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THE ANCIENT LAW

Ellen Glasgow
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Содержание

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BOOK FIRST
THE NEW LIFE

CHAPTER I
The Road

THOUGH it was six days since Daniel Ordway had come out of prison, he was aware, when he reached the brow of the hill, and stopped to look back over the sunny Virginia road, that he drank in the wind as if it were his first breath of freedom. At his feet the road dropped between two low hills beyond which swept a high, rolling sea of broomsedge; and farther still – where the distance melted gradually into the blue sky – he could see not less plainly the New York streets through which he had gone from his trial and the walls of the prison where he had served five years. Between this memory and the deserted look of the red clay road there was the abrupt division which separates actual experience from the objects in a dream. He felt that he was awake, yet it seemed that the country through which he walked must vanish

presently at a touch. Even the rough March wind blowing among the broomsedge heightened rather than diminished the effect of the visionary meeting of earth and sky.

As he stood there in his ill-fitting clothes, with his head bared in the sun and the red clay ground to fine dust on his coarse boots, it would have been difficult at a casual glance to have grouped him appropriately in any division of class. He might have been either a gentleman who had turned tramp or a tramp who had been born to look a gentleman. Though he was barely above medium height, his figure produced even in repose an impression of great muscular strength, and this impression was repeated in his large, regular, and singularly expressive features. His face was square with a powerful and rather prominent mouth and chin; the brows were heavily marked and the eyes were of so bright a blue that they lent an effect which was almost one of gaiety to his smile. In his dark and slightly coarsened face the colour of his eyes was intensified until they appeared to flash at times like blue lights under his thick black brows. His age was, perhaps, forty years, though at fifty there would probably be but little change recorded in his appearance. At thirty one might have found, doubtless, the same lines of suffering upon his forehead and about his mouth.

As he went on over some rotting planks which spanned a stream that had gone dry, the road he followed was visible as a faded scar in a stretch of impoverished, neutral-toned country – the least distinctive and most isolated part of what is known in

Virginia as "the Southside." A bleached monotony was the one noticeable characteristic of the landscape – the pale clay road, the dried broomsedge, and even the brownish, circular-shaped cloud of smoke, which hung over the little town in the distance, each contributing a depressing feature to a face which presented at best an unrelieved flatness of colour. The single high note in the dull perspective was struck by a clump of sassafras, which, mistaking the mild weather for a genial April, had flowered tremulously in gorgeous yellow.

The sound of a wagon jolting over the rough road, reached him presently from the top of the hill, and as he glanced back, he heard a drawling curse thrown to the panting horses. A moment later he was overtaken by an open spring wagon filled with dried tobacco plants of the last season's crop. In the centre of the load, which gave out a stale, pungent odour, sat a small middle-aged countryman, who swore mild oaths in a pleasant, jesting tone. From time to time, as the stalks beneath him were jostled out of place, he would shift his seat and spread out his short legs clad in overalls of blue jean. Behind him in the road the wind tossed scattered and damaged leaves of tobacco.

When the wagon reached Ordway, he glanced over his shoulder at the driver, while he turned into the small grass-grown path amid the clumps of sassafras.

"Is that Bernardsville over there?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the cloud of smoke.

The wagon drew up quickly and the driver – who showed at

nearer view to be a dirty, red-bearded farmer of the poorer class – stared at him with an expression which settled into suspicion before it had time to denote surprise.

"Bernardsville! Why, you've come a good forty miles out of your road. That thar's Tappahannock."

"Tappahannock? I hadn't heard of it."

"Mebbe you ain't, but it never knowed it."

"Anything going on there? Work, I mean?"

"The biggest shippin' of tobaccy this side o' Danville is goin' on thar. Ever heard o' Danville?"

"I know the name, but the tobacco market is about closed now, isn't it? The season's over."

The man's laugh startled the waiting horses, and lifting their heads from a budding bush by the roadside, they moved patiently toward Tappahannock.

"Closed? Bless you, it never closes – Whoa! thar, won't you, darn you? To be sure sales ain't so brisk to-day as they war a month back, but I'm jest carryin' in my leetle crop to Baxter's warehouse."

"It isn't manufactured, then – only bought and sold?"

"Oh, it's sold quick enough and bought, too. Baxter auctions the leaf off in lots and it's shipped to the factories in Richmond an' in Danville. You ain't a native of these parts, I reckon?"

"A native – no? I'm looking for work."

"What sort of work? Thar's work an' work. I saw a man once settin' out in an old field doin' a picture of a pine tree,

an' he called it work. Wall, wall, if you're goin' all the way to Tappahannock, I reckon I kin give you a lift along. Mebbe you kin pick up an odd job in Baxter's warehouse – thar's a sayin' that he feeds all the crows in Tappahannock."

He drove on with a chuckle, for Ordway had declined the proffered "lift," and the little cloud of dust raised by the wagon drifted slowly in the direction of the town.

A mile farther on Ordway found that as the road approached Tappahannock, the country lost gradually its aspect of loneliness, and the colourless fields were dotted here and there with small Negro cabins, built for the most part of unbarked pine logs laid roughly cross-wise to form square enclosures. Before one of these primitive dwellings a large black woman, with a strip of checked blue and white gingham bound about her head, was emptying a pail of buttermilk into a wooden trough. When she saw Ordway she nodded to him from the end of the little path, bordered by rocks, which led from the roadside to the single stone step before her cabin door.

As he watched the buttermilk splash into the trough, Ordway remembered, with a spasm of faintness, that he had eaten nothing since the day before, and turning out of the road, he asked the woman for a share of the supper that she gave the pigs.

"Go 'way, honey, dis yer ain' fit'n fur you," she replied, resting the pail under her arm against her rolling hip, "I'se des' thowin' hit ter de hawgs."

But when he had repeated his request, she motioned to a

wooden bench beside a scrubby lilac bush on which a coloured shirt hung drying, and going into the single room inside, brought him a glass of buttermilk and a piece of corn bread on a tin plate. While he ate hungrily of the coarse food a half-naked Negro baby, covered with wood ashes, rolled across the threshold and lay sprawling in the path at his feet.

After a little rambling talk the woman went back into the cabin, where she whipped up cornmeal dough in an earthenware bowl, turning at intervals to toss a scrap or two to a red and white cock that hovered, expectant, about the doorway. In the road a covered wagon crawled by, and the shadow it threw stretched along the path to the lilac bush where the coloured shirt hung drying. The pigs drank the buttermilk from the trough with loud grunts; the red and white cock ventured, alert and wary, across the threshold; and the Negro baby, after sprawling on its stomach in the warm earth, rolled over and lay staring in silence at the blue sky overhead.

