetta to take to school in the morning and submit to the teacher. You would have wondered with amusement how much the little lassie understood of the ponderous tomes she read in her high-pitched uncertain voice.

But you would not have wanted to laugh at the memory you carried away of the couple. More than one Gentile who had dropped into the store by chance went away racking their brains to recall the Holy Picture the Rayefskys suggested. It was what the psychologists call "inverse association." The Father and Daughter inevitably called to mind the Mother and Son.

Benjamin resembled – except for an ugly scar on his forehead – Guido Reni's "Christ." There was the same poignant sadness about his mouth, the same soft beard and sensitive nose; there was the same otherworldly kindliness in his eyes and his every gesture. And little Yetta was very like the Child Mary in Titian's "Presentation."

Towards nine o'clock the little shop began to fill up. First of the regulars was a consumptive lad whose attention had been caught by an advertisement asserting that a certain encyclopædia was worth a university education. Lacking money to go to college or to acquire so large a set of books, he was reading one of these compendiums in Rayefsky's Book-store. He had reached the letter "R," and considered himself a junior. There were others who came for regular reading, but more came to talk – and to listen to Benjamin. At ten he would close Yetta's book and, putting his arm about her shoulders, begin his evening discourse. Generally his text was some phrase from his reading which had impressed him during the day. Before long the little girl's eyes would close and her head fall over on her father's shoulder.

But one night he kept her awake. There was a wedding in progress across the street. It was his custom to talk directly to some one person of his audience, and this night he addressed himself to Yetta. With poetic imagination he paraphrased the idyll of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, making of the story an interpretation of marriage for his daughter's guidance. Some time in the years to come a Man would claim her, and against that time he taught her the vow that Ruth made to Naomi.

"Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

He made her repeat the vow over and over again in Hebrew until she knew it by heart.

"It is with these words, my daughter," he said, "that you must greet the Bridegroom."

Much of the gentle wisdom which her father preached to the little shopful of listeners Yetta did not fully understand. But for nine years, from the time she was six till she reached fifteen, it was the lullaby to which, every night, she fell asleep, perched on her high stool, her head on his shoulder. Much of it sank in.

This is to be the story of how little Yetta Rayefsky grew up into useful happiness. But her father's influence was the thing, more than all else, that differentiated her from thousands of other East Side girls. Without Benjamin's story, hers would be incomprehensible.

His father had been a man of means in the Russian town of Kovna. But Benjamin, the only son, had no talent for trade; he was of the type of Jews who dream. And he loved books. The library facilities of the Kovna Ghetto were limited, but he read everything on which he could lay hands. From his youth up he knew and loved the Psalms and the more poetic sections of the Prophets. The age-old beauty of the Hebrew literature was a never failing spring at which he refreshed his soul. He had also read the novels of Gogol, Korolenko, and Dostoiefsky, and the few books he could find on history and science.

A strange sort of cosmography had grown out of this ill-assorted reading. He took the Prophecies seriously and looked forward with abiding faith to the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Like most deeply religious people he was not strictly orthodox. He scrupulously observed the forms of Hebraic ritualism, but his real inspiration came from King David rather than from scribes who compiled the Talmud or the Rabbis who minutely interpreted the Torah. He had much sympathy with the Zionists, for they also had ardent faith in the Promises, but he took no interest in the geographical aspects of their aspirations. The Messiah, when he came, would establish His reign over all the earth. He also believed, as did the Zionists, that the Jews were the light-bearers of the human family, but he considered them a People chosen for special service – not for peculiar favors.

Added to this hoary mysticism was a very disjointed idea of world's history and a crude conception of Evolution. He believed that God's purpose with the Race was being worked out through the development of Democracy – which he understood to be another word for loving-kindness and brotherhood. He had never seen Democracy. He knew nothing of the crimes committed in its name; he had no conception of the modern Plutocracy, which is everywhere in a life-and-death struggle with Democracy – and as often as not seems to be winning the fight.

This vague idealization of Democracy was stimulated by the rare letters from his sister Martha in New York. While Benjamin was still a lad she had married David Goldstein, a ne'er-do-weel of the community, and with her dowry they had emigrated. The poor woman could hardly be blamed if she hid from her family the cruel realities of her life. She wrote what she thought would please them. As her imagination was limited, she borrowed her metaphors from the Scriptures and had milk and honey flowing down the Bowery. Benjamin often illuminated his talks on the Promised Land by references to the freedom and justice of America. It was not hard for him to believe in a Utopia. It did not seem too much to ask that all men should be as unselfish and gentle as himself.

Living thus in his dreams he grew to manhood. In the early twenties he married. His wife, fortunately, had common sense enough for two, and protected his patrimony from waste. The first child they named Benjamin, and a few years later Yetta was born.

The father held a privileged position in the Jewish community. His pure, unworldly life, his ever ready sympathy, his learning and homely wisdom, had earned him the rank of a saint. There were some, of course, who shook their heads over his dreamings. With so much money to start with, they said, he might have become rich – perhaps a "merchant of the first class." But every one loved him. The women came to him with their troubles, and even the busiest, most careworn men liked to sit for a while and hear him recite the sonorous prophecies and talk of the Kingdom which is to come.

It was in 1890 that Benjamin and his daughter were torn loose from their anchorage. The affair lacked the proportions of the later and more formal Jew-killings of Kishineff and Odessa. The cause of the outbreak was never explained, but we, who lynch negroes on so slight provocation, may not throw stones. Unexpectedly a mob – the scum of the Christian quarter – rushed into the Ghetto. At first they were intent on loot, but the hooligans had had to drink much vodka to generate sufficient courage to attack the defenceless Jews. Passions so stimulated cannot be controlled, and soon the mob was engaged in murder and rape. Benjamin went out on the street to reason with them. They left him for dead.

It was several weeks before he regained his consciousness. An ugly scar stretched from above his left eye to his ear. Many of his friends held that he never quite recovered from that wound, for as long as he lived he sometimes spoke of his wife and his son Benjamin as though they were still alive. But such lapses of memory happened rarely; generally he remembered that they had been buried while he was in the hospital. He had only Yetta left. He would surely have gone mad if he had lived on among the memories of Kovna. So he had emigrated to join his sister in the Happy Valley of America.

There was wonderful vitality to Benjamin's dreams. Even the tangible realities of Orchard Street could not obliterate them.

Many hideous things which he saw he did not understand. Among such phenomena was his brother-in-law. In the social organization of the Kovna Ghetto, David Goldstein had found no place. The opportunities for viciousness were too limited for him; he had been only a shiftless misfit. But on the East Side of New York his distorted talents found a market. He had sold them to Tammany Hall. His wife's money had been wasted in a legitimate business enterprise for which he had no fitness. A defalcation had caused his arrest, the District Leader had saved him from jail, and David found the niche into which he fitted. He was nominal owner of The Sioux Hotel – a saloon of the worst repute. The profits of vice are large, but those "higher up" always claim the lion's share. And as David had taken to drink – a rare vice among the Jews – his wife and her three children were having a very miserable time of it.

Perhaps it was the wound across his forehead which made it difficult for Benjamin to see clearly. About all he seemed to realize was that his sister could not afford to live comfortably. He had brought with him a few thousand dollars, the wreck of his father's fortune, and, by offering to pay liberally for a room and board, he enabled his sister to move into a better flat and so dulled the edge of her poverty. Some instinctive wisdom made him resist David's impassioned appeals to invest his money in The Sioux Hotel.

But he was no more of a business man than his brother-in-law, and before long, seduced by his passion for reading, he was persuaded to buy the second-hand book-store.

It was a dark basement. There were only a few hours a day when one could read, even in the front, without a lamp. But it was Yetta's home. To be sure, she and her father slept at the Goldstein's flat and had breakfast there. But by seven they were in the book-store. For lunch they had tea and buns from the coffee-house upstairs, and at six o'clock Yetta brought their dinner from her aunt's in a pail. At first the place had seemed to Yetta very large, and the darkness in the back limitless and fearsome. Once, when her father had gone back there and she could not see him, she had become frightened

and called him. He, laughing at her timidity, had taken her in his arms and they had explored all the dark corners by candle-light. She always remembered the sense of relief which had come to her when she realized how small it was.

Benjamin was thirty-four when this change in his life took place. With his scholarly turn of mind, it did not take him long to learn to read English fluently. But in his store on East Broadway he had little chance to speak the new language. Few of his customers spoke anything but Russian or Yiddish. Yetta always found it hard not to pronounce "book" "buk." This was the first word her father taught her. He was an insistent teacher. He realized his own inability to become an active unit in the seething, incomprehensible life about him. His explorations of the new world were meagre. He was tied to the store except on Saturday afternoons, and he could not desecrate the Sabbath by trolley rides. The poverty and misery which he could not ignore, he thought of as local. The unhappy lot of his people was due to their ignorance, their inability to understand the new language, their age-old habits of semiserfdom. But with Yetta it was to be different! She was to be fitted for full participation in the rich life of perfect freedom. He put especial emphasis on the language.

There were few things which made him outspokenly angry. The principal ones were the Jewish papers. Yiddish was to him the language of the Kovna Ghetto, the language of persecutions and pogroms. The pure Hebrew of the Scriptures – Yes! – he would have every child of the Race know that. He taught it to Yetta. It was the reservoir of all the rich traditions and richer promises. But Yiddish was a bastard jargon which his people had learned in captivity. It held no treasures of the past, no future hope. Let his people supplement the language of their forefathers by one of freedom. Let them learn the speech of the land of Refuge. His contempt for Yiddish, of course, isolated him from everything vital in the life of the East Side, and drove him back farther into his dreams and to Yetta.

As soon as she was old enough she went to the closely packed public school near by. While she was away, he read hungrily. He had cleared a shelf in the darkest corner of the store, and there he put by all the books which pleased him – those he wanted her to read when she grew old enough. They were not for sale. Yetta got very little play during her childhood. Back in the store, after school hours, she perched up on a high stool beside her father and went over her lessons with him.

At the end of the first year Benjamin's bank account had decreased by five hundred dollars. It had been a rare month when the total sales had equalled the month's rent and living expenses. But he was not depressed. A customer asked him one time about his business.

"Although I do not sell many books," Benjamin replied, "I have much time to read."

The second year would have been worse except for the lucky chance which secured him the agency for some Russian newspapers and considerably increased his income. If he had not so stubbornly refused to have anything to do with Yiddish, the store might have become prosperous, for he gradually learned the business and grew to use some judgment in replenishing his stock. His quaint philosophy attracted a little group of admirers. Even if they did not entirely accept his dreams, they liked to hear him talk about them.

In this environment Yetta grew into girlhood. Every day when her school work was finished she read aloud to her father from the books he had placed on the reserved shelf. It was a planless mixture – a History of the Jews, Motley and Prescott, Shakespeare and Dickens and Emerson.

The last thing she read to him was a three-volume edition of *Les Miserables*. She was fifteen then, and her reading was frequently interrupted by his coughs. Perhaps he had caught it from the lad who was racing with death to graduate from the Encyclopedia. Benjamin's friends shook their heads mournfully. But he expected to recover soon; was he not taking his "patent medicine" regularly? And so to the wonderful symphony of Hugo's masterpiece Benjamin coughed out his life. The third volume was read, not in the little store, but in their bedroom in the Goldstein's flat. It was the last book Yetta read for several years. When it was finished, she had begun to be afraid; she did not have the courage to begin a new book. He was too sick to listen.

CHAPTER II
YETTA'S GIRLHOOD

The death of her father was a greater catastrophe to Yetta than she realized. She felt only the personal loss. Her uncle took care of the financial matters, sold the book-store, and so forth. When the funeral expenses were paid, he said there was nothing left. Coming back from the cemetery, her aunt, in as kindly a manner as was possible to so woe-begone and soured a woman, tried to explain to her what it meant to be penniless. Leave school? Go to work? She hardly listened. Her sorrow was too real, too wild and incoherent.

The Goldsteins had three children. Isaac was eighteen. Two years before he had graduated from the House of Refuge – a pickpocket of parts. He had his ups and downs, but on the whole he found money "easy," and hardly a week passed when he did not hand his mother a few dollars.

The twin daughters of sixteen were working and brought their wages home. Rosa was anæmic, querulous, and unattractive. She worked "bei buttonholes." A slight curvature of the spine, which had become apparent in her childhood, had developed into a pitiful deformity after the years bent over a machine. Rachel had monopolized all the charms of health and good spirits which should have been divided between them. Her face looked much younger than Rosa's, but her body had developed into a pleasing womanhood which had been entirely denied her sister. She was not beautiful, but she was red blooded, merry, and likable. She was a milliner and earned twice as much as Rosa.

So the Goldsteins should have been fairly prosperous, but the father's craving for alcohol had grown more rapidly than the earning capacity of his children. Poverty had weighed too heavily on Mrs. Goldstein to allow her to tolerate an idler, and besides she had always looked with disapproval on Yetta's unwomanly education. It seemed almost impious to her to have a girl in school. She had perjured herself blissfully about the age of her own daughters to avoid the Truant Officer. For a few days the family left Yetta alone in her room to cry. Then they jerked her out of the stupor of her grief, and threw her into the cauldron of modern industry.

Rachel had seen a sign which advertised the need of "beginners" in the Vest Trade. Yetta followed her docilely up two flights of dirty stairs into a long work-room, which had been made by knocking the partitions out of a tenement-house flat. It was a gloomy place, for the side windows were faced by a dingy brick wall three feet away. The end windows looked out on Allen Street. The tracks of the elevated were on a level with the floor, and every few minutes the light which might have been expected from this quarter was cut off by the rush of a train. Artificial illumination was needed all the year round.

In the street below children shouted and cried; pushcart peddlers hawked their wares in strident, rasping voices; heavy trucks, loaded with clattering milk-cans, rattled deafeningly over the cobblestones. The chaos of noise caught in the narrow cañon of the street seemed to unaccustomed ears a pandemonium which must be audible in high heaven.

But none of this noise entered the long dark room two flights up. At one end of the shop a cheap electric motor threw its energy into two revolving shafts along the ceiling; these in turn passed it down a maze of roaring belts to a dozen sewing-machines – all twelve going at top speed. It sounded as if no one of the many bearings in the room had been oiled, as if each of the innumerable cogs in the machines were a misfit. The sound seemed like a tangible substance which could be felt. There was no room left in the shop for the noises of the street. If Gabriel had blown his horn on the sidewalk below, the silent women bent over the speeding machines would not have heard – they would have missed the Resurrection.

Dazed by this strange and fearsome environment, Yetta caught tight hold of her cousin's hand. But Rachel, the adventurous, would not have been dismayed in Daniel's den of lions. She boldly led the way into the "office." Half a dozen women, all older, were already in line. The boss – a rotund,

narrow-eyed man – was looking them over. But as soon as he saw the young girls he lost interest in the women.

"This is my cousin, Yetta Rayefsky," Rachel said. "She'd make a good beginner."

"Afraid of work?" he asked gruffly.

Yetta was speechlessly afraid of everything. But Rachel answered for her – a flood of extravagant, high-pitched eulogy.

"One dollar a week, while she's learning. Regular piece price when she gets a machine."

One of the older women, seeing the hopelessness of her own situation, – all the bosses preferred youth, – began to wail.

"Shut up!" the boss growled. "I will take the girl. Get out, all of you."

So Yetta was employed. At first the work consisted of carrying, piling, and wrapping bundles of vests. The loads were very heavy for her unpractised back. But she managed to live through the first day, and the next, and gradually got used to it. After a long wait she was put at a machine.

Even in such grossly mechanical work as sweat-shop labor, brains and youth count. Yetta's fingers were still plastic. Before long she had mastered the routine movements. Above all, she proved quicker than the other women in such emergencies as a broken thread. In less time than usual she worked to the top and became the "speeder," drawing almost double pay.

During the years which followed, while all that part of her brain which had to do with manual dexterity was keenly alive, the rest – the part of her brain in which her father had been interested – went to sleep. It was inevitable. Perhaps if she had been older when the crisis came, she might have made a struggle against her environment. She might have resisted her weariness for an hour or so after she came home, might have propped her eyes open and continued her studies, but she was only fifteen.