There was little beauty in the scene except the beauty which belongs to all things under the open sky. Road and landscape and cabin were bare even of any chance effect of light and shadow. Yet there was life – the raw, primal life of nature – and after his forty years of wasted experience, Ordway was filled with a passionate desire for life. In his careless pursuit of happiness he had often found weariness instead, but sitting now homeless and penniless, before the negro's cabin, he discovered that each object at which he looked – the long road that led somewhere,

the smoke hanging above the distant town, the deep-bosomed negro mother and the half-naked negro baby – that each of these possessed an interest to which he awakened almost with a start of wonder. And yielding to the influence of his thought, his features appeared to lose gradually their surface coarseness of line. It was as if his mouth grew vague, enveloped in shadow, while the eyes dominated the entire face and softened its expression to one of sweetness, gaiety and youth. The child that is in every man big enough to contain it looked out suddenly from his altered face.

He was thinking now of a day in his boyhood – of an early autumn morning when the frost was white on the grass and the chestnuts dropped heavily from the spreading boughs and the cider smelt strong and sweet as it oozed from the crushed winesaps. On that morning, after dressing by candlelight, he had gone into town with his maiden aunt, a lady whom he remembered chiefly by her false gray curls which she wore as if they had been a halo. At the wayside station, while they had waited for the train to the little city of Botetourt, he had seen a convict brought in, handcuffed, on his way to the penitentiary, and in response to the boy's persistent questioning, his aunt had told him that the man was wicked, though he appeared to the child's eyes to be only miserable – a thin, dirty, poorly clad labourer with a red cotton handkerchief bound tightly about his jaw. A severe toothache had evidently attacked him, for while he had stared sullenly at the bare planks of the floor, he had made from time to time a suffering, irritable movement with his

head. At each gesture the guard had called out sharply: "Keep still there, won't you?" to which the convict had responded by a savage lowering of his heavy brows.

For the first time it had occurred to the child that day that there must be a strange contradiction – a fundamental injustice in the universal scheme of nature. He had always been what his father had called impatiently "a boy with ideas," and it had seemed to him then that this last "idea" of his was far the most wonderful of them all – more wonderful than any he had found in books or in his own head at night. At the moment he had felt it swell so large in his heart that a glow of happiness had spread through his body to his trembling hands. Slipping from his aunt's hold he had crossed the room to where the convict sat sullenly beside his guard.

"I'll give you all my money," he had cried out joyously, "because I am so much happier than you."

The convict had started and looked up with an angry flash in his eyes; the guard had burst into a loud laugh while he spat tobacco juice through the window; the silver had scattered and rolled under the benches on the plank floor; and the child's aunt, rustling over in her stiff brocade, had seized his arm and dragged him, weeping loudly, into the train. So his first mission had failed, yet at this day he could remember the joy with which he had stretched out his little hand and the humiliation in which he had drawn it back. That was thirty years ago, but he wondered now if the child's way had been God's way, after all?

For there had come an hour in his life when the convict of his boyhood had stood in closer relationship to his misery than the people whom he had touched in the street. His childish memories scattered like mist, and the three great milestones of his past showed bare and white, as his success, his temptation and his fall. He remembered the careless ambition of his early youth, the brilliant promise of his college years, and the day on which he had entered as a younger member the great banking house of Amos, Bonner, and Amos. Between this day and the slow minutes when he had stood in his wife's sitting-room awaiting his arrest, he could find in his thoughts no gradation of years to mark the terrible swiftness of his descent. In that time which he could not divide Wall Street had reached out and sucked him in; the fever of speculation had consumed like disease the hereditary instincts, the sentiments of honour, which had barred its way. One minute he had stood a rich man on the floor of the Stock Exchange – and was it an instant or a century afterwards that he had gone out into the street and had known himself to be a beggar and a criminal? Other men had made millions with the use of money which they held in trust; but the star of the gambler had deserted him at the critical hour; and where other men had won and triumphed, he had gone down, he told himself, dishonoured by a stroke of luck. In his office that day a mirror over the mantel had showed him his face as he entered, and he had stopped to look at it almost with curiosity – as if it were the face of a stranger which repelled him because it bore some sinister likeness to his

own. After this there had come days, weeks, months, when at each sudden word, at each opening of the door, he had started, half sickened, by fear of the discovery which he knew must come. His nerves had quivered and given way under the pressure; he had grown morose, irritable, silent; and in some half-insane frenzy, he had imagined that his friends, his family, his wife, even his young children, had begun to regard him with terror and suspicion. But at last the hour had come, and in the strength with which he had risen to meet it, he had won back almost his old self – for courage, not patience, was the particular virtue of his temperament. He had stood his trial bravely, had heard his sentence without a tremor, and had borne his punishment without complaint. The world and he were quits now, and he felt that it owed him at least the room for a fair fight.

The prison, he had said once, had squared him with his destiny, yet to-day each act of his past appeared to rivet, not itself, but its result upon his life. Though he told himself that he was free, he knew that, in the reality of things, he was still a prisoner. From the lowest depths that he had touched he was reached even now by the agony of his most terrible moment when, at the end of his first hopeless month, he had found awaiting him one day a letter from his wife. It was her final good-bye, she had written; on the morrow she would leave with her two children for his father's home in Virginia; and the single condition upon which the old man had consented to provide for them was that she should separate herself entirely from her husband. "The

condition is hard," she had added, "made harder, too, by the fact that you are his son and my only real claim upon him is through you – yet when you consider the failure of our life together, and that the children's education even is unprovided for, you will, I feel sure, admit that my decision has been a wise one."

The words had dissolved and vanished before his eyes, and turning away he had flung himself on his prison bed, while the hard, dry sobs had quivered like blows in his chest. Yet she was right! His judgment had acquitted her in the first agony of his reproach, and the unerring justice in her decision had convicted him with each smooth, calm sentence in her letter. As he lay there he had lost consciousness of the bare walls and the hot sunshine that fell through the grating, for the ultimate desolation had closed over him like black waters.

A little later he had gone from his cell and taken up his life again; but all that he remembered of it now was a voice that had called to him in the prison yard.

"You look so darn sunk in the mouth I'll let you have my last smoke – damn you!"

Turning sullenly he had accepted the stranger's tobacco, unaware at the moment that he was partaking of the nature of a sacrament – for while he had smoked there in his dogged misery, he had felt revive in his heart a stir of sympathy for the convict he had seen at the wayside station in Virginia. As if revealed by an inner illumination the impressions of that morning had started, clear as light, into his brain. The frost on the grass, the dropping

chestnuts, the strong sweet smell of the crushed winesaps – these things surrounded in his memory the wretched figure of the man with the red cotton handkerchief bound tightly about his swollen jaw. But the figure had ceased now to stand for itself and for its own degradation alone – haunting, tragic, colossal, it had become in his thoughts the image of all those who suffer and are oppressed. So through his sin and his remorse, Ordway had travelled slowly toward the vision of service.