At first, while still a "beginner," her earnings were so small that there was some measure of charity in her aunt's sheltering of her. She was constantly reminded of the need of increasing her wages. But before this incentive had passed, before her pay began to amount to a fair charge for her board and lodging, before her spirit had recovered from the lethargy which had followed the loss of her father, she had been taken captive by "Speed." It was the keynote of her waking life. Every detail of the sweat-shop, the talk of her table mates, the groaning song of the belts – even the vitiated air – were "suggestions" beating in on her plastic consciousness, urging ever increasing rapidity.

It had become a habit for her to hand over all her wages to her aunt. She had her father's lack of guile and less experience. The bedroom which Benjamin had shared with his daughter was rented to a stranger. Yetta had to sleep in the same bed with the twins. She had to wear their outgrown clothes. But even if she had realized how little she was getting in exchange for her wages, she would not have had the courage to go out among strangers. And she had not sufficient energy – after all the machine took – to argue about it with her bitter, hardened aunt.

The drab monotony of her sweat-shop life was unbroken. The bosses changed frequently. So did the workers. But the process was unchanged – except that each new boss shaved the price per piece and pushed up the rate of speed. And then, after three years, a little flickering gleam of sunshine fell on Yetta's face. Rachel went to a ball.

Mrs. Goldstein objected to "dance-halls" because she was old fashioned and knew nothing about them. Mr. Goldstein objected because he knew them all too well. So when Rachel announced one night at supper that she was going to "The Mask and Civic Ball of the Hester Street Democratic Club," a storm broke loose. Mr. Goldstein – none too gently – threw his daughter into the bedroom and locked the door. Later in the evening he came home a shade more drunk than usual. Smashing some furniture to wake the household, he delivered a speech on the text of female respectability and where he would rather see his daughter than in a dance-hall. The "grave" was the least unattractive place he mentioned. Rachel seemed to give in before the family wrath.

But in her trade there were frequent rush periods when it was necessary to work after supper. One night she came home unusually late. As soon as she had put out the light and crawled into bed,

she woke up the two girls and confided to them in great excitement that she had been to a ball. A girl in her shop had lent her some finery, a shirtwaist, a pair of white shoes, and a hat. Of course one could not go to a dance in a shawl. It had been "something grand." She kept them awake a long time telling of the fine dresses, the "swell" music, and the good-looking men. She was too "mad about it" to sleep. She jumped out of bed and, humming a popular tune, danced a waltz for them in her nightgown. She was very sleepy in the morning, but the music was still in her ears. The other girls were rather dismayed by her rank disobedience. The morose and spiteful Rosa threatened to tell her father. Rachel herself became frightened at this and promised never to do it again.

But not many days passed before Rachel announced at supper that she would have to work late that night. Somehow Yetta knew it was a pretext. She could hardly get to sleep. She woke up the moment Rachel tiptoed into the room.

"You've been again," she said.

"Sure. But don't wake up Rosa."

"It's very wrong."

It may be that Rachel, who was only nineteen and had been brought up blindfolded, did not see anything wrong in the two dances she had attended. There are many perfectly respectable dances on the East Side. Fate may have led her to such. Or perhaps she glossed over dangers she had seen. She denied Yetta's charge. Rosa snored regularly beside them, while the two girls whispered half the night through.

Rachel's defence, although some of it was only half expressed, – she was not used to talking frankly about holy things, – was sound. After all, women do not come into the world to spend their lives in sweat-shops. They ought to marry and bear children. What chance did she have? She saw no men in her factory. It might be all right to leave such things to one's parents – if they were the right kind. But every one knew her father was a penniless, shiftless drunkard. What sort of a match could he arrange for her?

She was going to as many dances as she could. First of all, they were fun, and precious little fun did she get trimming hats for other women to wear. And then – well – she was not ugly. Perhaps some nice young man would marry her. That very evening a "swell fellow" had danced with her four times. He had wanted to walk home with her. But she would not let him do that, till she was sure he was "serious." She would see him again at a dance on Saturday night, and she would find out. What other chance had she? Her father could do nothing for her. Nor her mother. Nor her brother. Well – she was of age, she would do for herself.

"And if I was as swell looking as you are, Yetta," she said, "I'd sure get a winner. Why don't you come to a dance with me?"

The next day at the lunch hour Yetta overheard some of the girls talking about dances. Instead of going off by herself, as she generally did, to consecrate her few minutes of leisure to memories of her father, she sat down and listened to them. Yetta did not know how to dance. But the next time a hurdy-gurdy came by at noon, she began with the help of her shopmates to learn. Although she made rapid progress, although she listened eagerly to Rachel's account of stolen gayeties, she did not give in to her cousin's urgings. Her natural timidity, joined to a habit of obedience, kept her from going to a dance.

But a new element had come into her life. She began to feel that in some shameful way she was being defrauded. Was she to know nothing of Life but the sweat-shop? Was her youth to slip away uselessly? Since Rachel had spoken of her looks, she sometimes lingered before the mirrors in store windows and wondered if her smooth skin was doomed to turn wrinkled and yellow like that of the women at her table. Was she never to have children? The future, which she had never thought about before, began to look dark and fearsome. She did not feel that anything of lasting good could be gained by sneaking out to a ball, but at least, as Rachel said, it must be fun. Was she never to have any fun? Were the years – one after another – to creep by without music or laughter? Sooner or later

the craving for a larger life would have forced her out to adventure with Rachel, but the temptress was suddenly removed.

Isaac Goldstein encountered his sister at a dance. He had not been home for more than a week, but he came the next day and told his parents. When Rachel came in from work that evening, the drunken father denounced her as a disgrace to his fair name. Rachel listened in sullen silence to his foul abuse until, enraged by his own eloquence, he struck her. She turned very white and then suddenly laughed.

"Good-by, Yetta and Rosie!" And then, clenching her fist at her father, she cried out: "And you – you go to Hell."

She slammed the door behind her and never came back.

David Goldstein did not often trouble to go to the Synagogue, but the next Friday night he put on his old frock-coat and frayed silk hat and in the meeting-house of the men of Kovna, he read the Service for the Dead over his pleasure-loving daughter.

Yetta was surprised to find how much she missed her cousin. To be sure she had not seen much of her – they worked in different shops. But since they had shared this secret together, it had seemed almost like having a friend. It had never been a joyous household, and now with Rachel's occasional laughs gone it was bleak indeed.

But these confidences, short-lived as they were, had – in spite of their tragic ending – done their work with Yetta. They had suddenly opened a window in the wall of the dark room where she lived. Through it she saw, as through a glass darkly, a fair garden, lit with the sunlight of laughter, a garden where blossomed the wondrous flowers of music, of joy – of Romance.

Since the recent development of "Child Study," since grave and erudite professors have written learned volumes on the subject of "Play," many things, which former generations thought lightly of, have taken on importance. In the gurgling of a month-old baby we now see an experimentation with, a training of, the vocal apparatus which may later win the plaudits of a crowded opera or sway the council chamber of a nation. It is no longer senseless and rather disgusting noise. It is part of the profound development of Man. The haphazard muscular reflexes of a five-year-old boy – the running violently to nowhere in particular, the jumping over nothing at all – is no longer, as our grandfathers held, an aimless and sometimes bothersome amusement. A human being is getting acquainted with the intricate system of nerve complexes and motor-muscles which is to carry him through his allotted work in the world. And the little girl with her sawdust doll has become a portentous thing. If she does not learn to hold it properly at seven, her real babies, when she is twenty-seven, are likely to fare badly.

Yetta had never had dolls. There had been no younger children in her household. She had never associated with boys. In a starved, vicarious way, through the confidence of Rachel, she had begun to "play" with the ideas of marriage, of home-making, of babies. An unrest, the cause of which she did not guess, had invaded her. She was just coming into womanhood. Nature was working deep and momentous changes in her being. It is a transition which may be beautiful and joyous if freedom for play is given to the developing organs and nerve-centres. Because of her starved childhood it came to Yetta late and abruptly. She was becoming a woman in an environment where nobody wanted anything but wage-earning "hands." And so to her it meant erratic moods of black despair, of uncontrolled and ludicrous lyricisms, of sudden and senseless timidities, abnormal, insane desires.

Unless something happened, her womanhood was to be wasted. She had sore need of a Prince in Silver Armor. But no Princes go about nowadays rescuing fair damsels from the Ogre Greed. However, Rachel had opened a window on a quasi-fairyland where, if there were no bona fide princes, there were at least some "swell-looking men." And just as she was getting intoxicated with the wonderful vision, the window was slammed shut in her face.

CHAPTER III
THE SWEAT-SHOP

The sudden closing of the window made her prison cell seem darker than before. It needed the contrast of the vision to make her see the sordidness and squalor – the grim reality – of that long dark room, with its chaos of noise, its nerve-destroying "speed."

Scattered through the East Side of New York there are hundreds such "sweat-shops," engaged in the various branches of the "garment trade." Sometimes there will be half a dozen in the same tenement; one above another. Even the factory inspectors are never sure of the exact number. They are running so close a race with bankruptcy, it is hard to keep track of them. Often half a dozen will fail on the same day, and as many new ones will start the next. It is not on record that any one ever found a good word to say for the "sweating system." Such "shops" exist because I and you and the good wife and the priest who married you like to buy our clothes as cheaply as possible.

Yetta's "shop" manufactured vests. The four women at each table formed a "team." With separate operations on the same garment, they had to keep in exact unison. If any one slowed up, they all lost money by the delay. They were paid "by the piece," and long hours, seven days a week, brought them so infinitesimal a margin over the cost of brute necessities that the loss of a few cents a day was a tragedy for the older women with children to feed.

Yetta, the youngest of all, was Number One at her table.

The name of Number Two was Mrs. Levy. She was anywhere between twenty-five and fifty, bovine in appearance, but her fingers were as agile as a monkey's. She sat stolidly before her machine, her big body, which had lost all form, almost motionless, her arms alone active. Her face was void of any expression. Her washed-out eyes were half closed, for they were inflamed with tracoma. Eight years before she had brought her three children over from Galicia to join her husband and had found him dying of tuberculosis. She had been making vests ever since. She was an ideal sweat-shop worker, reliable – the kind that lasts.

Opposite her Mrs. Weinstein grabbed the vests as they left Mrs. Levy's machine. She also was a large woman, but not much over thirty, and just entering the trade. She was of merry disposition and had kept much of her youthful charm. Her hair, of course, was disordered; the cloth-dust stuck in blotches to her perspiring face. There was a smudge of machine grease over one cheek, but where her blouse – unbuttoned – exposed her throat and the rise of her breasts, the skin was still soft and white. Her husband, of whom she always spoke with fond admiration as a very kind and wise man, had deserted her a few months before. Engaged in another branch of the garment trades, he had become involved in one of the strikes which with increasing frequency were shaking the sweating system. He had been black-listed. After weeks of fruitless search for work, he had disappeared. If he found work elsewhere, he would send for his wife. He could not bear to stay and be supported by her. She had a sister, who had married well and who would not let the babies starve. Besides, she did not consider herself a regular vest-maker. Some day, soon, her husband would find work, in Boston, Philadelphia – somewhere. She was always expecting a letter to-morrow. So Mrs. Weinstein could afford to be cheerful.

But if Number Two had an unusually stolid body and phlegmatic brain – the type which suffers least from sweating; and if Number Three had been blessed with a merry, hopeful soul, Mrs. Cohen, at the foot of the table, had none of these advantages. She had been Number One, not so very long before – a marvel of speed. Then she had begun to cough. It is impossible to cough without breaking the regular rhythm which means speed. In a few months she had slipped down to the bottom. She was no older than Mrs. Weinstein, but her skin was as yellow as Mrs. Levy's, and even more unlovely, for the flesh behind it had melted away; the only prominences on her body were where her bones pushed out.

She had begun at twenty-one, when her husband died leaving her with two children. There had been another baby a couple of years later – because she had hoped the man would marry her and take her out of the inferno. He had not. And there was no hope any more, for who would marry a woman with bad lungs and three children?

Despair, while embittering her, had cleared her vision. She saw the "shop" and the "system" – and understood. She had entered the trade strong and healthy, and had been well-paid at first, when she had the great desideratum – Speed. It had seemed like good pay then. But now she knew better. They had been buying not only her day-by-day ability, they had bought up her future. For the wages of less than ten years they had bought all her life – they had bought even her children! Already the flow of vests had piled up once or twice too swiftly for her. Jake Goldfogle, the present boss, was threatening to discharge her. If she lost this job, it would be the end. The Gerry Society would surely take her babies and put them in "institutions." No, she had not been well-paid in the days when they had given her extra wages for the pace that kills. It is small pleasure for a mother to hush the hunger-cry of her children, but that was all the joy that was left to Mrs. Cohen. And if she lost her job, she would lose even this.

Just in proportion as Number Four at the bottom of the table had learned many bitter things from life, so Yetta at the head had almost everything yet to learn. She began the long lesson with a pain in her back.

It came unexpectedly. It was as much the insulting surprise of it, as the hurt itself, which made her cry out sharply and drop her work – throwing the whole team out of rhythm.

"*Wos is dir*, Yetta?" Mrs. Weinstein asked with motherly solicitude.

"Oy-yoy-yoy!" Yetta said, putting her hand to her back – "*Es is schon verbei*."

Mrs. Cohen at the bottom of the table laughed mirthlessly.

"It will come back," she screamed in Yiddish above the din of the machinery. "I know. It begins so. One speeds two, three years – four – with one it is the lungs, with another it is the back, or the eyes." She seized the momentary pause to ease herself with coughs.

Mrs. Levy, who had been long in the trade, had seen many a "speeder" give in; some slowly, some suddenly. She had seen dozens of them, fighting desperately the fight for food, slip down from the head to the foot and out – out through the door to the street and nowhere. As Mrs. Cohen had said, it was sometimes the eyes, sometimes the lungs, sometimes the back. She nodded her head in affirmation. Oh yes, she had seen it many times. She could have told the story of one mother who had gone on speeding in spite of back and lungs and eyes, had kept on speeding until one day she had fallen over her machine dead. Her hair had gotten tangled in the cogs, and they had to cut it to take her away.

Mrs. Weinstein tried to comfort Yetta.

"Don't listen to them," she said. "You are yet young – you'll be all right – "

She stopped abruptly, for the office door had opened and Jake Goldfogle came out. His ear, trained to the chaotic noise of the shop, had caught the momentary halt.

"*Ober, mein Gott, wos is der mer?*" he roared.

Mrs. Cohen, who had caught up with her work and was waiting for more, pointed an accusing finger at Yetta.

Jake Goldfogle was twenty-eight. This was his first "shop." The dominant expression of his face – which he tried to cover with an assumption of masterliness – was worry. The person who has been ground by poverty is never a debonaire gambler. But these ignorant, unimaginative women who slaved for him, whom he lashed with his tongue and sometimes struck, did not understand his situation, did not know of the myriad nightmares which haunted his waking as well as his sleeping hours. They bent low over their machines, hurrying under the eye of the master, holding their breath to catch the torrent of abuse they expected to hear fall on Yetta.

They did not realize – least of all did Yetta – that she was an exception. Jake swallowed the curses on his tongue and asked her in a constrained and unfamiliar voice what was wrong.

"Nothing," she said. "A pain in my back."

No sort of pain known to women was considered a valid excuse for breaking speed. She wondered with sullen, servile anger how much he would fine her. If any of the women had looked up, they would have seen strange twists on the boss's face. He turned abruptly, without a word, and went back to his office. He sat down at his desk and looked through the little window, by means of which he could, glancing up from his ledger, spy on the roomful of workers. His eyes rested a moment on Yetta's stooped back. Then, grasping his temples, he paced up and down his dingy office, cursing the day he was born. He was in love with Yetta and could not afford to tell her so.

The psychology of the refugees from Russian and Galician Ghettos, who come to live among us, is very hard for us to understand. Above all, the Jew is marked by single-mindedness and consistency of purpose. We have our Anglo-Saxon tradition of compromise and confused issues. We have generally several irons in the fire. We shift easily – often flippantly – from one purpose to another. The Semite, having once accepted a goal is hard to divert.

Coming to us, as most of them do, in abject poverty, it is small wonder that many a Jewish lad decides that the Holy Grail is made of American dollars. The surprising thing is the unswerving fidelity with which they follow the quest – a fidelity which is quite absent in the legends of King Arthur's English Knights. It is the same no matter what ideal they choose. Just as the money grubber will deny himself necessary food and overwork his wife and children to amass a little capital, so the East Side poet will stick to writing rhymes in Yiddish, although it can never give him a decent living, and the Jewish Socialist will hold fast to his principles through starvation and persecution.

Jake Goldfogle had a vague recollection of a great wave which had washed over the steerage deck of an immigrant steamer and had scared him immensely. All his other memories were set in the scenery of the New York slums. He had "got wise" young, with the wisdom of the gutter, which says that you must be either a hammer or an anvil, preyed upon or preying. For the last fifteen years he and his sister, more recently reënforced by her husband, had been engaged in a desperate struggle to pull up out of the muck.

For years the three of them had been slaves to the machine. Six months before they had put all their miserable savings, all their credit, into buying this "shop." They had accepted a highly speculative contract from which there could be no halfway issue. A dozen weeks more and it would be over – either an immense success or utter ruin. Failure meant the swallowing up in a moment of the results of their long slavery; it meant going back to the machine.

Hundreds of men throughout the city, in the different garment trades, were in exactly the same position. Ground between the gambling nature of their contracts and insufficiently secured credit, the fear of ruin in their hearts, they had been driving the rowels deeper and deeper into the flanks of the animals who worked for them – on whose backs they hoped to win to the gilded goal of success. But revolt from such conditions was inevitable. Strikes were constantly occurring. This fear was the worst of Jake Goldfogle's nightmares.

The revolt of the garment workers was as yet unorganized and chaotic. There were a dozen odd unions, but few of them were strong or well disciplined. Too many of those in the trade were immigrants from southeastern Europe and the Russian Pale – where only a few of the men are literate. Most of them were women – mothers. When the long hours in the shops were over, they hurried home to their children. It was very hard to get them to meetings.

But in spite of all these handicaps the workers were gradually organizing. Such strikes as had already occurred had had little effect except to ruin the smaller bosses. The large manufacturers could afford to wait until their "hands" were starved back to the machines. But so close was the contest, – it mattered little whether the trade was vests or shirtwaists or overalls, – that a few days' interruption was enough to ruin the weaker bosses. The small fry, like Jake, echoed the sentiments of *Le Grand*

Monarque– The Deluge might come after, if only they could speed their contracts to completion. And so, with ever increasing viciousness, the rowels were driven deeper and deeper.

It had been a surprising sensation to Jake Goldfogle to discover that it was more pleasant to look through his spying window at the curve of Yetta's neck and the wild little curls of rich brown hair that clustered about it than to add up columns of figures. Even the unhealthy, stooped curve of her spine as she leaned forward to the machine seemed gracious to him. He looked forward eagerly to the times, every half hour, when he went out into the shop on a tour of inspection, for then he could catch glimpses of her face. To be sure she never looked up from her work while he was watching. But there was one place where he could stand unnoticed and see her in profile. It was a marvellously regular face for the East Side. The dark curve of her eyebrows was perfect, and sometimes he could catch the gleam of her eyes. The skin of her throat was whiter even than Mrs. Weinstein's. She was a trifle thinner than Jake's ideal – but he told himself she would fill out. All this added color to his dream of success, a deeper shade to his fear of ruin.

A man of another race would probably have lost his head and asked her to marry him. But Jake had a deep-seated habit of planning for success. Long before he had noticed the grace of her body and face he had realized that she was the best worker in his shop, "the pace-maker" for the whole establishment. If success was to be won, it would be by just that very narrow margin, which the breaking in of a new "speeder" would jeopardize. So he had tried to put her out of his mind till the "rush season" was over. Intent on his main purpose he had not thought of her physical well-being. She was young and healthy looking. It had not occurred to him that a few weeks more or less would matter. The pain in her back surprised him.

If the incident had occurred in the morning, he might have called her into his office then and there and asked her to marry him. Things had looked brighter in the morning. But at lunch – a frugal affair, two sweet buns and a glass of tea – he had heard disquieting talk of the "skirt-finishers" strike. It had been more serious than most. Half a dozen shops had been already wiped out. And his informant – a hated competitor – had gloomily foretold trouble in their own trade. If strikes broke out among the "vest-makers," it would tighten credit. The call of a couple of loans would be the end of Jake. No! He could not afford to take Yetta out now. Any one who came to take her place might be infected with the virus of Unionism. His own women did not know what a strike was. No. He could not risk it. If Pincus & Company paid promptly on the next delivery, he could take up those dangerous loans and then – perhaps —

He put his face close to the spying window and looked out at Yetta's back. He wondered just where the pain had been and whether it still hurt.

"Poor little girl," he said.

But Yetta knew nothing of her boss's intention. She could see no outlet. The future stretched before her, so barren that it hurt to think of it. But she could not escape the thought. Was she to get fat and ugly like Mrs. Levy? Would the pain come again and would she slip down – as Mrs. Cohen prophesied – coughing herself to uselessness?

CHAPTER IV
LIFE CALLS

In the months that followed Rachel's departure Yetta began to lose hope. She could see no promise of escape, and lethargic time gradually faded the colors of her dream. The flame of holy discontent which had blazed for a while in her soul threatened to go out. Sometimes she wondered what had happened to Rachel. But "Speed" eats up a person's power of wondering.

Yetta had been at the machine for a long time now. Her muscles had become hardened. She did not often suffer from weariness any more, but she had, without knowing it, commenced to go downhill. The immense reserve of vitality, which is the blessing of so many of her race, was running low. It was amazing how her strong young body had resisted the strain. But any doctor would have shaken his head over the future. After all there is a limit, beyond which the nerves and muscles of a woman cannot compete with electricity and steel.

One night, a few days after the pain had come in her back, an American woman knocked at the door of the Goldstein flat while Yetta and Rosa were eating supper.

"I'm a neighbor of yours," she said. "My name is Miss Brail. I've come to get acquainted."

Mrs. Goldstein looked up hostilely from her sewing. Rosa, surly as usual, went on with her eating. But Yetta offered the intruder her chair. The visitor seemed used to such cold receptions; she sat down placidly and tried violently to establish more friendly relations.

She and some other women had rented the house across the street and were going to live there. It was to be a sort of a school. First of all they were going to start a kindergarten and day nursery for the children of women who worked. Rosa interrupted harshly that there were no children in their household. Miss Brail refused to be rebuffed. They were also going to have a sewing school for young women. Rosa, who had accepted the responsibility of the conversation, although she had not stopped eating, said that she and Yetta sewed all day long and did not need to learn.

"Well," Miss Brail continued bravely, "we will have a cooking-class too."

Rosa replied that her mother cooked for them.

"But don't you want to know how to cook yourself? Some day you'll have a home of your own, and it will be worth while to know how to cook good meals cheaply. Why, if the wife only knows how to buy scientifically and understands a little of food values, you can feed the ordinary family on only – "

But once more Rosa interrupted her. She had finished her meal and, emptying her tea-cup with a noisy sip, she stood up in her gaunt, twisted unloveliness.

"Do you think any one's going to marry me?" she asked defiantly.

Miss Brail did not have the heart to answer the question truthfully. She turned towards Yetta, who – confused by the implication of her look – hung her head and blushed. Rosa laughed scornfully.

"She ain't got no money. Nobody'd marry a girl for her looks, even if she could cook."

At this blasphemy against Romance, Miss Brail became eloquent. She was very definitely unmarried herself. But not so much an "old maid" as a new woman. It would have been impossible to picture her fondling a cat. She was almost athletic in her build, her hair was combed to hide the few streaks of gray, her eyes were young and full of fire. Her tailor-made suit was attractive; in a very modern, businesslike way, even coquettish. You could not look at her without feeling that no one was to blame but herself that she was unmarried. She delivered an impassioned harangue on the subject of men. Of course there were soulless brutes who would marry only for money. But the right sort of a man would just as soon take a poor girl as a rich one if he really loved her. She knew lots of that kind. They were going to have clubs and classes for young men in the house across the way – she called it The Neighborhood House. And once a month they would have dances. She invited Rosa and Yetta to come.

At the word "dance," Mrs. Goldstein stopped sewing, and sticking her needle in her wig, got up threateningly. No! Neither her daughter nor her niece would go to a dance. With her bony hand she pointed emphatically at the door. Miss Brail protested that the Neighborhood House dances would be eminently respectable; only the young men and women they knew personally. She tried to say that it was good to give the girls a chance to meet men in clean, orderly surroundings. But she could not resist the old woman's wrath, and at last, shrugging her shoulders in defeat, she went out.

Mr. Goldstein, when he heard of the incident, added his curses to those of his wife. Dances had been the ruin of one daughter, and that was enough disaster for a self-respecting family. Besides, these Goyim were trying to undermine the True Religion. David was hardly a religious man. But social settlements always took an interest in reform politics. Tammany Hall had small reason to be friendly with them. And as he could think of no arguments, this religious talk seemed a handy weapon.

But all her uncle's and aunt's denunciations could not persuade Yetta that Miss Brail was evil. Morning and evening, as she went out to work and came home, she stopped a moment on her doorstep to note the progress of rehabilitation in the house across the way. What the East Side calls the "parlor floor" had formerly been a store. Its great plate-glass window was cleaned and a heavy curtain was stretched across the lower half, so that people on the sidewalk could not look in. White dimity curtains were hung in the upstairs windows. The fine old front door was painted white, the rusted banister of the steps was replaced by a new and graceful one of polished steel. Before long the "residents" moved in. Their arrival coincided with the appearance of beautiful potted plants inside the windows.

Although the screen hid the front parlor from the street, it was not high enough to hide it from the windows of the Goldstein's flat. From that vantage-point Yetta learned the routine of evening work in the Settlement. A bulletin-board beside the door helped her to put names to the things she saw. On Monday nights there were meetings of "The Martha Washington Club." They were young women of her own age, and Miss Brail presided. There was generally some "uptown woman" who spoke or sang to the girls. This part of the evening's entertainment lasted until nine, then they grouped about Miss Brail at the piano and practised some choral music. They ended with half an hour's dancing and went home a little after ten. Tuesday night there was a club of boys. Wednesday night a class in sewing. Thursday night "The Abraham Lincoln Debating Club" held forth. Most of them were young men in the early twenties, but a few were older. On Friday there was a "Mothers' Club," and on Saturday night a magic-lantern show.

At last it came time for the monthly dance. Yetta had noticed the announcement on the bill-board several days before. On the eventful night she pretended to be sleepy and went to bed early, but as soon as Rosa began to snore she wrapped herself in her shawl and a blanket and tiptoed out into the front room to watch the ball. The Martha Washington Club had turned out in force, dazzlingly beautiful in their best clothes. The black-suited young men of the debating club also looked very wonderful to the hungry-eyed girl who watched it from afar. As was the strange custom of The Krists, the big window was opened although it was mid-February, and the sound of the four-piece orchestra and the laughter came up, unobstructed, to Yetta's ears.

She had never been so happy in all her life, but most of the time her eyes were filled with tears. She imagined herself first as one of the girls and then as another. There was one whose shirtwaist seemed especially beautiful. Yetta was convinced that if she were a millionnaire, or if a fairy godmother should offer her one choice, she would choose just such clothes. There was one of the young men, a curly-haired, laughing fellow, whom she had noticed on Thursday nights. Whenever he took part in the debates, all the other men clapped violently. Generally she imagined herself dancing with him.

After a while the music stopped. Miss Brail and the other settlement women brought in trays loaded with lemonade and sandwiches and cakes. The curly-haired man sat down beside the girl in the resplendent waist. Hot little blushes chased themselves all over Yetta's body. It frightened her

even to imagine that she was so gayly dressed, that such a man sat close to her and whispered in her ear, looking at her and laughing all the time.

The supper fire had not yet burned down in the Goldstein's sordid kitchen-eating-sitting room. It was stuffy and hot, but Yetta, in spite of her shawl and blanket, shivered when the intermission was over. The curly-haired man nonchalantly put his arm about the gorgeous shirtwaist and, with his face rather close to his partner's, swung off into a dizzy two-step. Yetta felt as if she had been suddenly caressed. She had to grit her teeth to keep them from chattering.

A tremendous storm had broken out in the breast of the little sweat-shop girl. Sometimes she had to close her eyes, the beauty of the vision was so dazzling. For a moment she would tear herself away from the blighting memory of reality, and her soul seemed to float away from her body into the brightly lit room across the way. In the most deeply spiritual sense she became part of that gay scene. She was arrayed in gorgeous clothes. Men – even the wonderful curly-haired man – sought her as a partner. And she could laugh!

But the Blessed Angel of Forgetfulness is – like her sister, the Spirit of Delight – an inconstant hussy. No Wise Man of all the ages has learned the trick of keeping her always at his side.

The memories of the day's stark realities would submerge Yetta. Back of her was the squalid flat, the snores of her loveless relatives. In her dark bedroom her one frayed dress was hung over the back of a chair, waiting for her to put it on and hurry through the dawn to Jake Goldfogle's Vest Shop. Routine – hopeless monotony! A prison tread – from the vitiated air and uneasy sleep of the tenement, so many steps to the cruel speed and inhumanity of the Machine. Then so many steps back to the tenement, and all to do over again.

In front of her – in the room across the street – "Life-as-it-might-be." Beauty – thrilling excitement – joy!

The eyes of Yetta's soul swung back and forth from one vision to the other. Through the long evening she knelt there by the window, so forgetful of her body that she did not realize how the dirty window ledge was cutting into her elbows, how her knees were being bruised on the unswept floor.

At last the musicians put away their instruments. Every one clapped insistently and crowded about Miss Brail. But she waved her watch in their face. A distant church-bell tolled midnight. Yetta stayed at her post until the last laughing couple had shaken hands with the ladies at the door. For several minutes more she watched the shadows on the upper windows, while the "residents" talked over the success of the dance. She watched till the last light was out, then she crept back to bed and cried herself to sleep.

The tears she shed that night were not the kind that heal. There was acid in them which ate into the quick. For nearly four years her body had been on the rack. Now her soul was being torn. The questionings which had troubled her after Rachel's disappearance became more and more insistent. Was she never to know what joy meant? Was day to crawl along after day in desolate and weary monotony? Was this dull ache of soul-hunger never to be relieved until some indefinite future was to find her – cheated of everything – cast out useless on the human refuse heap? Was this weary plain of uneventfulness never to be broken by any dazzling mountain peaks nor shady valley?

Shortly after the Settlement Ball, which Yetta had watched as a starveling beggar peers through a baker's window, Life suddenly opened up. The drab monotony was illumined by a lurid display of fireworks. Rockets of glaring, appalling red shot up into the night. There was a great white blaze of hope, and all the sky became suffused by the soft caressing colors of unsophisticated Romance.

The sweat-shop motor broke down. Jake Goldfogle cursed and tore his hair. He kept his "hands" waiting in idleness half through the afternoon, until the electricians had come and said that the damage could not be righted till midnight. Then Jake surlily dismissed his women. It was rare that Yetta had such a holiday. There was no reason for her to go to her dreary home. It was a precocious spring day, the sun shone with a heat that made the streets attractive.

Wandering about aimlessly, Yetta came to Hamilton Fish Park. The faint suggestion of rising sap which came to her in that open space seemed infectious. The questionings which had disturbed her returned with new force. Why? What did it all mean? Was there no escape?