With a word of thanks to the woman, he rose from the bench and went down the little path and out into the road. The wind had changed suddenly, and as he emerged from the shelter of a thicket, it struck against his face with a biting edge. Where the sun had declined in the western sky, heavy clouds were driving close above the broken line of the horizon. The night promised to be cold, and he pushed on rapidly, urged by a feeling that the little town before him held rest and comfort and the new life beneath its smoking chimneys. Walking was less difficult now, for the road showed signs of travel as it approached the scattered houses, which appeared thrust into community by the surrounding isolation of the fields. At last, as he ascended a slight elevation, he found that the village, screened by a small grove of pines, lay immediately beneath the spot upon which he stood.

CHAPTER II
The Night

THE scattered houses closed together in groups, the road descended gradually into a hollow, and emerging on the opposite side, became a street, and the street slouched lazily downhill to where a railroad track ran straight as a seam across the bare country. Quickening his steps, Ordway came presently to the station – a small wooden building newly painted a brilliant yellow – and pushed his way with difficulty through a crowd of Negroes that had gathered closely beside the waiting train.

"Thar's a good three hundred of the critters going to a factory in the North," remarked a man behind him, "an' yit they don't leave more'n a speck of white in the county. Between the crows an' the darkies I'll be blamed if you can see the colour of the soil."

The air was heavy with hot, close smells – a mingling of smoke, tobacco, dust and humanity. A wailing sound issued from the windows of the cars where the dark faces were packed tightly together, and a tall Negro, black as ebony, in a red shirt open at the throat, began strumming excitedly upon a banjo. Near him a mulatto woman lifted a shrill soprano voice, while she stood beating the air distractedly with her open palms. On the other side of the station a dog howled, and the engine uttered an angry whistle as if impatient of the delay.

After five years of prison discipline, the ugly little town

appeared to Ordway to contain an alluring promise of freedom. At the instant the animation in the scene spoke to his blood as if it had been beauty, and movement seemed to him to possess some peculiar æsthetic quality apart from form or colour. The brightly dyed calicos on the Negro women; the shining black faces of the men, smooth as ebony; the tragic primitive voices, like voices imprisoned in the soil; the strumming of the rude banjo; the whistling engine and the howling dog; the odours of smoke and dust and fertilisers – all these things blended in his senses to form an intoxicating impression of life. Nothing that could move or utter sounds or lend a spot of colour appeared common or insignificant to his awakened brain. It was all life, and for five years he had been starved in every sense and instinct.

The main street – Warehouse Street, as he found later that it was called – appeared in the distance as a broad river of dust which ran from the little station to where the warehouses and small shops gave place to the larger dwellings which presided pleasantly over the neighbouring fields. As Ordway followed the board sidewalk, he began idly reading the signs over the shops he passed, until "Kelly's Saloon," and "Baker's General Store" brought him suddenly upon a dark oblong building which ran back, under a faded brick archway. Before the entrance several men were seated in cane chairs, which they had tilted conveniently against the wall, and at Ordway's approach they edged slightly away and sat regarding him over their pipes with an expression of curiosity which differed so little in the different

faces that it appeared to result from some internal automatic spring.

"I beg your pardon," he began after a moment's hesitation, "but I was told that I might find work in Baxter's warehouse."

"Well, it's a first-rate habit not to believe everything you're told," responded an enormous man, in half-soiled clothes, who sat smoking in the middle of the archway. "I can't find work myself in Baxter's warehouse at this season. Ain't that so, boys?" he enquired with a good-natured chuckle of his neighbours.

"Are you Mr. Baxter?" asked Ordway shortly.

"I'm not sure about the Mister, but I'm Baxter all right." He had shifted his pipe to the extreme corner of his mouth as he spoke, and now removing it with what seemed an effort, he sat prodding the ashes with his stubby thumb. His face, as he glanced down, was overspread by a flabbiness which appeared to belong to expression rather than to feature.

"Then there's no chance for me?" enquired Ordway.

"You might try the cotton mills – they's just down the next street. If there's a job to be had in town you'll most likely run up against it there."

"It's no better than a wild goose chase you're sending him on, Baxter," remarked a smaller member of the group, whose head protruded unexpectedly above Baxter's enormous shoulder; "I was talking to Jasper Trend this morning and he told me he was turning away men every day. Whew! but this wind is getting too bitter for me, boys."

"Oh, there's no harm can come of trying," insisted the cheerful giant, pushing back his chair as the others retreated out of the wind, "if hope doesn't fill the stomach it keeps the heart up, and that's something."

His great laugh rolled out, following Ordway along the street as he went in pursuit of the fugitive opportunity which disported itself now in the cotton factory at the foot of the hill. When he reached the doors the work of the day was already over, and a crowd of operatives surged through the entrance and overflowed into the two roads which led by opposite ways into the town. Drawing to one side of the swinging doors, he stood watching the throng a moment before he could summon courage to enter the building and inquire for the office of the manager. When he did so at last it was with an almost boyish feeling of hesitation.

The manager – a small, wiry man with a wart on the end of his long nose – was hurriedly piling papers into his desk before closing the factory and going home to supper. His hands moved impatiently, almost angrily, for he remembered that he had already worked overtime and that the muffins his wife had promised him for supper would be cold. At any other hour of the day he would have received Ordway with politeness – for he was at heart a well-disposed and even a charitable person – but it happened that his dinner had been unsatisfactory (his mutton had been served half raw by a new maid of all-work) and he had particularly set his hopes upon the delicious light muffins in which his wife excelled. So when he saw Ordway

standing between him and his release, his face grew black and the movements of his hands passed to jerks of frantic irritation.

"What do you want? Say it quick – I've no time to talk," he began, as he pushed the last heap of papers inside, and let the lid of his desk fall with a bang.

"I'm looking for work," said Ordway, "and I was told at Baxter's warehouse – "

"Darn Baxter. What kind of work do you want?"

"I'll take anything – I can do bookkeeping or – "

"Well, I don't want a bookkeeper."

He locked his desk, and turning to take down his hat, was incensed further by discovering that it was not on the hook where he had placed it when he came in. Finding it at last on a heap of reports in the corner, he put it on his head and stared at Ordway, with his angry eyes.

"You must have come a long way – haven't you? Mostly on foot?"

"A good distance."

"Why did you select Tappahannock? Was there any reason?"

"I wanted to try the town, that was all."

"Well, I tell you what, my man," concluded the manager, while his rage boiled over in the added instants of his delay; "there have been a blamed sight too many of your kind trying Tappahannock of late – and the best thing you can do is to move on to a less particular place. When we want bookkeepers here we don't pick 'em up out of the road."

Ordway swallowed hard, and his hands clinched in a return of one of his boyish spasms of temper. His vision of the new life was for an instant defaced and clouded; then as he met the angry little eyes of the man before him, he felt that his rage went out of him as suddenly as it had come. Turning without a word, he passed through the entrance and out into the road, which led back, by groups of negro hovels, into the main street of the town.