Suddenly her attention was caught by a familiar figure, Rachel, arrayed in cheap finery. Yetta quickened her pace to overtake her and called her. It was a great shock to Rachel when she recognized her. She stared at her in bewilderment, but it was surely Yetta, – Yetta of the old life, of the great sad eyes, with the same old shawl over her head.

"The motor broke in my shop," Yetta explained as they sat down. "I came out for a walk. Where are you working?"

"I ain't working."

Yetta's eyes opened wider.

"Are you married," she asked with awe in her voice.

Shame closed Rachel's lips. How could she explain the grim dirtiness of Life to her ignorant little cousin? She started to get up and go away. But suddenly the heart-break of it all – the memory of the girlish dreams she had confided to Yetta – overcame her. She threw her arms around her cousin and cried, great sobs which shook them both. A few words came to her lips, the same phrase over and over: "Oh! Yetta. I wanted to be good." When the first burst of her grief was spent, she began to tell how it had all come about.

At first everything had gone smoothly. She had taken a furnished room with the girl from her shop who had lent her the hat and white shoes for her first dance. "She had a crush on me," Rachel explained. They had led a joyous but quite innocent life, working hard all day and two or three nights a week going to dances. As far as they knew how to choose they went to respectable places. Several men had paid court to Rachel. A clerk in a dry-goods store on Sixth Avenue had been in love with her. He was serious. But he was earning very little, had a marriageable sister, and wanted to wait a couple of years. She had even become engaged to one man. At first, she said, she had "been crazy about him." She had let him kiss her and make pretty violent love to her. But after a while she saw he was "a spender," too free with his money – like her father. She did not want a man like that, so she had sent him about his business. Then her room-mate "got a crush" on another girl and had left Rachel alone in the furnished room.

"What can you do?" – she began to cry again – "when you ain't got no place to have your friend call except a furnished room? All alone? A girl ain't got no chance – all alone – like that."

She could not tell Yetta what came next, so she asked about the family. As Yetta told her meagre store of news, the flood-gates of Rachel's bitter heart opened. She cursed her family. They were to blame for her disaster. Why had not her father made a decent home for his children? Was it her fault that her brother was a crook? If they had been honest and thrifty, they could have given her a marriage portion. Worse than doing nothing for her, they had even eaten up her wages. If she had been an orphan, she could have put some of her pay in the bank – she could have saved enough money to get married on.

"Don't you let them cheat you, Yetta," she broke out, "the way they cheated me. Perhaps I'm a bad woman, but I never cheated little girls the way they cheated us. I never robbed an orphan like they done to you. You're a fool to stand for it. Why should you give them your wages? Haven't they cheated you enough? They made your poor father pay too much board. The funeral never cost like they said it did. And now they're stealing your wages. I tell you what you do. You find some good woman in your shop, who'll take you to board, and put your money in the bank. But don't go to no 'furnished room.' Furnished rooms is Hell! You – "

"Hello, Ray. Introduce me to your friend."

The intruder's voice sent a convulsive shiver through Rachel. He wore a suit of dove-gray, the cuffs and collar of which were bound with silk braid. There was a large diamond in his scarlet tie.

As though he did not wish to be outdone by the sun in its premature glory he wore a slightly soiled Panama hat, shaped after the fashion depicted in photographs of the German Crown Prince.

"I say," he insisted, and there was a twang of menace in his soft voice, a more evident threat in his hard domineering eyes, "I say, introduce me to your friend."

"She's my cousin, Yetta Rayefsky," Rachel replied reluctantly.

"And my name," he said with easy assurance, "is Harry Klein. I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Rayefsky. Do you dance as well as your cousin?"

"I've never been to a dance," Yetta stammered.

She was very much flustered by his stare of frank admiration. No man had ever put a "Miss" to her name before. Again the hot blushes chased themselves over her body. But he did not seem to notice her embarrassment.

"I was walking along the street," he said, "and noticed Miss Goldstein here in the Park. I came to ask her to go to the Tim Sullivan ball with me to-night. Won't you come along?"

"She ain't got no clothes for a ball," Rachel said.

"I'm sure," he said, his eyes turning hard again, "that you could lend her some."

But Yetta was frightened beyond words at the bare idea of going. She refused timidly.

Harry Klein urged her, managing gracefully the while to weave in the story of his life. He was a commercial traveller for a large silk-house on Broadway. Of course it was very good pay, and in a few months he was to be taken into the firm, but it had its inconveniences. He did not get to New York very often. He liked dances, but it was no fun to go alone. Being away so much, he did not know many nice girls. He had no use for the kind you can "pick up" at a ball. He did wish she could come. He knew another travelling man who was also in town – a friend of his. It would be great fun for the four of them to go together.

But he did not push his urgings too far. He was sorry she would not come, but he hoped Miss Goldstein could find a partner for his friend. Would she come now on that errand?

"I'm sorry to run away with your cousin, Miss Rayefsky," he said, signalling Rachel to get up. "And I sure hope I'll have the pleasure of meeting you again."

He bowed very low, made a gallant flourish with his hat, and taking Rachel by the arm, started off gayly. But he turned back after a few steps.

"I'm not going to be discouraged," he said with his very best smile, "because you won't go with me to-night. I like your looks and want to get acquainted with you. I'll see you again."

Once more he flourished his hat, and rejoined Rachel.

Yetta sat still on the park bench for a long time after they had gone. She tried to make some sense out of Life. But it was all very perplexing. What did Rachel's story mean? In a vague way she had heard of the women who are called "bad." She knew their more blatant hall-marks. Rachel's cheeks were painted; she had spoken of herself as "bad." But the term did not mean anything to Yetta which could include a girl like her cousin who "wanted to be good." She understood that Rachel was unhappy, bitter, and very much ashamed, but she could not think of her as sinful or vicious. She tried – but entirely in vain – to imagine what sort of life Rachel was leading. She tried to picture in what sort of acts her "badness" consisted. She had heard somewhere of "selling love," but she had no idea how it was done. It was very perplexing for her – indeed it has perplexed older and wiser heads – to discover that "bad" people may after all be good.

But it was hard for her to keep her mind on this problem of ethics. It was very much easier to think of Harry Klein. She had never talked to so courteous and well dressed a gentleman. The dream of the curly-haired debater was wiped from her mind – Harry Klein was much better looking.

A queer question shot into her mind. Did a girl have to be "bad" to have such enchanting friends? No. That could not be. He had wanted to be friends with her. She knew she was not bad.

He had said he wanted to be her friend! The blood raced through her veins at the thought. She went over again in her mind all her arguments with Rachel. The only possible way to escape from

the sweat-shop was to marry. Of course she could not hope to win so debonair a gentleman as Harry Klein. But rescue – if it were to come at all – must come in some such way. It was her only hope.

CHAPTER V
HARRY KLEIN

When they were out of hearing, Harry Klein tightened his grip on Rachel's arm.

"Say, Kid, that cousin of yours is a peach. Why didn't you put me on before?"

"Oh, Jake," Rachel pleaded, "leave her alone. She ain't got no chance. She's only a kid. She ain't got no father or mother. Oh, Jake, please. Promise me you'll leave her alone. There are lots of other girls. She's only a kid. Please – "

"Oh, shut your face," he growled; "you make me tired."

And he began to whistle a light-hearted ditty. Rachel might just as well have gone to Jake Goldfogle and have asked him, for the same reasons, not to drive her cousin so hard. She might just as well have asked you or me to pay a decent price for our clothes. Harry Klein, just like Mr. Goldfogle – just like you and me – needed the money.

"Where's 'Blow Away'?" he asked, interrupting his whistling.

"He's asleep," Rachel said.

"Well – we'll wake him up."

They turned down a side street.

"Jake," Rachel began again, "I'll find you some other girl – I'll do anything for you. Oh, Jake, please."

"Shut up," he growled. "Tell your troubles to a policeman."

They went up three flights of dirty stairs to a door which Rachel opened with a latch-key. It gave on a long hall. Turning to the left, they entered a parlor fitted out with cheap plush furniture. The windows were closed, the air heavy with the scent of stale beer and cigarette smoke – all the varied stenches of a debauch.

"Wake him up," Jake ordered.

Rachel turned down the hall and opened a bedroom door. The air was even worse than in the parlor. A thin-chested youth of twenty-eight or so was asleep, lying across the bed on his face. The butt of a pistol stuck out of his hip pocket. His coat and vest and shirt were on the back of a chair, his shoes on the floor.

"Charlie," Rachel called.

There was no response. She approached the bed cautiously and gave a pull at his foot, jumping back out of reach as soon as she had touched him. There were a couple of angry grunts.

"Charlie," she called again.

He sat up with a roar of profanity.

"How many times have I told you to leave me alone when I'm sleeping? I'll break your dirty face for you."

"Jake's in the front room," she interrupted him. "Wants to see you."

"Jake?" He lowered the hand he had raised to strike her. "What in Hell does he want?"

"How do I know?"

"You never know nothing," he growled sourly, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He shuffled down the hall in his stocking feet. When the great ones of the earth are waiting, you cannot stop to put on shoes.

"Hello, Blow Away," Jake said. "I've got something to say to you. Your bundle" – he indicated Rachel – "steered me up to a honey bunch this afternoon, named Yetta Rayefsky. The little doll took my eye. See? She's Ray's cousin. I just want you to explain to her – as a favor to me – that she mustn't butt in. The less talking she does with her mouth the better it'll be. You'd better impress it on her, so she won't forget? See?"

Charlie – alias Blow Away – saw. And Rachel saw. She cowered down in a corner and promised not to warn Yetta – if only they would not beat her. But it was a basic belief of these two gentlemen that "a beating is never wasted on a woman."… It was from this time that Rachel began to kill herself with "booze." She did not like to remember how she had betrayed Yetta. And drink helped her to forget.

There were few things which Jake, or Harry Klein – it does not matter what name we use for him, for a hundred aliases were on the back of his portrait in the Rogues' Gallery – there were not many things which he enjoyed more than seeing some one cower before him. The servility with which "Blow Away" had obeyed his orders, the wild terror and passionate pleadings of Rachel, had tickled the nerves of his perverted being, and he smacked his lips as he went downstairs and out into the twilight of the open streets.

He was the recognized leader of the principal East Side "gang" – a varied assortment of toughs, "strong-arm men," pickpockets, "panhandlers," and pimps. It must not be supposed, however, that these various professions were sharply differentiated. There is a hoary tradition which says that once upon a time the under world of New York City was divided into rigid classes and cliques, when a "dip" looked down on a beggar, and highway robbers had a professional pride which kept them from associating with panders. But in the year of grace 1903 – when Jake's crooked trail ran across Yetta's path – such delicate distinctions, if they ever had existed, were entirely lost. Many a man who claimed to be a prize-fighter sometimes "stuck up a drunk." The "flyest" pickpocket did not disdain the income to be derived from the sale of "phony" jewellery. It was no longer possible to distinguish a "yeggman" from a "flopper," and even bank robbers wrote "begging letters." And of all "easy money," the easiest is from prostitution. There were very few denizens of the under world who did not have one or two women "on the string." Even the legendary aristocracy of forgers had sunk thus low.

The political manifestation of the gang over which Jake ruled was the James B. O'Rourke Democratic Club, of which he was president. This organization maintained, with the help of a subsidy from Fourteenth Street, a shabby parlor floor club-room on Broome Street. They gave one ball and one picnic a year. A central office detective, if he had attended a meeting, could have given a "pedigree" for almost all the members. But the political bigbugs, the members of the city administration, who sometimes came to visit the club, did not bring a detective with them. They saw only a roomful of ardent young Democrats. The good-will of the club was an important asset to aspiring politicians; the members would willingly vote half a dozen times for a candidate they liked.

The social centre of the gang was a "Raines Law" hotel on lower Second Avenue. It had a very glittering back parlor for "ladies." There, and in the Hungarian Restaurant next door, Jake's followers spent their moments of relaxation. The frontier between their territory and that of hostile gangs was several blocks away. The "hang out" was just inside the borders of a police precinct, with whose captain they had a treaty of peace.

The more professional headquarters were in an innocent-looking barber shop on Chrystie Street. In the back there was a pool parlor. The lamps were so shaded that the table was brilliantly illumined and the rest of the room was black. If you walked in from the brightly lighted shop in front, you could not tell how many people were there, nor how many pistols were pointed at you. From the toilet-room in the back there was an inconspicuous door into the alley, which, besides its strategic advantages, led to the back door of Pincus Kahan's pawnshop. Much stolen goods followed this route.

A sort of Robin Hood romance has been thrown around the notorious gang leaders of Lower New York. As usual, the reality back of the romance is a very sorry thing. Jake, for instance, was not an admirably clever, nor strong-willed, nor fearless specimen of the genus homo. To be sure he excelled many of his stunted, defective, and "cocaine-doped" retainers in these qualities, but above all he owed his position to a calculating, patient prudence. Discretion is certainly the better part of valor in knavery, and while most crooks are daredevils, Jake was discreet.

Since his first detention in the House of Refuge, Jake had managed to keep out of jail. On his release he had organized a "mob" of pickpockets. Most of its members were boys he had met in that worthy institution. Neither the House of Refuge nor any of the other "reformatories" are to be blamed for the crimes of those who have passed through them. Many of their inmates are taught honorable trades, and some follow them after release. Nearly half of the juvenile pickpockets who gathered about Jake had never been arrested – and they were every bit as bad as those who had been in the House of Refuge.

Owing to their leader's discretion, this little "mob," which had affiliated with the dominant East Side Gang, enjoyed an almost unbroken run of prosperity. But when he had turned eighteen, Jake retired from the active practice of his profession. There was as much money and more security in women. Nature had endowed him with the necessary external charms. He enjoyed cleanliness, he was good looking, and above all he had a soft, persuasive voice.

His covetousness, joined with a natural ability at organization, was always pushing him into new enterprises. He gathered together the wreck of the notorious Beggars' Trust. He joined "The Independent Benevolent Society," and cornered the business of supplying girls to their "brass check" houses. One after another, he gained control of the gang's most lucrative ventures. Almost any other man of the under world would have made a play for acknowledged leadership long before Jake did. He was modest, or, as his enemies said, a coward. He waited until sudden death or imprisonment had removed his principal rivals – until the leadership was practically forced upon him.

There were cleverer, more strong-willed, braver men in the gang than he. But he was never careless. A civil war within the political machine had given him an opportunity to make explicit and profitable treaties with those "higher up." He had sense enough to leave "dope" alone. He lacked the imagination to have any sentiment of loyalty or any sympathy, and this made him what is called unscrupulous. Like most cowards he was bitter and cruel in revenge. He had never killed a man with his own hands, but he ruled his organization of "thugs" through fear.

It was two days after her encounter with him in the Park before Yetta saw him again. As she came out of the factory, after the day's work, she almost ran into him.

"Why, hello, Miss Rayefsky," he greeted her. "Your cousin Ray told me where you worked. May I walk along with you?"

He walked beside her to the corner of the street where she lived. Glowing stories he told her of the Ball, how much fun he and Rachel had had, and how sorry he was that she had missed it. Really, she ought to have come. What fun was there for working girls if they did not go to dances? To be sure some girls were too crazy about it, went to balls every night and stayed up too late. He disapproved of such doings. He had to work. And he did not want to be sleepy in the office. No, indeed! A serious young man with ambitions could not afford to try the all-night game. He very seldom went to balls except on Saturday night.

Hairy Klein, alias Jake, had sized Yetta up and decided on the "serious" talk.

It was several days before he turned up again. He explained that he had been "out on the road." In the course of half a dozen such walks he opened his heart to her. There was nothing about himself which he did not tell her. She knew all his ambitions and hopes, the names of his influential relatives, the details of his serious, laborious life, and the amount of his balance in the Bowery Savings Bank. Pretty soon the "bosses" would keep their promise and take him into the firm. They would be surprised to find how much capital he had accumulated. Meanwhile he was learning the business from A to Z. What he did not know about silk was not worth knowing.

To all this fairy-story Yetta listened with credulous ears. The young man had a convincing manner; he was courteous and well dressed. And besides, Rachel would have warned her if he had been bad.

If Yetta had grown up with boys, if she had played at courtship, – as most young people happily do, – she might have seen through the surface glitter of this scoundrel. She had no standard by which to judge him.

But in a timidly defensive spirit she refused to go to a dance with him. It was partly the instinct of coquetry, which told her to struggle against capture. It was more her humility. When he said he liked her, thought she was good looking, wanted "to be her steady fellow," and so forth, it made her throb with a strange and disturbing pride. But it also made her distrustful – it was too good to be true. He had somewhat over-colored his romance. If he had only pretended to be a clerk at $11.50 a week and meagre expectations, it would have been easier to accept. But why should this rich and brilliant young conqueror want poor, penniless her?

It was not so much that she doubted Harry's truthfulness; she found her good luck unbelievable. And this uncertainty tormented her. Despite her lack of experience, she had a large fund of instinctive common sense. She realized that she could not compromise with Life. Either this man was good, wonderfully, gorgeously good, in which case the slightest distrust was folly and cruelty, or he was bad – then the smallest grain of trust would be dangerous. She felt herself utterly unable to decide wisely so momentous a question. She longed ardently for some older confidante, some woman whose goodness and wisdom she could trust. She wished she knew Miss Brail and the Settlement women. She was sure they were both wise and good.

There was her aunt. In her desperate extremity she proposed one night that Harry should call at the Goldstein's flat. But when he refused, she could not blame him. His argument was good. Her aunt was sure to oppose any one who threatened to marry Yetta and divert her earnings. He stood on the street-corner and urged her earnestly to leave her relatives. He had wormed from her all the sordid details of that miserable family. Why should she give her money to a drunkard who had no claim on her? He knew a nice respectable place where she could get a room for half her wages. She could buy some nice clothes with her savings. He made quite a pretty speech about how much better she would look in a fine dress. It was his firm conviction that she was the most beautiful girl in New York.

Yetta knew that it was foolish for her to go on living with the Goldsteins. As Rachel had said, they were and always had been cheating her. But a dread of the unknown kept her from at once accepting Harry's advice. The waves of Life were swirling about her dizzyingly, and she felt the need of a familiar haven. She held on in panic to the only home she knew, sparring blindly for time, and hoping that something would happen to convince her definitely whether or not she ought to put trust in the alluring dream.

But all the time her instinctive resistance was weakening; she had begun to give into his seduction. Her growing horror of the "sweated" monotony of her life was forcing her relentlessly into the clutches of this pander. Strain her eyes as she might she could see no door of escape unless some such lover rescued her. Whenever she tried to think of the possible dangers of believing in Harry Klein, a mocking imp jeered at her with the grim certainties of life without him. What risk was there in the dream which was worse than the inevitable barrenness and premature fading of the sweat-shop? She listened eagerly to what he said about the flat they would rent in Harlem. But with more thrilling attention, she listened to his stories of dances. Her heart hungered passionately for a little gayety. And then there was the fear that at some dance he might meet a more attractive girl and leave her.

She was no longer handing over all her wages to her aunt. Under pretext of a slack season she was holding back a couple of dollars a week. She carried these humble savings wrapped in a handkerchief inside her blouse. Every time she felt the hard lump against her body, her heart gave a little jump. She would have some money to buy a hat and some white shoes for her first dance.

Jake, alias Harry Klein, had a more devious psychology. When "Blow Away" asked him one night, in the Second Avenue "hang-out," how things were going with Ray's cousin, Jake's lying face assumed a faraway contented smile. But inwardly he was raging over Yetta's stubbornness. He was not used to such long chases. When he had first seen her, his money-loving soul had revolted at so

shameful a waste of earning capacity. A pretty girl like that working in a sweat-shop! He had followed the scent without much enthusiasm. It would be an affair of a couple of weeks. Most pretty girls want good clothes to look prettier. Most of them lost their heads if a well-dressed man made love to them. The grim, hopeless monotony of poverty made most of them hungry for a larger life. It was really sickening to a man of his experience to see how greedily they swallowed his story of the silk firm on Broadway. It was – and this was his expression for supreme easiness – like stealing pennies from a blind beggar.

Yetta by her stubborn caution had won a sort of respect from him. His pride was engaged. His face flushed when he thought of her. She stirred in him something more than vexation. The girl "on his string" who was at the moment enjoying his special favor suddenly seemed stupid and insipid to him. In his distorted way he rather fell in love with Yetta. His day-dreaming moments were filled with passionate lurid pictures of possessing her. Although it was proving a long chase, he knew the odds and was sure of the outcome. Sometimes he thought almost tenderly of the time of victory. Sometimes his face hardened, and he vowed he would make her pay.

The pursuit had dragged on a solid month when quite by chance he stumbled on an argument which won his case.

He began to worry about her health. She ought to get out of the sweat-shop. It would kill her. He told her horrible stories about how women went to pieces in the sweat-shops, how they got "bad lungs," or went blind, or had things happen to them inside. He would, the very next day, find a position for her in a store or some place that would not be so hard on her. It did not matter if the wages were not so good; it broke his heart to think of her ruining her health. As soon as they took him into the firm he was going to marry her. He did not want his wife to be sick or crippled.

In his mind was a dark and sinister plan to entice Yetta from her home and establish her in nominal employment with some complaisant woman. He was really a very stupid young man. He did not realize that in all her life Yetta had never had any one worry about her health. He did not guess how his solicitude, which seemed so unselfish, had choked her throat and filled her eyes with tears. He went on with his evil eloquence, when all the time he might have put his arms about her and kissed her, and carried her off wherever he wished.

The next afternoon in the sweat-shop, the pain smote Yetta in the back once more.

CHAPTER VI
THE PIT'S EDGE

This second backache did not cause any noticeable interruption in the day's routine. Yetta gritted her teeth and kept the pace – if anything, increased it. But while her fingers flew back and forth over the accustomed work, her thoughts soared far afield. If there had been persuasiveness in Harry's words, there was ten times as much eloquence in that sudden clutch of pain. As Mrs. Cohen had prophesied, it had come back. How soon would she feel it again?

At last the motor stopped its crazy rattle, the roar of the belts turned to a sob, the day's work was done. Yetta arranged her shawl with trembling fingers and hurried down the stairs. But she hesitated a moment inside the doorway before plunging out into the pack of workers who were hurrying eastward.

The ebb and flow of this tide of tenement dwellers is one of the momentous sights of Manhattan. At five in the morning the cross-town streets are almost deserted. On the Bowery the milk wagons and occasional trucks rattle northward in the false dawn. The intervals between the elevated trains are long. But the side streets are even more lifeless. Now and then shadows flit eastward – women, night workers, who scrub out the great Broadway office buildings. They would be shadows even in broad daylight. Towards six one begins to hear sharper, hurrying footfalls – coming westward. The tide has begun to flow. It grows in volume with the increasing light. The congested tenements have awakened; by six the flood is at its height. So dense is the rush that it is hard to make way against it, eastward. So fast the flow that the observer can scarcely note the faces. It is the backs which catch the eye and leave an impress on the memory. A man who walked like a soldier – upright – in that crowd would seem a monstrosity. Even the backs of the little children are bent. They seem to be carrying portly persons on their shoulders.

Then for close to twelve hours these side streets are almost deserted again – till the ebb begins. It is hard to decide which sight is the more awesome: the flow of humanity hurrying to its inhuman labor or the same crowd ebbing, hurrying to their inhuman, bestial homes.

But Yetta was not thinking of her fellow-workers. With the egoism of youth she was thinking of herself and the pain in her back. Harry had been right – the sweat-shop was killing her. There was a chance of escape and Life might never offer her another. She had come to the now-or-never place. Yetta was not a coward, she was only timid. And the bravery of timid people is sublime. For only a moment she hesitated in the dark hallway, below Goldfogle's Vest Company, and then with a smile – a fearless smile – on her lips she stepped out into the glare of the arc-light. Harry was waiting for her. She slipped her hand confidently into his arm.

"Say, Harry, to-morrow night, let's go to a ball."

"What?" he said, stopping short, to the surprise and discomfort of the home-rushing workers. "What?"

"Sure. I want some fun."

At last she had swallowed the bait! He could hardly believe his ears. But he was afraid to seem too eager. They were swept along by the hurrying crowd almost a block before he spoke.

"How about clothes?"

"I got some," she said. "I'll bring 'em to the shop and put 'em on there."

"Why not to-night."

"No. To-morrow."

They hurriedly talked over the details of her escape. She would tell her aunt the "rush-work story." When the shop closed, Harry could take her somewhere to supper and afterwards to a dance.

"To-morrow night? Sure?" he said when they separated at her corner.

"Sure," she called back.

She ran upstairs and told her aunt that there was a rush order in her shop and she must hurry back; she only had time for a glass of tea and a piece of bread. To-morrow she would take a bigger lunch and not come home for supper. In a few minutes she out was again on the brightly lit streets. From her scant store of savings she bought a hat, a blouse, a pair of stockings and white shoes. She left her bundles at a store near her home, and then started on a pilgrimage.

The shrine she set out to visit was the little second-hand book-store on East Broadway, where she had been so happy with her father. It had hardly changed at all. Only the man who sat on the high stool behind the desk did not look like her father. She stood there aimlessly for a few minutes, and then her eye fell on the first two volumes of *Les Miserables*. It was the set she had read to her father. The last volume was in her room.

"One volume is gone," the man told her; "you can have them for seventy-five cents."

"I ain't got more'n half a dollar," she said.

"The complete set is worth five dollars."

"I only got fifty cents."

"All right. Take them."

She turned away from him to pull the last of her little horde out of her blouse. When she faced him, there were tears in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked kindly.

"Nothin'. My father used to keep this store. These were the last books I read to him."

"Oh! Is your name Rayefsky? I knew your father – he was a good man. And I guess I used to know you, when you were about so high. Let's see – what was your name?"

"Yetta."

"Oh, yes, little Yetta Rayefsky, grown up into a big woman. I suppose you'll be getting married soon."

"Say, can I sit down here fer a while," she asked, to change the subject.

"Of course you can," he said cordially, bringing her a chair.

She pulled it back into the obscurity and sat there all the evening, watching through wet eyes the old familiar scene, the people who came to buy, and the people who came to talk. One or two she recognized. When she had been a little girl, she used to sit up there behind the desk on a high stool beside her father and fall asleep against his shoulder. There was no one now to lean her head against when she was tired – except Harry. He promised to take care of her.

Memories of her father seemed to crowd the dingy old store. Why were there not more men like him in the world? He would not have wanted her to kill herself over the machine. How glad he would have been that she had found a lover to rescue her. She recalled the sermon he had preached about the wedding across the way. She did not remember many of the words; much of it had been above her childish understanding. But she remembered how he had told her that she must love and trust and cherish her man. She recalled the Vow of Ruth which he had taught her. And now at last the lover had come. The old sad, drab life had ended; she was about to enter into the glory. When it was time to close, the bookseller insisted on giving back her fifty cents.

"You take the books," he said. "And when you get married, you can call them a wedding present from a man who knew your father, and never knew a better man."

Hugging the two volumes of *Les Miserables* against her breast, she walked home more light hearted because of this evening with ghosts – more light hearted than she had ever been before.

The next morning Yetta left home earlier than usual, so that she could pick up her bundles on her way to work. All the long morning the noisy machinery of the shop seemed to be playing the music of The Song of Songs.

But suddenly The Fates seemed to become ashamed of the way they were treating her. Perhaps Yetta's dreams of her father the night before had pierced through the adamantine walls and stirred him out of the drowsy bliss of Paradise; he may have thrown himself at the feet of The Most High

to plead his daughter's cause. Perhaps it was her Guardian Angel which intervened. Or perhaps it was just chance.

When Yetta went down on the sidewalk during the noon rest to get a breath of air, – with the Song ringing in her heart, – her attention was attracted by a group of people about a woman who was speaking. She joined the listening crowd. The woman was talking about a strike of "The Skirt Finishers." The girls had been out now for weeks and were on the point of starvation. The Woman's Trade Union League, to which the speaker belonged, had arranged a ball for that night in behalf of the "skirt finishers."

"Every garment worker ought to come," she said. "It's your fight they are fighting. The garment trades are all 'sweated' – you've got to rise or die together. And every cent from the tickets goes to help the strike. The hall, the orchestra, everything has been donated – all the money goes to the girls. But, more than the money, they need encouragement. Don't buy a ticket and throw it away. Of course the fifty cents will help, but we want more than the money, we want a crowd. It will cheer up the girls a bit if the ball is a success. If you can't come yourself, give a ticket to some one who will."

Now the spirit of her father, or her Guardian Angel, or chance, moved Yetta to give her last fifty cents to the cause of the strikers. The time was so close when she was to leave the sweat-shop forever that her heart went out to all the less fortunate girls who had no such happy prospects. She would not only buy the ticket, but if the strikers needed encouragement, she would persuade Harry to take her there.

When the day's work was over, she hurried into her new finery and downstairs to meet her lover. Harry looked her over approvingly. Yes, she was worth all the time it had taken. But he was too wily a fox to let his evil glee be apparent. The rest was so easy; only a fool would risk frightening her now. A couple of hours more love-making, the intoxication of a few dances, a little wine – if need be a drop or two of chloral – and the trick was turned.

He took her to "Lorber's" for supper. And leaning over the brightly lighted table, over dishes which all together cost less than a dollar, but which seemed to her very wonderful, he solemnly asked her to promise to marry him. Just as solemnly she said "yes." Jove's laughter did not reach her ears to disturb her as she looked trustful and happy into his eyes. One cannot but wish that sometimes the guffaws of Jupiter were louder.

Harry promised to go to a jeweller in the morning and buy her an engagement ring. And when they had finished talking over this important detail, Yetta remembered about her ticket to the Woman's Trade Union League ball. Harry tried to laugh the idea away. He knew nothing about trade-unions except that high-class "crooks" did not belong to them. But the Lyceum Hall, where it was to be held, was a very modest place.

"It's sure to be stupid in that hall," he said. "They never have good balls there. I'm going to take you up to The Palace. There's a swell affair there every night – the real thing. And fifty cents! What fun can you have at a fifty-cent ball? Sometimes the tickets cost five dollars at The Palace."

But Yetta had set her heart on using her own ticket, and it seemed an unimportant detail to Harry. They compromised; they would go to both, first to hers and then to his. She would see that he knew what he was talking about.

He proposed a bottle of champagne. For a moment Yetta was frightened.

"I never drank no wine," she protested.

"Oh, come," he said, "they always drink wine over a marriage contract. I wouldn't ask you to if it would hurt you."

Yetta looked at him out of her big, deep eyes. He had the peculiar kind of nerve which made it possible for him to look straight into them. He reached his hand across the table and put it caressingly on hers. And so she believed him.

"If you says fer me to," she said, "I'll do anything you wants me to, Harry – always." And then Yetta remembered her father and the vow he had taught her. It made her suddenly bold. She took

firm hold of the hand Harry had reached to her across the table, and in a singsong but throbbing voice began to recite the wonderful old Hebrew words. The pimp was bewildered. His religious instruction had been neglected; he knew no Hebrew.

"Wot's this yer giving me?" he asked.

And Yetta translated into the vernacular.

"It means: 'Wherever you go, I'll go too, where you sleep, I'll sleep wid you, your folks will be my folks and I'll pray to your God; when you die, I'll die too and be buried beside you. And God can do more to me, if I leave you before I die.' My father taught it to me. Ain't it a swell thing to say when you're engaged?"

When at last the significance of Yetta's avowal had penetrated Harry's thick skull, he moved uneasily on his chair. The business side of him said he was wasting time. It had been a foolish precaution to bring her to this respectable restaurant. He might have taken her straight to the Second Avenue "hang-out" – with its complaisant proprietor and the rooms upstairs. But there was a sweetness – even to him – in such innocent, confiding love. He had acted the part with her so long that it seemed something more than bald pretence. There was a residue of "original decency" left under the hard shell, which living in this world of ours had given him. And this part of him – God knows it was small and weak – wished that it was true. It was strong enough to make him prolong the make-believe. He ordered only a half bottle of champagne – as a really, truly lover would have done. It was nine o'clock when they left.