His anger gave place to helplessness; and it seemed to him, when he reached presently the larger dwellings upon the hill, and walked slowly past the squares of light that shone through the unshuttered windows, that he was more absolutely alone than if he had stood miles away from any human habitation. The outward nearness had become in his thoughts the measure of the inner distance. He felt himself to be detached from humanity, yet he knew that in his heart there existed a stronger bond than he had ever admitted in the years of his prosperity. The generous impulses of his youth were still there, but had not sorrow winnowed them from all that was base or merely selfish? Was the lesson that he had learned in prison to be wholly lost? Did the knowledge he had found there count for nothing in his life – the bitterness of shame, the agony of remorse, the companionship with misery? He remembered a Sunday in the prison when he had listened to a sermon from a misshapen little preacher, whose face was drawn sideways by a burn which he had suffered during an epileptic seizure in his childhood. In spite of his grotesque features the man had drawn Ordway by some

invisible power which he had felt even then to be the power of faith. Crippled, distorted, poorly clad, the little preacher, he felt, had found the great possession which he was still seeking – this man believed with a belief that was larger than the external things which he had lost. When he shut his eyes now he could still see the rows of convicts in the chapel, the pale, greenish light in which each face resembled the face of a corpse, the open Bible in its black leather binding, and beside it the grotesque figure of the little preacher who had come, like his Master, to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

The sun had dropped like a ball below the gray horizon, and the raw March wind, when it struck him now, brought no longer the exhilaration of the afternoon. A man passed him, comfortable, well-fed, wheezing slightly, with his fat neck wrapped in a woollen muffler, and as he stopped before a whitewashed gate, which opened into the garden surrounding a large, freshly painted house, Ordway touched his arm and spoke to him in a voice that had fallen almost to a whisper.

At his words, which were ordinary enough, the man turned on him a face which had paled slightly from surprise or fear. In the twilight Ordway could see his jaw drop while he fumbled awkwardly with his gloved hands at the latch of the gate.

"I don't know what you mean – I don't know" he repeated in a wheezing voice, "I'm sorry, but I really don't know," he insisted again as if in a helpless effort to be understood. Once inside the garden, he closed the gate with a bang behind him, and went

rapidly up the gravelled walk to the long piazza where the light of a lamp under a red shade streamed through the open door.

Turning away Ordway followed the street to the end of the town, where it passed without distinct change of character into the country road. On this side the colour of the soil had paled until it looked almost blanched under the rising moon. Though the twilight was already in possession of the fields a thin red line was still visible low in the west, and beneath this the scattered lights in negro cabins shone like obscure, greenish glow-worms, hidden among clumps of sassafras or in stretches of dried broomsedge. As Ordway looked at these humble dwellings, it seemed to him that they might afford a hospitality denied him by the more imposing houses of the town. He had already eaten of the Negro's charity, and it was possible that before dawn he might be compelled to eat of it again.

Beneath his feet the long road called to him as it wound a curving white line drawn through the vague darkness of the landscape. Somewhere in a distant pasture a bull bellowed, and the sound came to him like the plaintive voice of the abandoned fields. While he listened the response of his tired feet to the road appeared to him as madness, and stopping short, he turned quickly and looked back in the direction of Tappahannock. But from the spot on which he stood the lights of the town offered little promise of hospitality, so after an uncertain glance, he moved on again to a bare, open place where two roads met and crossed at the foot of a blasted pine. A few steps farther he

discovered that a ruined gate stood immediately on his right, and beyond the crumbling brick pillars, he made out dimly the outlines of several fallen bodies, which proved upon nearer view to be the prostrate forms of giant cedars. An avenue had once led, he gathered, from the gate to a house situated somewhere at the end of the long curve, for the great trees lying across the road must have stood once as the guardians of an estate of no little value. Whether the cedars had succumbed at last to age or to the axe of the destroyer, it was too dark at the moment for him to ascertain; but the earth had claimed them now, magnificent even in their ruin, while under the dim tent of sky beyond, he could still discern their living companions of a hundred years. So impressive was the past splendour of this approach that the house seemed, when he reached it, almost an affront to the mansion which his imagination had reared. Broad, low, built of brick, with two long irregular wings embedded in English ivy, and a rotting shingled roof that sloped over dormered windows, its most striking characteristic as he first perceived it under the moonlight was the sentiment which is inevitably associated with age and decay. Never imposing, the dwelling was now barely habitable, for the roof was sagging in places over the long wings, a chimney had fallen upon one of the moss-covered eaves, the stone steps of the porch were hollowed into dangerous channels, and the ground before the door was strewn with scattered chips from a neighbouring wood pile.

The air of desolation was so complete that at first Ordway

supposed the place to be uninhabited, but discovering a light presently in one of the upper windows, he ascended the steps and beat with the rusted knocker on the panel of the door. For several minutes there was no answer to his knock. Then the sound of shuffling footsteps reached him from the distance, drawing gradually nearer until they stopped immediately beyond the threshold.

"I ain' gwine open dis yer do' ef'n hits oner dem ole hants," said a voice within, while a sharp point of light pierced through the keyhole.

An instant later, in response to Ordway's assurance of his bodily reality, the bolt creaked back with an effort and the door opened far enough to admit the slovenly head and shoulders of an aged negress.

"Miss Meely she's laid up en she cyar'n see ner comp'ny, Marster," she announced with the evident intention of retreating as soon as her message was delivered.

Her purpose, however, was defeated, for, slipping his heavy boot into the crack of the door, Ordway faced her under the lamp which she held high above her head. In the shadows beyond he could see dimly the bare old hall and the great winding staircase which led to the painted railing of the gallery above.

"Can you give me shelter for the night?" he asked, "I am a stranger in the county, and I've walked thirty miles to-day."

"Miss Meely don' wan'ner comp'ny," replied the negress, while her head, in its faded cotton handkerchief, appeared to

swing like a pendulum before his exhausted eyes.

"Who is Miss Meely?" he demanded, laying his hand upon her apron as she made a sudden terrified motion of flight.

"Miss Meely Brooke – Marse Edward's daughter. He's daid."

"Well, go and ask her. I'll wait here on the porch until you return."

Her eyelids flickered in the lamplight, and he saw the whites of her eyes leap suddenly into prominence. Then the door closed again, the bolt shot back into place, and the shuffling sound grew fainter as it passed over the bare floor. A cold nose touched Ordway's hand, and looking down he saw that an old fox-hound had crept into the porch and was fawning with pleasure at his feet. He was conscious of a thrill of gratitude for the first demonstrative welcome he had received at Tappahannock; and while he stood there with the hound leaping upon his chest, he felt that, in spite of "Miss Meely," hidden somewhere behind the closed door, the old house had not lost utterly the spirit of hospitality. His hand was still on the dog's head when the bolt creaked again and the negress reappeared upon the threshold.