They walked along Grand Street towards the Bowery. A sudden wave of tenderness flooded Harry.

"Yetta," he said, "you've never kissed me."

Her feet on the roseate clouds, she was quite unconscious of the passers-by; she turned her face up to him unquestioningly. But Harry never lost consciousness of such things. He did not dare to risk the jibes of onlookers. He tightened his grip on her arm and led her into a dark doorway. The late March wind was cold, and no loiterers sat on the steps nor stood about in the hall. Yetta – a bit surprised at his prudence – gave herself freely into his arms. When he kissed her, the last faint shadow of a doubt disappeared. She was sure he really loved her. The blood pounding in her head under his caresses dizzied her – but she was not afraid. Only somehow, the flush in his face and the husky tone of his voice seemed unfamiliar.

"Yetta," he said in a hot whisper. "Did you mean what you said – that stuff your father taught you? Will you come with me to-night – to my room and – never go away?"

This was a new idea to Yetta; she had not thought out the literal meaning of the ancient vow. For a moment she looked into his face, then turned her head aside. After all, that was what her father had told her to do.

"I'll marry you," he said, "as soon as they take me into the firm. It won't be long."

But this aspect of it had not worried Yetta. She did not question his good intentions. She was trying to picture to herself what such a change in her life would mean. There had been so little joy for her that now it was hard to accept it.

Suddenly a familiar figure crossed her range of vision. Her eyes, which had been straining to pierce the future, focussed on the other side of the street.

"Look! look! Harry," she cried. "There's Rachel. Run and call her. Quick."

"No," he said firmly. "That ain't Ray."

"Yes, it is," Yetta insisted. "I guess I knows my cousin when I sees her. Run after her. I'd like to tell her."

But Harry's hand, which before had caressed her, tightened over her arm in a brutal grip. He jerked her along in the other direction to the Bowery.

"I tell you it ain't her. Come on. Get into this car."

The evil look in his eyes terrified her. The sound of his voice hurt even more than his cruel grip. She got into the car without a word. But she knew he had lied. She realized suddenly and with terror that she did not know the man beside her. She had caught a lightning gleam on a new side of his character. She had seen something dark and sinister. And all the joy which had been in her heart shrivelled up and cowered.

For a moment they sat side by side in startled silence. Harry was surprised and angry with himself for having lost his temper. He tried to cover his blunder, to get back to the old intimacy. But Yetta heard the forced note in his suave voice. The sight of Rachel had recalled her warnings about the dangers which life holds for unprotected girls. She did not answer him nor speak till the car passed Fifth Street.

"The Lyceum's on Sixth Street."

And when they reached the sidewalk, she asked him flatly why he had lied.

"Can't you understand, Yetta," he asked, bending his head close to hers, "that I didn't want anybody butting in to-night?"

But she was not reassured. Once a doubt had entered, the whole fabric of her dreams had begun to totter. And while he told her over again the threadbare story of his glowing prospects, she was remembering that she had never seen the "Silk-house" on Broadway. When he spoke of how happy they would be, she felt the sting of his rough grip on her arm. She was a very frightened young person as they reached the door of the Lyceum Hall.

Harry felt the change in her and was raging. All the quasi-tenderness he had felt for her earlier in the evening had gone. He wanted to break her. He cursed himself for the time he had wasted that evening. She would have gone anywhere with him a half hour before. His distorted brain was torn by strange emotions. Yetta had caught hold of the inner fabric of his imagination as no other girl had ever done. And, as is just as true of cadets as of other men, when they begin to care, they lose their *sang-froid*. He was suddenly afraid of losing her. He felt himself awkward.

His lack of ease was intensified by his strange surroundings. He had never been to a ball like this. He only knew two kinds: the flashy, vicious dances, organized by his own class, the kind he was planning to take Yetta to, and "Greenhorn balls" – sordid but equally vicious – in the back rooms of low-class saloons, patronized by ignorant, newly arrived immigrants.

The entry to the Lyceum Hall was packed with poorly dressed people, but they were not greenhorns. The women were the strangest of all to him. Their kind did not come to the balls he frequented. More than half of them wore shawls; they were of all ages, from fifteen to seventy. They were serious-eyed working women, and many of them looked hungry. He felt that his foppish clothes were conspicuous. He felt hostility in the stares of the men. He would have given anything to be among his own kind, on familiar ground.

Indeed he was conspicuous among that roomful of poorly dressed men. He attracted the attention of a couple who stood near the door, Mabel Train and Walter Longman. In a way they were as conspicuous as he, but the curious glances which turned in their direction were not hostile. Miss Train was secretary of the Woman's Trade Union League. Many of the women and girls, as they entered the room, rushed up to greet her. She was about twenty-seven, tall and slender. In reality her body was an almost perfect instrument. She was never sick, and rarely unpleasantly tired, but in looking at her one was more impressed with nervous than physical energy. She was more graceful than beautiful. Her face was too small, a fault which was emphasized by her great mass of brown hair. But her diminutive mouth was strong in line. Her eyes were keenly alive and unafraid.

Longman was over thirty, big of bone and limb. Although he strongly resembled a tame bear, he was a likable-looking man. And just as it surprised people to find that Miss Train was a hardy horsewoman, and could tire most men at skiing or swimming, so every one wanted to laugh when they were told that this lumbering giant, Longman, was an Instructor of Assyriology at Columbia.

"Look," she said as her eyes fell on Harry and Yetta, "he's a cadet."

The remark, and the matter of fact, decisive way she said it, was typical of Mabel Train. She knew the life of the East Side well enough to recognize Harry's unsavory profession at a glance, and she did not waste time beating about the bush of euphemisms. She never declared a heart or a club when she meant a spade.

Longman's eyebrows went up affirmatively, but he at once opposed the natural deduction from her observation.

"Now, don't you go butting in, Mabel, until you're asked."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The girl's a stranger. I guess I've got a right to welcome her."

And with Longman lumbering behind her she crossed the hall.

"Good evening," she said to Yetta, elaborately ignoring Harry's existence. "I'm Miss Train, secretary of the League. What's your trade?"

But Yetta replied with a question.

"Didn't you talk to the girls at the Neighborhood House?"

"Yes. I gave them a talk on Trade Unions. Were you there? I don't remember your face."

Yetta started to explain how she had watched the meeting from her window. But suddenly she began to stutter; she saw Miss Train look at Harry, saw the scorn and contempt in her eyes. Yetta could not remember what she was trying to say. Some newcomers rushed up and interrupted them. Mabel Train felt that the short conversation had been a decided failure.

But to Yetta it had had immense significance. In the preceding months the Settlement had come to typify all the good things of life, for which she hungered. Like her cousin Rachel she "wanted to be good." The women whom she watched in the house across the street had seemed to her good, and also they seemed happy. Miss Train was of that world, she bore its stamp. And she did not trust Harry. Down crashed the dream into greater ruin. Yetta was afraid with Harry. Beside such women she would be safe. How could she escape?

A man on the platform clapped his hands for attention and asked the people to take seats close to the stage.

"Aw! Come on," Harry said; "let's beat it. This place is stupid."

"No," Yetta said with the determination of fear; "I want to stay."

BOOK II

CHAPTER VII
THE SKIRT-FINISHERS' BALL

Harry was right. It was a stupid ball. It was more of a strike-meeting than a dance. To most of the people the speeches were of more importance than the two-steps. As he followed Yetta, grumblingly, up towards the platform he realized that the crowd of workers, packing in about them, cut off all possibility of escape. He had not set out that evening with the intention of sitting on a hard bench and listening to "a lot of rag-chewing."

"Is this what you call fun?" he growled at Yetta.

But the crowd – so foreign to his manner of life – intimidated him. He sank into surly silence.

The first speaker was a nervous, overstrained Irish woman. With high-strung Celtic eloquence she told the story of the sweated. Her manner was almost lyrical, as if she were chanting a new "Song of the Shirt." Most of the garment workers in the audience were Jews, but although her manner of appeal was strange to them, the subject matter of her speech was their very life, and they were deeply moved.

The president of the "Skirt-Finishers' Union," who spoke in Yiddish, followed her. She told of the intolerable conditions of the trade: how the prices had been shaved until no one but girls who lived at home and had no rent to pay could earn a living at it; how at last the strike had started and how desperate the struggle was. The treasury was empty, so they could pay "benefits" no longer. Unless money could be raised they would be starved back to the machines – defeated.

Then a young Jewish lawyer, Isadore Braun, spoke. It was the ringing message of Socialism he gave them. All the working people of the world were victims of the same vicious industrial system. In one branch of industry – like "skirt-finishing," which they had just heard about – it might momentarily be worse. But the same principle was back of all labor. The coal-miner, the lace-maker, the farm-laborer, the clerk – every one who worked for wages – was in the same manner being cheated out of some of the product of his labor. Individually the workingman is powerless. When men or women get together in a union, they are stronger and can sometimes win improvements in the conditions of their trade. But if they would all get together in one immense organization, if they would also vote together, they would be an overwhelming force in politics. They would rule society. They could install a new civilization based on Justice and Brotherhood.

"Workingmen of all countries, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to gain!"

Dr. Liebovitz rose when Braun sat down. He was a smooth-shaven, amiable-looking man, but he spoke with a bitterness in striking contrast to his appearance.

"The bosses do more than cheat you. They're not only thieves – they're murderers! I'm a doctor. Day and night I go about through this district with a bag of medicine and surgical instruments trying to save the lives of people – men and women and newborn babies – who would never be sick if it was not for the crimes of capitalism!

"Tuberculosis! How many of you are there in this audience who haven't lost a relative from lungs? As I sat here a moment ago I heard at least a dozen tubercular coughs. It's preventable – it's curable. There's no reason why any one should have it – less still that any one of you should die of it – if Capitalistic Greed didn't force you to live in rotten tenements, to work long hours in worse shops.

"Unless you people who are here this evening – and all the working people – make up your mind to make it impossible for some people to get fat off your misery, unless you get together to

overthrow Capitalism, to establish Socialism, some of your babies are going to die of impure milk, others of adulterated food, more of T. B. Unless we can put these murderers out of business there will never be an end to this horrible, needless, inexcusable slaughter."

Miss Train spoke when he had finished. She made no pretence of oratory, did not seek to move them either to tears or anger. She tried to utilize the emotions stirred by the other speakers, for the immediate object of the meeting – raising funds for the "skirt-finishers." A collection would now be taken up. Mr. Casey, the secretary of the Central Federated Union, had promised to address them. He had not yet come. She hoped he would arrive while the girls were passing the hat.

"For Gawd's sake," Harry said, "come on. This is fierce."

"No," Yetta replied, jerked down from the heights by his gruff voice. "I want to hear it all."

She had listened spellbound to the speakers. Never having been to a meeting, she had never heard the life of the working class discussed before. Almost everything they said about the "skirt-finishers" applied equally to her own trade. Jake Goldfogle was grinding up women at his machines to satisfy his greed. Before, he had seemed to her an unpleasant necessity. Now he took on an aspect of personal villainy. He was not only harsh and foul-mouthed and brutal, he was robbing them. Cheated at home by her relatives, at the shop by her boss, what wonder her life was poverty stricken!

A strange thing was happening to Yetta. The champagne which Harry had urged on her was mounting to her brain. She had not taken enough to befuddle her, but sufficient – in that hot, close hall – to free her from her natural self-consciousness, to open all her senses to impressions, to render her susceptible to "suggestion." This, although Harry did not understand psychology, was why he had urged it on her. But his plan had "gang aglee." The alcohol was working, not amid the seductions of a brightly lighted, gay ball-room, but in this sombre, serious assembly. The "suggestions" which were flowing in upon her receptive consciousness were not the caresses of a waltz. She was being hypnotized by the pack of humanity about her. She was becoming one with that crowd of struggling toilers, one with the vast multitude of workers outside the hall; she was feeling the throb of a broader Brotherhood, in a way she never could have felt without the stimulation of the wine.

One of the speakers had alluded to the evil part in the sweating system which is played by the highly paid "speeders." Yetta was a "speeder." Why? What good did it do her? Her uncle swallowed her wages. Jake Goldfogle – the slave-driver – profited most. How did it come about that she – her father's daughter – was engaged in so shameful a rôle? She wanted passionately to talk it over with some one who understood.

Open-eyed she watched the group of speakers on the platform. She felt the kinship between their idealism and her father's dreams. He would have loved and trusted Miss Train. It must be wonderful to be a woman like that. With the inspiration of the wine in her veins, she felt that she might find courage to talk to her.

The young woman whom Yetta was so ardently admiring was holding in her hand a note from Mr. Casey which announced that he could not get to the meeting, and she was asking Longman – ordering him, in fact – to fill the gap in the programme. He was protesting. He was not an orator. The sight of a crowd always made him mad. He was sure to say something which would anger them. It would be much better to begin the dance. But Miss Train was used to having her way. His protest only half uttered, Longman found himself out on the platform.

"Mr. Casey can't come. And Miss Train has asked me to take his place. Now, I'm no good as a speaker, and you won't like what I say, but I'm going to tell you what I believe. Braun and Dr. Liebovitz told you about the rotten injustice of our social system, and what they said was true. But they did not tell you whose fault it is. You may think the bosses are to blame. It's your own fault. You're only getting what's coming to you.

"You're slaves because you haven't the nerve to be free. You came here to hear the bosses called names. I don't like the bosses any more than you do. But it makes me tired to hear everybody cursing

them and not looking at their own faults. You are getting cheated. What are you going to do about it? Are you cowards? Haven't you got the guts to stand up and fight for your rights?

"Fourscore and several years ago, our Fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation dedicated to the ideals of Democracy, of Liberty, Justice, and Brotherhood. And look at this nation now! Plutocracy has swallowed up Democracy. I don't have to tell you garment workers how little there is of Justice and Brotherhood. What's wrong? Were the Fathers off on their ideals? No! But they neglected to people this continent with a race of men! The country is full of weak-kneed cringers, who read the Declaration of Independence once a year, but would rather be slaves than go hungry. People whose rights are 'for sale.' People who prefer 'getting on in the world' to liberty. The trouble with this country is that we've got too few patriots.

"I'm an American. What I've been saying to you Jews applies equally to my own people. But at least I can say this for myself. It isn't much, but it's more than you can say. My ancestors fought for Liberty. Back in 1776 some of my forebears thought enough of independence to risk not only their jobs – but their lives. My father valued human freedom enough in the sixties to fight for it.

"Do you want some one to give you Liberty? – to hand it to you on a platter? You come here, hundreds of thousands every year, from the oppression of mediæval Europe, because here in America men of a different race and creed have bought some measure of freedom with their blood. Not perfect Liberty – far from it. But we had to fight for the little we have.

"You're disappointed in America. You curse the bosses who enslave you. But think a moment. Why should you be free? There's nothing in life worth having, which doesn't have to be striven for. One of the American Revolutionists said, 'Eternal vigilance is the price of Liberty.' Have you been vigilant?

"To-day the age-old fight for Liberty is being fought out in Industry – between Capital and Labor. What part in it are the Jews of America going to take? Are you going to submit servilely to injustice, in the vain hope that some one else will win Justice for you? Or are you going to follow the footsteps of the glorious fighters of your race, like Heine and Marx? Are you going to beg for Liberty or join the Army of Liberation, pay your share of the price and have the proud right to claim your share of the Victory?

"I know your history. I know how the ages of oppression have bent your backs. I know your poverty. But did you come to America to transplant here these old traditions of servitude? No. You came in search of a broader life, a larger measure of Freedom. Well. Just like every one else you'll have to fight for it. You've got to sacrifice for it. You've got to be ready to die for it.

"What are the most servile, down-trodden, abject trades in the city? The sweated garment trades. Who works in them? Jews. Where are the rottenest, vilest tenements? On the East Side. Who lives in them? Jews. You are the worst-paid, hardest-driven, least-considered people in New York. You are willing to work in sweat-shops. You consent to live in dumbbell tenements. You submit to injustice.