"Miss Meely she sez she's moughty sorry, suh, but she cyarn' hev ner strange gent'mun spendin' de night in de house. She reckons you mought sleep in de barn ef'n you wanter."

As the door opened wider, her whole person, clad in a faded woollen dress, patched brightly in many colours, emerged timidly and followed him to the topmost step.

"You des go roun' ter de back en den thoo' de hole whar de

gate used ter be, en dar's de barn. Nuttin' ain' gwine hu't you lessen hits dat ar ole ram 'Lejab."

"Well, he shall not find me unprepared," responded Ordway, with a kind of desperate gaiety, and while the old hound still leaped at his side, he found his way into a little path which led around the corner of the house, and through the tangled garden to the barn just beyond the fallen gateposts. Here the dog deserted him, running back to the porch, where a woman's voice called; and stumbling over a broken ploughshare or two, he finally reached the poor shelter which Miss Meely's hospitality afforded.

It was very dark inside, but after closing the door to shut out the wind, he groped his way through the blackness to a pile of straw in one corner. The place smelt of cattle, and opposite to the spot on which he lay, he distinguished presently a soft, regular sound which he concluded to be caused by the breathing of a cow. Evidently the barn was used as a cattleshed also, though his observation of the mansion did not lead him to suppose that "Miss Meely" possessed anything approaching a herd. He remembered the old negress's warning allusion to the ram, but so far at least the darkness had revealed nothing that could prove hostile to his company. His head ached and his will seemed suddenly benumbed, so stretching himself at full length in the straw he fell, after a few troubled moments, into the deep and dreamless sleep of complete physical exhaustion.

An instant afterwards, it seemed to him, he was aroused by a

light which flashed into his face from the opening door. A cold wind blew over him, and as he struggled almost blindly back into consciousness, he saw that a girl in a red cape stood holding a lantern above her head in the centre of the barn. At his first look the red cape warmed him as if it had been flame; then he became aware that a voice was speaking to him in a peculiar tone of cheerful authority. And it seemed to him that the red cape and the rich voice expressed the same dominant quality of personality.

"I thought you must be hungry," said the voice with energy, "so I've brought your supper."

Even while he instinctively grasped the tray she held out, he observed with quickened attention that the hands which offered him the food had toiled out of doors in good and bad weather – though small and shapely they were chapped from cold and roughened by marks of labour.

"You'd better drink your coffee while it's hot," said the voice again.

The practical nature of her advice put him immediately at his ease.

"It's the first hot thing I've had for a week," he responded.

"Then it will be all the better for you," replied the girl, while she reached up to hang the lantern from a rusted nail in the wall.

As the light fell over her, the red cape slipped a little from her shoulder and she put up her hand to catch it together on her bosom. The movement, slight as it was, gave Ordway a chance to observe that she possessed a kind of vigorous grace,

which showed in the roundness of her limbs and in the rebellious freedom of her thick brown hair. The airy little curls on her temples stood out, he noticed, as if she had been walking bareheaded in the wind. At his first look it did not occur to him that she was beautiful; what impressed him most was the quality of radiant energy which revealed itself in every line of her face and figure – now sparkling in her eyes, now dimpling in her cheek, now quickening her brisk steps across the floor, and now touching her eyes and mouth like an edge of light. It may have been merely the effect of the red cape on a cold night, but as she moved back and forth into the dark corners of the barn, she appeared to him to gather both warmth and animation out of the gloom.

As she did not speak again during her work, he found himself forced to observe the same friendly silence. The ravenous hunger of the afternoon had returned to him with the odour of the food, and he ate rapidly, sitting up on his straw bed, while she took up a bucket and a piece of wood sharpened at one end and prepared a bran mash for the cow quartered in a stall in one corner. When a little later she gathered up an armful of straw to replenish the animal's bed, Ordway pushed the tray aside and made a movement as if to assist her; but stopping an instant in her task, she waved him aside with the easy dignity of perfect capability.

"I can do it myself, thank you," she said, smiling; and then, glancing at his emptied plate, she added carelessly, "I'll send back

presently for the tray and lantern – good-night!"

Her tone had changed perceptibly on the last word, for its businesslike authority had given place to the musical Southern drawl so familiar to his ears in childhood. In that simple phrase, accompanied by the gracious bend of her whole person, she had put unconsciously generations of social courtesy – of racial breeding.

"Thank you – good-night," he answered, rising, and drawing back with his hand on the heavy latch.

Then before she could reach the door and pass through, a second lantern flashed there out of the blackness beyond, and the terrified face of a Negro urchin was thrust into the full glare of light.

"Fo' de good Lawd, Miss Em'ly, dat ar ole ram done butt Sis Mehitable clean inter de smoke 'us."

Perfectly unruffled by the news the girl looked at Ordway, and then held out her small, strong hand for the lantern.

"Very well, I'll come and shut him up," she responded quietly, and holding the red cape together on her bosom, she stepped over the threshold and followed the Negro urchin out into the night.

CHAPTER III
The Return To Tappahannock

AT sunrise he came out of the barn, and washed his face and hands at the well, where he found a coarse towel on the moss-covered trough. The day was breaking clear, but in the fine golden light the house and lawn appeared even more desolate than they had done under the full moon. Before the war the place had been probably a comfortable, unpretentious country mansion. Some simple dignity still attached to its bowers of ivy and its ancient cedars, but it was easy to imagine that for thirty years no shingle had been added to its crumbling roof, and hardly a ship gathered from the littered walk before the door. At the end of the avenue six great trees had fallen a sacrifice, he saw now, to the mere lust for timber – for freshly cut and still odorous with sap, the huge trunks lay directly across the approach over which they had presided through the tragic history of the house. Judged by what it must have been in a fairly prosperous past, the scene was sad enough even to the eyes of a stranger; and as Ordway walked slowly down the dim, fragrant curve of the avenue, he found it difficult to place against so sombre a background, a figure as full of life and animation as that of the girl he had seen in the barn on the evening before. She appeared to his imagination as the embodiment of youth amid surroundings whose only remaining beauties were those of age.

Though he had resolved yesterday not to return to Tappahannock, he found himself presently retracing, almost without an effort of will, the road which he had travelled so heavily in the night. Something between sunrise and sunset had renewed his courage and altered his determination. Was it only the wasted strength which had returned to him in his sleep? Or was it – he hesitated at the thought – the flush of shame which had burned his face when the girl's lantern had flashed over him out of the darkness? In that pitiless illumination it was as if not only his roughened surface, but his secret sin was laid bare; and he had felt again all the hideous publicity that had touched him and put him as one apart in the court-room. Though he had outgrown the sin, he knew now that he must carry the scar of it until his death; and he knew, also, that the reality of his punishment had been in the spirit and not in the law.

For a while he walked rapidly in the direction of Tappahannock; then sitting down in the sunshine upon the roadside, he ate the piece of cornbread he had saved last night from his supper. It would be several hours at least before he might hope to find the warehouses open for the day, so he sat patiently eating his bread under the bared boughs of a young peach-tree, while he watched the surface of the long white road which appeared to hold for him as much despondency as freedom. A farmer driving a spotted cow to market spoke to him presently in a friendly voice; and rising to his feet, he overtook the man and fell into the jogging pace which was rendered necessary by the

reluctance of the animal to proceed.

"I declar' the sense in them thar critters do beat all," remarked the farmer, after an ineffectual tug at the rope he held. "She won't be drove no more 'n a woman will – her head is what she wants no matter whar it leads her."

"Can you tell me," inquired Ordway, when they had started again upon the advance, "the name of the old house I passed a mile or so along the road?"

"Oh, you mean Cedar Hill, I reckon! – thar now, Betsey, that thar toad ain't a turnip!"

"Cedar Hill, is it? Well, they appear to be doing their level best to get rid of the cedars."

"Mr. Beverly did that – not Miss Em'ly. Miss Em'ly dotes on them trees jest the same as if they were made of flesh and blood."

"But the place belongs to Mr. Beverly, I presume?"

"If thar's a shingle of it that ain't mortgaged, I reckon it does – though for that matter Miss Em'ly is overseer and manager, besides teachin' every day in the public school of Tappahannock. Mr. Beverly's got a soft heart in his body – all the Brookes had that they say – but the Lord who made him knows that he ain't overblessed with brains. He used to speculate with most of the family money, but as luck would have it he always speculated wrong. Then he took to farmin', but he's got such a slow gentlemanly way about him that nothin' he puts in the ground ever has spirit enough to come up agin. His wife's just like him – she was Miss Amelia Meadows, his second cousin

from the up-country, and when the children kept on comin' so thick and fast, as is the Lord's way with po' folks, people said thar warn't nothin' ahead of 'em but starvation. But Miss Em'ly she come back from teachin' somewhar down South an' undertook to run the whole place single-handed. Things are pickin' up a little now, they say – she's got a will of her own, has Miss Em'ly, but thar ain't anybody in these parts that wouldn't work for her till they dropped. She sent for me last Monday to help her mend her henhouse, and though I was puttin' a new roof over my wife's head, I dropped everything I had and went. That was the day Mr. Beverly cut down the cedars."

"So Miss Emily didn't know of it?"

"She was in school, suh – you see she teaches in Tappahannock from nine till three, so Mr. Beverly chose that time to sell the avenue to young Tom Myers. He's a sly man, is Mr. Beverly, for all his soft, slow ways, and if Young Tom had been on time he'd have had half the avenue belted before Miss Em'ly got back from school. But he got in some mess or other at the store, and he was jest hewin' like thunder at his sixth cedar, when up come Miss Em'ly on that old white horse she rides. Good Lord! I hope I'll never see anybody turn so white agin as she did when her eyes lighted on them fallen trees. 'Beverly,' she called out in a loud, high voice, 'have you dared to sell the cedars?' Mr. Beverly looked a little sick as if his stomach had gone aginst him of a sudden, but he stood right up on the trunk of a tree, and mumbled something about presarvin' useless timber

when the children had no shoes an' stockings to thar feet. Then Miss Em'ly gave him a look that scorched like fire, and she rode straight up to Myers on her old horse and said as quiet as death: 'Put up your axe, Tom, I'll give you back your money. How much have you paid him down?' When Young Tom looked kind of sheepish and said: 'a hundred dollars,' I saw her eyelids flicker, but she didn't hesitate an instant. 'You shall have it within an hour on my word of honour,' she answered, 'can you wait?' 'I reckon I can wait all day, Miss,' said Young Tom – and then she jumped down from her horse, and givin' me the bridle, caught up her skirt and ran indoors. In a minute she came flying out agin and before we had time to catch our breath she was ridin' for dear life back to town. 'You'd better go on with yo' work,' said Mr. Beverly in his soft way, but Young Tom picked up his axe, and sat down on the big stump behind him. 'I reckon I can take her word better 'n yours, Mr. Beverly,' he answered, 'an' 'I reckon you can, too, Young Tom,' said I – ."

"But how did she raise the money?" inquired Ordway.

"That's what nobody knows, suh, except her and one other. Some say she sold a piece of her mother's old jewelry – a locket or something she had put by – and some believe still that she borrowed it from Robert Baxter or Jasper Trend. Whichever way it was, she came ridin' up within the hour on her old white horse with the notes twisted tight in her handkerchief. She was mighty quiet, then, but when it was over, great Lord, what a temper she was in. I declar' she would have struck Mr. Beverly with the sour

gum twig she used for a whip if I hadn't slipped in between 'em an' caught her arm. Then she lashed him with her tongue till he seemed to wither and shrink all over."

"And served him right, God bless her!" said Ordway.

"That's so, suh, but Mr. Beverly ain't a bad man – he's jest soft."

"Yet your Miss Emily still sticks to him, it seems?"

"If she didn't the farm wouldn't hold together a week. What she makes from teachin' is about all they have to live on in my opinion. Last summer, too, she started raisin' garden things an' poultry, an' she'd have got quite a thrivin' business if she had had any kind of help. Then in July she tried her hand at puttin' up preserves and jellies to send to them big stores in the North."

Ordway remembered the cheerful authority in her voice, the little cold red hands that had offered him his supper; and his heart contracted as it did at the memory of his daughter Alice. Yet it was not pity alone that moved him, for mingled with the appeal to his sympathy there was something which awoke in him the bitter agony of remorse. So the girl in the red cape could endure poverty such as this with honour! At the thought his past sin and his present disgrace appeared to him not only as crime but as cowardliness. He recalled the angry manager of the cotton mills, but there was no longer resentment in his mind either against the individual or against society. Instead it seemed to him that all smaller emotions dissolved in a tenderness which placed this girl and Alice apart with the other good and inspiring memories of

his life. As he walked on in silence a little incident of ten years before returned to his thoughts, and he remembered the day he had found his child weeping beside a crippled beggar on his front steps.

When, a little later, they reached Tappahannock, the farmer turned with his reluctant cow into one of the smaller paths which led across the common on the edge of the town. As it was still too early to apply for work, Ordway sat down on a flat stone before an iron gate and watched the windows along the street for any signs of movement or life within. At length several frowsy Negro maids leaned out while the wooden shutters swung slowly back against the walls; then a milk wagon driven by a small boy clattered noisily round the corner, and in response to the shrill whistle of the driver, the doors opened hurriedly and the Negro maids rushed, with outstretched pitchers, down the gravelled walks to the iron gates. Presently an appetising odour of bacon reached Ordway's nostrils; and in the house across the street a woman with her hair done up on pins, came to the window and began grinding coffee in a wooden mill. Not until eight o'clock did the town open its gates and settle itself to the day's work.