"You haven't joined the fight, although the Jew can fight when he wants to. I've no quarrel with these 'skirt-finishers.' But the fact remains that – with a few glorious exceptions – the great mass of your people have preferred a new serfdom to the trouble of earning Liberty. The Chosen People are watching the combat from a safe distance.

"This may sound as if I was a Jew-hater. I'm not. But I love Liberty. The fight is world-wide, international, interracial. It's bigger than Jew or Gentile. It's for the Freedom of Humanity. And the people who are willing to be slaves are more dangerous enemies than those who want to be tyrants. It's rather good fun fighting oppressors. But it's Hell trying to free ourselves from slaves."

His words inflamed Yetta's imagination. How often she had heard her father explain the misery of their people by the lack of training in the habits of freedom! He had felt – and it had been his keenest sorrow – that the Chosen People were falling far short of their high calling. She remembered

his solemn talks with her, his explanation of why he had wished her to study. He wanted her to be an American – a free woman.

Longman stopped. Instead of applause there were angry murmurings. But his words had sounded like the Ultimate Truth to Yetta. Why did they not greet his message with a cheer. The wine accomplished its miracle. Without its burning stimulation she would have been a cowering bundle of timidity before that sullen audience. But many good things can the kindly Fates conjure out of vile beginnings. The champagne which was to have been her utter undoing gave her courage. She got up as one inspired.

"What he says is true. We Jews don't fight for Freedom like we ought to. Look at me. My father loved Liberty. Perhaps some of you remember him. His name was Rayefsky. He used to keep a book-store on East Broadway. He talked to me about Liberty – all the time, and how we in this country ought to do our share. And then he died, and I went to work in a sweat-shop. Vests. I forgot all he had told me. What right have I got to be free? I forgot all about it. I ain't been vigilant. Nobody's talked to me about Liberty – since my father died. I'm" – her voice trembled a moment – "Yes, I'll tell you. I'm speeder in my shop. I'm sorry. I didn't think about it. Nobody ever told me what it meant before. If there's a union in my trade, I'll join it. I'll try not to be a slave. I can't fight much. I don't know how. I guess that's the real trouble – we're not afraid – only we don't know. I ain't got no education. I had to stop school when my father died. I was only fifteen. But I'll try not to make it harder for those that are fighting. I think…"

But her excitement had burned out the stimulation of the wine. She suddenly saw the sea of faces. It turned her from The Voice of her Race into a very frightened young woman, who knew neither how to go ahead nor how to sit down.

"That's all I've got to say!" she stammered. "I'll try not to be a slave."

Her simple, straightforward story, above all her self-accusation, turned the spirit of the assembly. "That's right," a number of men admitted, and there was considerable applause. She was too confused, too frightened at her own daring, to realize that she had saved the meeting from failure. But Miss Train, who never lost her presence of mind, recognized the Psychological Moment to end the speech making, and she signalled to the orchestra to begin the dance music. Every one got up and began, with a great hubbub, to move the benches back against the walls.

But Harry Klein was in no mood for dancing. In this unfamiliar, disturbing atmosphere, he also was discovering that his companion had a new and unsuspected side. It was something he did not understand, with which he was unprepared to deal. Everything seemed conspiring to tear her away from him. There were limits even to his patience. He must get her out on the sidewalk – into his own country.

"Come on," he said gruffly, taking firm hold of her arm. "I've had enough of this. Come on, I say. I ain't going to listen to hot air all night."

In her moment of exaltation, Yetta had almost forgotten the existence of her fiancé. His brusque manner broke into her mood with a suddenness which dazed her. He had led her down the hall, nearly to the door, before she could collect her wits. Beyond the door was the dark night and helplessness and unknown fear. Here in the hall was the woman who had been in the Settlement, the woman of whom she was not afraid.

"Wait," she said. "I want to talk to Miss Train."

In all that hostile environment, Miss Train's silent disdain had been the most outspoken. Harry would rather have had Yetta talk with Rachel. Rachel at least was afraid of him.

"Come on," he growled, and jerked her nearer to the door.

"No, no. I want to stop."

"Don't you begin to holler," he hissed, with a rough jerk. He tried to subdue her with his hard eyes. "Come on. Don't you make no row. Don't you holler."

They were close to the dark doorway now, and somehow Yetta could not find breath to scream out her fright. He pushed her roughly out into the vestibule. But his progress came to a sudden stop. Some one caught him by the collar and swung him off his feet.

"Not so fast, my man." It was Longman. "Where are you trying to take this young lady?"

Harry's free hand made an instinctive movement towards his hip pocket, but Longman's hand got there first.

"Oh, ho!" he said softly. "Concealed weapons?"

Jake nearly wept with rage. He – the president of a political club, the dreaded leader of a murderous gang – held up in such a manner for the mockery of a lot of working-men!

"I asked you where you were taking this young lady," Longman repeated.

"I brought her here," Jake snarled, trying desperately to regain his *sang froid*. "I guess I can take her away when she's tired of the show."

"Yes. Of course you can take her away, if she wants to go. But you can't if she doesn't. I didn't catch your name," he continued, turning to Yetta, "but I'd be very glad to see you safely home, whenever you want to go. Would you prefer to go with me or with this – " he looked first at the wilted desperado in his grip and then at the little circle of men who had gathered about. "He's a Cadet, isn't he, comrades?"

There was a growl of assent.

"You ain't going to throw me down now, are you, Yetta," Jake pleaded, the thought of losing her suddenly undoing what he considered his manhood, "just because this gang has picked on me."

"Of course you can go with him if you want to," Longman said kindly. "But really I think you'd better not. You won't do much for Freedom if you go with him."

"I'll stay," Yetta said simply.

And then Jake began to curse and threaten.

"Shut up," Longman said laconically, and Jake obeyed.

"Here," he continued to some of the men, "hand him over to the police. Be careful; he's got a gun in his pocket. Make a charge of 'concealed weapons.' And – what is your name? – Rayefsky. Thanks. Miss Train wanted to speak to you – that's why I happened along just now. Won't you come and we'll find her."

He told her how much he had liked her speech, as he led her across the room and chatted busily about other insignificant things, just as if rescuing a young girl from the brink of perdition was one of the most natural things in the world. Yetta was not at all hysterical, but she had had enough strange emotions to upset any one that night. His quiet steady tone, as if everything of course was all right, was like a rock to lean upon.

He left her in an empty committee-room off the stage and hurried out to find Mabel, who, as a matter of fact, had not sent him to find Yetta. With no small exertions he pried her loose from the swarm of admiring young girls, and, leading her to the door of the committee-room, told her what had happened.

"Good old Walter," she laughed; "warning me not to butt in, and doing the rescue all by yourself."

"I didn't butt in," he said sheepishly, "until the chap began to use force."

"Are muscles the only kind of force you recognize?" she said. "I'll bet he wasn't using half as much force when you interfered as he had other times without touching her."

She went into the committee-room and closed the door. And in a very few minutes Yetta was lost in the wonder of a friend. Hundreds of girls had sobbed out their troubles on Miss Train's shoulder before, but, although she made jokes to her friends about how tears faded her shirtwaists, none of the girls had ever failed to find a ready sympathy. Although the process had lost the charm of novelty to Mabel it was for Yetta a new and entirely wonderful experience. Not since her father had comforted her for a stubbed toe or a cut finger had she cried on anybody's shoulder. And Miss Train, as well

as Longman, had the tact, as soon as possible, to lead her thoughts away from the evening's tragedy to the new ideals which the meeting had called to life. As soon as her tears were dried, Mabel took her out in the main hall and introduced her to her friends. Longman came up and claimed a dance, and after it was over he sat beside her for a time and talked to her about labor unions and the struggle for Liberty. And then he called over Isadore Braun, the socialist lawyer, and had him dance with her. These two were her only partners at her first ball. Every few minutes Mabel managed to escape from her manifold duties and sit beside her.

About midnight they took her home. Longman shook hands with her, and Mabel kissed her good night. Yetta went up the dark stairway very tired and shaken.

CHAPTER VIII
NEW FRIENDS

"Interesting girl," Longman said as he and Miss Train turned away from Yetta's door.

"Yes. I'll have to keep an eye on her. She may be a valuable recruit."

Longman laughed.

"What's so funny?" she asked sharply.

"Funny isn't just the word, but don't you ever see anything in people except enemies and allies?"

"I don't think much else matters – enemies and allies. There can't be neutrals in a fight for Justice."

"True enough, but I see a lot of interesting things in this little girl of the slums, which haven't anything to do with the fact that she is chuck full of fighting spirit and is sure to be on the right side."

"For instance?"

"Well. To begin with, a sweet and pure character, which in some amazing way has formed itself in this rotten environment – a wonderfully delicate sort of a flower blossoming in the muck heap. The kind of a sensitive plant that the slightest rude touch would blight. It's a marvel how it has escaped being trod upon – there are so many careless feet! I'm not proud of myself as I am, but I hate to think of what I'd be like if I'd been born in her cradle. It is always a marvel to me when some child of the slum wants to be good. From where in all this sordidness did she get the inspiration? And then it is always interesting to me – sad and interesting – to see how utterly stupid this desire for goodness is – how it is just as likely to lead to utter damnation as anywhere else. This Yetta Rayefsky has a beautiful and quite absurd trust in people. On a very short acquaintance she trusts you completely. I think she trusts me too – just exactly as she trusted that Cadet. And the faith she put in him was just as beautiful as what she has given you."

"Walter, a person who looked at you would never dream that you're such a – "

"Sentimentalist? I suppose you're going to call me that again."

Longman said it bitterly. And she, knowing how the taunt would sting him, with equal bitterness did not reply. They trudged on side by side in silence, across town to Broadway and up that deserted thoroughfare towards Washington Square. They were neither of them happy.

In the bottom of her heart Mabel Train knew that something had been neglected by those fairies who had equipped her for life. They had showered very many talents upon her. But they had forgotten that little knot of nerve cells which had to do with the deeper affections. There were heights and depths of life which she knew she would never visit. It made her feel unpleasantly different. And Longman, whom otherwise she liked very much, was always reminding her of this deficiency. It seemed to her that he was mocking her cold intellectualism. And being supersensitive on this point, she had hurled "sentimentalist" in his face.

Of all the odd types in New York City, Walter Longman was one of the most bizarre. His parents had died while he was in Harvard. They had left him an income of about five thousand a year. He did not make a brilliant record in the University. There were nearly always one or two conditions hanging over his head, but a marked talent for languages and a vital interest in philosophy carried him through. He was not popular with the students because in spite of his immense body he could not muster sufficient interest in football to join the "squad." He preferred to sit in his window-seat and read.

In the course of his junior year he chanced in his haphazard reading upon a German scientific review which contained an account of some excavations in the territory of Ancient Assyria. It told of the discovery of a large quantity of "brick" books, in a language as yet undeciphered. The matter interested him, and he set out to find what the library contained on the subject. He was surprised at the amount of material there was. The story of how Rawlinson and others had deciphered unknown

languages fascinated him. He stayed on in Cambridge two months after graduation to finish up this subject. He found more information about the "brick" books which had first caught his attention. Several hundred of them had been brought to a museum in Berlin. Having nothing pressing to do in America, he went over to have a look at them. All the spoil from this expedition had been housed in one room. After studying the bricks for a couple of days, he thought he had found a clew. He could get more ready access to them if he was a student, so he went to the University and enrolled. He had no idea of staying long, nor of attending courses in the University, but his only plan for life in America was to write a book on philosophy, and that could wait.

The first "clew" proved to be an illusion. But those rows and rows of ancient bricks, with their cryptic writing which hid the story of a lost civilization, had piqued his curiosity. Again he decided that his work on philosophy could wait.

It was two years before he satisfactorily translated the first brick. Once having found the key, his progress was rapid. If he had been in touch with the Assyriologists of the University, he would probably have confided in them at once. But he knew none of them personally, and he went on with his work single-handed. It took him six months to translate the entire collection. They contained the official records of a certain King of kings, who had ruled over a long-forgotten people called the Haktites. It took him six months more to arrange a grammar and dictionary of the Haktite tongue. Then he remembered the University and took his two manuscripts to the Professor of Assyriology. He was decidedly provoked by the first scepticism which greeted his announcement, even more bored by the hullabaloo which the savants made over him, when investigation proved the truth of his claim. He stayed a year longer in Europe, to see an edition of his work through the press at Berlin and to translate the scattered Haktite bricks in other museums. This took him as far as Teheran and afield to the site of the excavations, where there were numerous inscriptions on the stonework which was too unwieldy to be taken to European museums. Then he came to New York to take up the position of Instructor in Assyriology in Columbia. He had stipulated that he should be granted a great deal of leisure. It was not a hard matter for the University to arrange, as there was no great clamor among the students to learn Haktite. But Longman had insisted on the leisure, so that he would have opportunity to write his book on philosophy, which seemed to him very serious and infinitely more important than the dead lore of his department. He was vexed with himself for having wasted so much time and acquired such fame in so useless a branch of human knowledge.

He established himself in the top floor of a two-story building on Washington Square, East. He took the place on a long lease, and making free with the partitions, had arranged a big study in the front overlooking the Square, a bath, a bedroom, and a kitchenette behind it. Two big rooms in the rear he sublet as storerooms to the carriage painter who rented the ground floor. Having a horror of servants, he made his own coffee in the morning and Signora Rocco, a worthy Italian woman, came in with a latch-key when he was out at lunch and put the place in order. Twice a week he had to go up to the University.

The rest of his time went to what he considered his real work. He was to call his book *A Synthetic Philosophy*. Hundreds of would-be sages had cut themselves off from all active communion with life, had retired to the seclusion of a study or cave, and had written solemn tomes on what Man ought to think. Longman was going to discover what his kind really did think. He went about it in a systematic, almost statistical way.

He had reduced the more important of the various possible human beliefs to twenty-odd propositions and many subheads, all of which he had had printed on a double sheet of foolscap. It began boldly by raising the question of Deity. From the heights of metaphysical discussion of the Existence, the Unity, and the Attributes of God, it came nearer to earth by inquiring into Heaven and a belief in a future existence. Again it soared up into the icy altitude of Pure Reason and the *Erkenntniss Theorie*. Again it swooped down to more practical questions of Ethics, what one considered the *summum bonum* and under what circumstances one conceded the right to suicide, and whether or

not one believed that every man has his price. Whenever Longman found willing subjects he cross-questioned them by the hour. From the notes he took he tabulated the victim's *credo* on one of the printed questionnaires and filed it away. Almost every one laughed at his idea, but with the same dogged momentum which had kept him bent for months on and over Assyrian bricks, which interested him only slightly, he stuck to this work which interested him deeply.

In a way he was especially fitted for it. Every one liked him and found it easy to talk freely with him. And he was quick to detect any cant or lack of sincerity. If he wrote "yes" after the question, "Do you believe it pays to be honest?" it was the subject's basic belief, not a pretence nor a pose. And he had a knack of putting his questions in simple, comprehensible language. The printed questionnaire bristled with appalling technical words. But he did not use such phrases as "ultimate reality," "the categorical imperative." He did not ask his subject if his idea of God was anthropomorphic. Very few of the people whose faith he analyzed would have understood such terms.

It was the essence of his proposition that he should tabulate the convictions of all sorts and conditions of men. And in his quest for varied points of view he had come into very close contact with a strange mixture of people. Into his "operating room," as Mabel Train derisively called his study, he had enticed college professors and policemen, well-bred young matrons and street-walkers. One of his sheets recorded the intimate convictions of the man downstairs who painted carriages; another, those of a famous opera singer. The Catholic Bishop of New York had undergone the ordeal and a Salvation Army lassie, who had knocked at his door to sell a *War-cry*, had come in to try to convert him. She had been very much distressed by his perplexing questions, but like all the rest had quickly fallen captive to his gentle manners and understanding eyes. She had dropped her missionary pose and had talked freely to him, not only of her beliefs, but also of her doubts.