When the doors of the warehouses were fastened back, Ordway turned into the main street again, and walked slowly downhill until he came to the faded brick archway where the group of men had sat smoking the evening before. Now there was an air of movement in the long building which had appeared as mere dim vacancy at the hour of sunset. Men were passing in and

out of the brick entrance, from which a thin coat of whitewash was peeling in splotches; covered wagons half filled with tobacco were standing, unhitched, along the walls; huge bags of fresh fertilisers were thrown carelessly in corners; and in the centre of the great floor, an old Negro, with a birch broom tied together with coloured string, was sweeping into piles the dried stems left after yesterday's sales. As he swept, a little cloud of pungent dust rose before the strokes of his broom and floated through the brick archway out into the street.

This morning there was even less attention paid to Ordway's presence than there had been at the closing hour. Planters hurried back and forth preparing lots for the opening sale; a wagon drove into the building, and the driver got down over the muddy wheel and lifted out several willow crates through which Ordway could catch a glimpse of the yellow sun-cured leaf. The old Negro swept briskly, piling the trash into heaps which would finally be ground into snuff or used as a cheap grade of fertiliser. Lean hounds wandered to and fro, following the covered wagons and sniffing suspiciously at the loose plants arranged in separate lots in the centre of the floor.

"Is Baxter here this morning?" Ordway asked presently of a countryman who lounged on a pile of bags near the archway.

"I reckon you'll find him in his office," replied the man, as he spat lazily out into the street; "that thar's his door," he added, pointing to a little room on the right of the entrance – "I seed him go in an' I ain't seed him come out."

Nodding his thanks for the information, Ordway crossed the building and rapped lightly on the door. In response to a loud "come in," he turned the knob and stood next instant face to face with the genial giant of the evening before.

"Good-morning, Mr. Baxter, I've come back again," he said.

"Good-morning!" responded Baxter, "I see you have."

In the full daylight Baxter appeared to have increased in effect if not in quantity, and as Ordway looked at him now, he felt himself to be in the presence less of a male creature than of an embodied benevolent impulse. His very flabbiness of feature added in a measure to the expansive generosity of mouth and chin; and slovenly, unwashed, half-shaven as he was, Baxter's spirit dominated not only his fellow men, but the repelling effect of his own unkempt exterior. To meet his glance was to become suddenly intimate; to hear him speak was to feel that he had shaken you by the hand.

"I hoped you might have come to see things differently this morning," said Ordway.

Baxter looked him over with his soft yet penetrating eyes, his gaze travelling slowly from the coarse boots covered with red clay to the boyish smile on the dark, weather-beaten face.

"You did not tell me what kind of work you were looking for," he observed at last. "Do you want to sweep out the warehouse or to keep the books?"

Ordway laughed. "I prefer to keep the books, but I can sweep out the warehouse," he replied.

"You can – can you?" said Baxter. His pipe, which was never out of his hand except when it was in his mouth, began to turn gray, and putting it between his teeth, he sucked hard at the stem for a minute.

"You're an educated man, then?"

"I've been to college – do you mean that?"

"You're fit for a clerk's position?"

"I am sure of it."

"Where did you work last?"

Ordway's hesitation was barely perceptible.

"I've been in business," he answered.

"On your own hook?" inquired Baxter.

"Yes, on my own hook."

"But you couldn't make a living at it?"

"No; I gave it up for several reasons."

"Well, I don't know your reasons, my man," observed Baxter, drily, "but I like your face."

"Thank you," said Ordway, and he laughed again with the sparkling gaiety which leaped first to his blue eyes.

"And so you expect me to take you without knowing a darn thing about you?" demanded Baxter.

Ordway nodded gravely.

"Yes, I hope that is what you will do," he answered.

"I may ask your name, I reckon, mayn't I? – if you have no particular objection."

"I don't mind telling you it's Smith," said Ordway, with his

gaze on a huge pamphlet entitled "Smith's Almanac" lying on Baxter's desk. "Daniel Smith."

"Smith," repeated Baxter. "Well, it ain't hard to remember. If I warn't a blamed fool, I'd let you go," he added thoughtfully, "but there ain't much doubt, I reckon, about my being a blamed fool."

He rose from his chair with difficulty, and steadying his huge body, moved to the door, which he flung open with a jerk.

"If you've made up your mind dead sure to butt in, you might as well begin with the next sale," he said.

CHAPTER IV
The Dream Of Daniel Smith

HE had been recommended for lodging to a certain Mrs. Twine, and at five o'clock, when the day's work at Baxter's was over, he started up the street in a bewildered search for her house, which he had been told was situated immediately beyond the first turn on the brow of the hill. When he reached the corner there was no one in sight except a small boy who sat, crying loudly, astride a little whitewashed wooden gate. Beyond the boy there was a narrow yard filled with partly dried garments hung on clothes lines, which stretched from a young locust tree near the sidewalk to the front porch, where a man with a red nose was reading the local newspaper. As the man with the red nose paid no attention to the loud lamentations of the child, Ordway stopped by the gate and inquired sympathetically if he could be of help.

"Oh, he ain't hurt," remarked the man, throwing a side glance over his paper, "he al'ays yells like that when his Ma's done scrubbed him."

"She's washed me so clean that I feel naked," howled the boy.

"Well, you'll get over that in a year's time," observed Ordway cheerfully, "so suppose you leave off a minute now and show me the way to Mrs. Twine's."

At his request the boy stopped crying instantly, and stared up

at him while the dirty tearmarks dried slowly on his cheeks.

"Thar ain't no way," he replied solemnly, "'cause she's my ma."

"Then jump down quickly and run indoors and tell her I'd like to see her."

"'T ain't no use. She won't come."

"Well, go and ask her. I was told to come here to look for board and lodging."

He glanced inquiringly at the man on the porch, who, engrossed in the local paper, was apparently oblivious of the conversation at the gate.

"She won't come 'cause she's washin' the rest of us," returned the boy, as he swung himself to the ground, "thar're six of us an' she ain't done but two. That's Lemmy she's got hold of now. Can't you hear him holler?"

He planted his feet squarely on the board walk, looked back at Ordway over his shoulder, and departed reluctantly with the message for his mother. At the end of a quarter of an hour, when Ordway had entered the gate and sat down in the cold wind on the front steps, the door behind him opened with a jar, and a large, crimson, untidy woman, splashed with soapsuds, appeared like an embodied tempest upon the threshold.

"Canty says you've come to look at the dead gentleman's room, suh," she began in a high voice, approaching her point with a directness which lost none of its force because of the panting vehemence with which she spoke.

"Baxter told me I might find board with you," explained Ordway in her first breathless pause.

"To be sure he may have the dead gentleman's room, Mag," put in the man on the porch, folding his newspaper, with a shiver, as he rose to his feet.