Almost every one who had gone through the ordeal remembered it with a strange, awed sort of pleasure. It is so very rarely that we find any one to whom we can tell the truth.

There was a wreck of a man, an habitué of cheap lodging-houses and gin-mills, who would tell you the story on the slightest provocation. One cold October night when he had no money for a bed and was trying to live through the night on a park bench with a morning paper for a blanket, a man had asked him if he wanted a drink. Not suspecting the good fortune which had befallen him, he had followed Longman to the "operating room." First there had been a stiff bracer of whiskey – "good Scotch whiskey, sir," – and then a plentiful cold supper of bread and cheese and sardines and a steaming cup of coffee – "as much as I could eat, sir" – and a cigar – "as long as yer foot, sir. He was a real gentleman, sir, and he talked to me like I was a gentleman."

There was a young wife of an elderly professor. Some of the ladies of the faculty raised their eyebrows when her name was mentioned and did not go to her teas. She had been smitten by Longman's broad shoulders and gentle bearishness and had quite eagerly consented to come to his study. She did not tell anybody about it, but she cried when she thought about it – cried that he had not asked her again.

Whether or not Longman's book promised any great usefulness to humanity, the preparing of it was of undoubted use to him. He had seen life at close quarters, with what Mirabeau called "terrible intimacy." His heart had grown very large there in his "operating room." As well as he could he hid his ever ready sympathy under a surface joviality and flippancy. There were very few people beside Mabel who realized what a sentimentalist he was. He was a brother to Abou ben Adhem. And that love of his fellow-men necessarily brought him into bitter revolt against things as they are. But he had no collective sense; he loved his fellow men individually. He had no feeling for mass movements. Intellectually he realized the need of united activity, he believed in trade-unions and socialism. But the sight of a crowd always made him angry. He was an ardent apostle of the Social Revolution. But he could not work harmoniously with an organization. So the socialists called him an Anarchist. He did not care what he was called. But most of the difference between his very small living expenses and his liberal income found its way unobtrusively into some socialist or labor organization.

But for three years now Mabel Train had been the "Cause" to which he gave his devotion.

She was also of the class of those who, never having had to work, had volunteered in the cause of those who must. But she had done so in a more intense, thoroughgoing, and practical way than had Longman. She had given not only what money she could spare, but herself.

She was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, and having come under the influence of the able and daring group of economists on that faculty had been educated to a position in labor matters which is very nearly as radical as that of the socialists. One of her professors had told her that in all his experience in coeducation he had never encountered a woman with a more masculine brain. At the time she had felt complimented. She had, at twenty, been proud that she did not have hysterics, that her mind did not have "fainting fits," that she could tackle the problems of the class-room in the same graceless, uninspired, direct way that men did. At twenty-seven she was beginning to realize that life was not a class-room exercise and that there were certain inevitable problems of womanhood which could not be solved man-fashion. She felt herself cold in comparison to other women. The romances of the girls in college had rather disgusted her. At twenty-seven she would have given her right hand for the ability to lose her head like some of the shop-girls among whom she worked.

As a matter of fact the professor had been quite wrong in calling her intellect masculine – it was only a remarkably good one. It had the fearlessness to look the folly of our industrial system in the face and understand it. She had a deep womanliness which made it impossible for her to accept a manner of life which was in contradiction to her intellectual convictions. Thinking as she did that the relations between capital and labor were basically unjust, it was necessary for her to spend her life in the fight for justice.

What might be called "the normal mother instinct" had been denied her. Her woman's nature had turned into an ardent desire to "mother" the race. The babes who die unborn, those who are poisoned by bad milk, who wither up from bad air, whose growth is stunted by bad food – all the sad little children of the poor – were her own brood. She wrote rarely to her two blood sisters – she was the big sister of all the girls who are alone.

Her parents were entirely out of sympathy with her interest in working people. Principally to escape their ceaseless nagging, she had come East. For several years she had been the head of the Woman's Trade Union League. Her gentle breeding made her successful with the wealthy ladies on whom the League depended for support, the working girls idolized her, the rather rough men of the Central Federated Union had come to recognize that she never got up in meeting unless she had something to say. And the bosses complimented her ability by hating her cordially.

Most of the young men who tried to court her – and there was a constant stream of them, for she was a very attractive woman – fared badly. She was distressingly illusive. Her intellect was so lively that it was hard to admire her manifold charms. She wanted the people who talked to her to think. And she checked sentimentality with scornful laughter.

Things were further complicated for her would-be suitors by the fact that Mabel, when she was not very busy, was always accompanied by her room-mate Eleanor Mead. Eleanor did not look like a formidable duenna. She was of a pure pre-Raphaelite type. By profession she was an interior decorator, and her business card said, "Formerly with Liberty – Avenue de l'Opera, Paris." She carefully cultivated the appearance of an Esthete. She nearly always dressed in rich greens and old golds and was never truly happy except during the limited season when she could wear fresh daffodils in her girdle. She was clever at her work and gained a very good income, which she augmented by fashionable entertainments where she lectured in French on subjects of Art and sometimes gave mildly dramatic readings of Maeterlinck and other French mystics.

Most men found her style of beauty too watery. But one of the "Younger Choir" had taken her as his Muse and had dedicated a string of Petrarchian sonnets to her. Eleanor had been rather flattered by the tribute until the unlucky bard had been forced by the exigencies of his rhyme to say that she had "eyes of sapphire." People had begun to make sport of her "sapphire" eyes – they

did have a rather washed-out look – and had begun to call her "Sapphire." Most of Mabel's lovers shortened it disrespectfully to "Saph." She had given this aspiring versifier the sack, and his long hair was no longer to be seen in the highly decorated apartment on Washington Square, South.

Although her appearance was not at all dreadful, she was feared and hated by all Mabel's admirers. It was impossible to call on Miss Train – it was necessary to call on both of them. Without any open discourtesy, with a well-bred effort to hide her jealousy, Eleanor made the courting of her friend a hideous ordeal. Most aspirants dropped out of the race after a very few calls. But for three years Longman had held on. It had not taken him long to know what was the matter with him, and after two unsuccessful efforts to see Mabel alone and tell her about it, he went one night to the flat with grim resolution.

"Miss Mead," he said abruptly on entering, "I've got something very important I want to say to Miss Train. I want to ask her to marry me. Will you be so kind – ?"

He opened the door leading into the dining-room. His manner had been irresistible. And Eleanor with her head in the air had sailed out past him. He shut the door carefully. All the evening long, Eleanor knelt down outside it, with her ear glued to the keyhole. But she heard nothing to distress her.

Longman got no satisfaction. Mabel had rejected his offer as decisively as possible. But he had refused to be discouraged. The third time that he forced a proposal on her, it had made her angry and she had said that she did not care to see him again. A few days later she received a very humble letter from him. He pleaded for a chance to be her friend, and solemnly promised not to say a word of love for six months. She had not answered it, but the next Sunday he came to the flat for tea. They had drifted into a close but unsound friendship. Eleanor's dislike for him was so evident – she maintained that the way he had banished her to the dining-room proved that he was no gentleman – that he very rarely went to their apartment. But on every possible occasion he met Mabel outside. The people who saw him at her side, night after night at labor meetings, assumed that they were engaged. This added intimacy only whetted Longman's love. From bodyguard he fell to the position of slave. He ran errands for her.

With the masculine attitude towards such matters he did not believe that she would accept such untiring service if there was no hope.

When at the end of the stipulated six months she refused him again, – just as coldly as at first, – it was a bitter surprise to him. If a man had acted so, Longman would have unhesitatingly called him a cad.

He went away to the mountains to think it out. In a week he was back, proposing again. Once more she became angry. When she said "no," she meant "no." She did not want to marry him and did not think she ever would. He had asked to be her friend. Well. She enjoyed his friendship, but if he was going to bother her every few days with distasteful proposals of marriage it made friendship impossible. For two weeks he struggled with himself in solitude, torn between his desire to see her and his pride. Then he went to a meeting where he knew she would speak and walked home with her.

So it had recommenced and so it had continued – in all three years. A deep camaraderie had grown between them. They knew each other better than many couples who have been married twice as long. But Longman could see no progress towards the consummation he so earnestly desired. During the three years there had been alternate moods of hope and despair. At times he thought she surely must come to love him. At other times the half loaf of intercourse tasted bitter as quinine. He told himself that he was a weak fool, a spectacle for the gods to laugh at, hanging to the skirts of a woman who had no care for him. At times he said, "Let all the rest go hang, to-day's sweet friendship is better than nothing." There were sad and angry moments when he paced up and down in his study and cursed her and himself and his infatuation – and the next moment he wanted to kiss the dust she had trod upon.

But steadily the torment of their relationship grew worse. More and more insistent had become the idea of going away. Perhaps she would miss his friendship and call him back. But he had been too deeply enslaved to dare so drastic a revolt. However, that morning had brought him mail which had suddenly crystallized this idea. He had resolved to put it to the test.

"Mabel," he said as they entered Washington Square, "if you're not too tired let's go up to the Lafayette for a while. I've got something important to talk over with you."

A look of vexation crossed her face, which, with quick and painful sensitiveness, he interpreted.

"No," he said gravely, "I won't bore you with any professions of affection. It's a business matter on which I'd like your advice."

"Why not come up to the flat; we've some beer, and Eleanor's been making some fudge. It's more comfortable than that noisy café."

"Very well, then," he said stiffly. "I'll leave you at your door."

"Now, Walter – don't be a fool. What are you so sour about to-night? You haven't opened your mouth for six blocks."

"You know very well that I can't talk with "Saph" on the job – she hates me. I'd like to talk this over with you."

"All right," she said, shaking his arm to cheer him up. "But don't be quite so grumpy, just because I called you a sentimentalist."

Over the marble-topped table in the café, he told her that a letter had come inviting him to join an expedition, organized by the French Government, to excavate some Haktite ruins in Persia. From the point of view of an Assyriologist it was a flattering offer; they had selected him as the most eminent American in that department. But it would be a three or four years' undertaking in one of the most inaccessible corners of the globe. They would probably get mail no oftener than two or three times a year. And after all he was more interested in the thoughts of live men than in mummies and cuneiform inscriptions. It would stop his work on philosophy.

"In fact, Mabel," he ended, "there is only one thing that makes me think of accepting. I can't stand this. I don't want to bring up the forbidden subject. But I'm tired – worn out – with hiding it. If I stay here in New York, I'm sure to – bore you."

He tried to smile lightly, but it was not much better than the smile with which we ask the dentist if it is going to hurt. Mabel dug about in her *café parfait* for a moment without replying. She understood all the things he had not said. At last she did the unselfish, the kindly thing, which, if she had been a man, she would have done long before. She sent him away.

"It looks to me like a great opportunity. It isn't only an honor for past achievements, but a chance for new and greater ones. Sometimes I poke fun at your Synthetic Philosophy, but seriously I don't think it is as big a thing as your Assyriology. Whether you like it or not the Fates have given you a talent for that. Your wanting to do something else – write philosophy – always seems to me like a great violinist who wants to be a jockey or chauffeur. You're really at the very top as an Assyriologist. It's not only me – but most of your friends – think you have more talent for that. I think you'd best accept it."

Longman swallowed his medicine like a man. A few minutes later he left Mabel at her door.

She found "Saph" stretched out *à la Mme. Récamier* on the dull green Empire sofa.

"Will you never get out of the habit of staying to sweep up after the ball?" she asked languidly.

"I haven't been sweeping up," Mabel replied; "I've been over at the Lafayette with Walter. Now don't begin to sulk," she went on; "he's been telling me great news. The French Government has asked him to go on one of their expeditions to Central Asia. He's going."

"Goody," Eleanor cried, jumping up. "I'm glad!"

"I'm not," Mabel said; "I'll miss him no end."

"Mabel Train, I believe you're in love with that man."

"No, I'm not. And I'm half sorry I'm not. I'm tired, done up. Good night."

"Don't you want some fudge? – it turned out fine."

"No. Goodnight."

Mabel did not exactly bang her bedroom door, but she certainly shut it decisively, and for more than an hour sat by her window, watching the ceaseless movement in the Square. Once she saw Longman walk under an arc-light. His head was bent, his hands deep in his pockets. Although the sight of him left her quite cold, her eyes filled with tears as they had not done for years. It was just because the sight of him left her cold that tears came.

CHAPTER IX
YETTA ENLISTS

Yetta did not fall asleep readily after the ball. Her mind was a turmoil. If she tried to fix her attention on this question of Liberty which had stirred her so deeply, she was suddenly thrown into confusion by a memory of the cold fear which Harry Klein's hard eyes and brutal grip had caused her. She felt that she must think out her relationship with him clearly if she was ever to be free from fear, but again this problem would be disturbed by the thought of her wonderful new friends.

Sleep when it came at last was so heavy that she did not wake at the accustomed hour in the morning. When Mrs. Goldstein came into the bedroom to rouse her, she was startled by the sight of the new hat and white shoes, which Yetta had been too excited the night before to hide.

The first thing Yetta knew, there was a great commotion in her room. Her uncle and aunt, neither more than half dressed, were accusing her loudly of her crime and heaping maledictions on her head. It was several minutes before Yetta fully awoke to the situation. And when she did, a strange transformation had taken place within her; she was no longer afraid of the sorry couple.

"Yes," she said, sitting up in bed, drawing the blanket about her shoulders, "I went to a ball. If you don't like it, I'll find some other place to live."

The garrulous old couple fell silent. Goldstein's resentment against his daughter Rachel was fully as much because she had stopped bringing him money to get drunk on as because she had "gone wrong." After a minute's amazement at Yetta's sudden display of independence, they began a sing-song duet about ingratitude. Had they not done everything for her? Taken her in when she was a penniless orphan? Clothed and fed and sheltered her?

"And haven't I paid you all my wages for four years?" she replied. "Go away. I want to get dressed."

At the shop Yetta found that the story of her speech had been spread by one of the girls at the second table who had been at the ball. Fortunately this girl had not witnessed the scene with Harry Klein. Yetta found the women at her table discussing the matter in whispers when she arrived. In the moment before the motor started the day's work, the bovine Mrs. Levy told her that she was a fool.

"You've got a good job," she said. "You'll make trouble with your bread and butter. You're a fool."

"Better be careful," the cheerful Mrs. Weinstein advised. "Don't I know? My husband's a union man. Of course the unions are right, but they make trouble."

"It ain't no use," the sad and worn Mrs. Cohen coughed from the foot of the table. "There ain't nothing that'll do any good. Women ain't got no chance."

The motor began with a roar.

It is a strange fact of life, how sometimes a sudden light will be turned on a familiar environment, making it all seem new and entirely different from what we are accustomed to. Four years Yetta had worked in that shop. She had accepted it all as an inevitability, which no more admitted change or "reform" than the courses of the stars. The speeches to which she had listened made it suddenly appear in its true human aspect. It was no longer a thing unalterable, it was an invention of human greed. It was a laboratory where, instead of base metals, the blood of women and young girls was transmuted into gold. The alchemists had failed to find the Philosopher's Stone. The sweat-shop was a modern substitute. It was a contrivance by which such priceless things as youth and health and the hope of the next generation could be coined into good and lawful money of the realm.

Her nimble fingers flying subconsciously at the terrible speed through the accustomed motions, Yetta saw all the grim reality of the shop as never before. She saw the broken door to the shamefully filthy toilet, saw the closed, unwashed windows, which meant vitiated, tuberculosis-laden air, saw the backs of the women bent into unhealthy attitudes, saw the strained look in their eyes. More vaguely

she saw a vision of the might-be life of these women, – clean homes and happy children. And behind her she felt the existence of the "office", where Jake Goldfogle sat and watched them through his spying window, and contrived new fines. And even more clearly than when she had made her speech, she saw her own function in this infernal scheme of greed, saw herself a lieutenant of the slave-driver behind her. She wondered if the other women hated her as she deserved to be hated. But habit is a hard thing to break, and her fingers sped on as of old.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.