"I warn't thinkin' about lettin' that room agin'," said Mrs. Twine, crushing her husband's budding interference by the completeness with which she ignored his presence. "But it's jest as well, I reckon, for a defenceless married woman to have a stranger in the house. Though for the matter of that," she concluded in a burst of domestic confidence, "the woman that ain't a match for her own husband without outside help ain't deservin' of the pleasure an' the blessin' of one." Then as the man with the red nose slunk shamefacedly into the passage, she added in an undertone to Ordway, "and now if you'll jest step inside, I'll show you the spare room that I've got to let."

She led the way indoors, scolding shrilly as she passed through the hall, and up the little staircase, where several half-dressed children were riding, with shrieks of delight, down the balustrade. "You needn't think you've missed a scrubbing because company's come," she remarked angrily, as she stooped to box the ears of a small girl lying flat on her stomach upon the landing. "Such is my taste for cleanness," she explained to Ordway, "that when my hands once tech the soap it's as much as I can do to keep 'em back from rubbin' the skin off. Thar 're times even when the taste is so ragin' in my breast that I can hardly wait

for Saturday night to come around. Yet I ain't no friend to license whether it be in whiskey or in soap an' water. Temperance is my passion and that's why, I suppose, I came to marry a drunkard."

With this tragic confession, uttered in a matter of fact manner, she produced a key from the pocket of her blue gingham apron, and ushered Ordway into a small, poorly furnished room, which overlooked the front street and the two bared locust trees in the yard.

"I kin let you have this at three dollars a week," she said, "provided you're content to do yo' own reachin' at the table. Thar ain't any servant now except a twelve year old darkey."

"Yes, I'll take it," returned Ordway, almost cheerfully; and when he had agreed definitely as to the amount of service he was to receive, he closed the creaking door behind her, and looked about the crudely furnished apartment with a sense of ownership such as he had not felt since the afternoon upon which he had stood in his wife's sitting-room awaiting his arrest. He thought of the Florentine gilding, the rich curtains, the long mirrors, the famous bronze Mercury and the Corot landscape with the sunlight upon it – and then of the terrible oppression in which these familiar objects had seemed closing in upon him and smothering him into unconsciousness. The weight was lifted now, and he breathed freely while his gaze rested on the common pine bedstead, the scarred washstand, with the broken pitcher, the whitewashed walls, the cane chairs, the rusted scuttle, filled with cheap coal, and the unpainted table holding a glass lamp

with a smoked chimney. From the hall below he could hear the scolding voice of Mrs. Twine, but neither the shrill sound nor the poor room produced in him the smothered anguish he felt even to-day at the memory of the Corot landscape bathed in sunlight.

An hour later, when he came upstairs again as an escape from the disorder of Mrs. Twine's supper table, he started a feeble blaze in the grate, which was half full of ashes, and after lighting the glass lamp, sat watching the shadows flicker to and fro on the whitewashed wall. His single possession, a photograph of his wife taken with her two children, rested against the brick chimney piece, and as he looked at it now it seemed to stand in no closer relationship to his life than did one of the brilliant chromos he had observed ornamenting the walls of Mrs. Twine's dining-room. His old life, indeed, appeared remote, artificial, conjured from unrealities – it was as if he had moved lightly upon the painted surface of things, until at last a false step had broken through the thin covering and he had plunged in a single instant against the concrete actuality. The shock had stunned him, yet he realised now that he could never return to his old sheltered outlook – to his pleasant fiction – for he had come too close to experience ever to be satisfied again with falsehood.

The photograph upon the mantel was the single remaining link which held him to-day to his past life – to his forfeited identity. In the exquisite, still virgin face of his wife, draped for effect in a scarf of Italian lace – he saw embodied the one sacred memory to which as Daniel Smith he might still cling with honour. The

face was perfect, the expression of motherhood which bent, flamelike, over the small boy and girl, was perfect also; and the pure soul of the woman seemed to him to have formed both face and expression after its own divine image. In the photograph, as in his memory, her beauty was touched always by some rare quality of remoteness, as if no merely human conditions could ever entirely compass so ethereal a spirit. The passion which had rocked his soul had left her serenity unshaken, and even sorrow had been powerless to leave its impress or disfigurement upon her features.

As the shadows flickered out on the walls, the room grew suddenly colder. Rising, he replenished the fire, and then going over to the bed, he flung himself, still dressed, under the patchwork quilt from which the wool was protruding in places. He was thinking of the morning eighteen years ago when he had first seen her as she came, with several girl companions, out of the old church in the little town of Botetourt. It was a Christmas during his last year at Harvard, when moved by a sudden interest in his Southern associations, he had gone down for two days to his childhood's home in Virginia. Though the place was falling gradually to ruin, his maiden great-aunt still lived there in a kind of luxurious poverty; and at the sight of her false halo of gray curls, he had remembered, almost with a start of surprise, the morning when he had seen the convict at the little wayside station. The station, the country, the muddy roads, and even the town of Botetourt were unchanged, but he

himself belonged now to another and what he felt to be a larger world. Everything had appeared provincial and amusing to his eyes – until as he passed on Christmas morning by the quaint old churchyard, he had seen Lydia Preston standing in the sunshine amid the crumbling tombstones of several hundred years. Under the long black feather in her hat, her charming eyes had dwelt on him kindly for a minute, and in that minute it had seemed to him that the racial ideal slumbering in his brain had responded quickly to his startled blood. Afterward they had told him that she was only nineteen, a Southern beauty of great promise, and the daughter of old Adam Preston, who had made and lost a fortune in the last ten years. But these details seemed to him to have no relation to the face he had seen under the black feather against the ivy-covered walls of the old church. The next evening they had danced together at a ball; he had carried her fan, a trivial affair of lace and satin, away in his pocket, and ten days later he had returned, flushed with passion, to finish his course at Harvard. Love had put wings to his ambition; the following year he had stood at the head of his class, and before the summer was over he had married her and started brilliantly in his career. There had been only success in the beginning. When had the tide turned so suddenly? he wondered, and when had he begun to drift into the great waters where men are washed down and lost?

Lying on the bed now in the firelight, he shivered and drew the quilt closer about his knees. She had loved beauty, riches, dignity, religion – she had loved her children when they came;

but had she ever really loved him – the Daniel Ordway whom she had married? Were all pure women as passionless – as utterly detached – as she had shown herself to him from the beginning? And was her coldness, as he had always believed, but the outward body of that spiritual grace for which he had loved her? He had lavished abundantly out of his stormy nature; he had spent his immortal soul upon her in desperate determination to possess her utterly at her own price; and yet had she ever belonged to him, he questioned now, even in the supreme hours of their deepest union? Had her very innocence shut him out from her soul forever?

In the end the little world had closed over them both; he had felt himself slipping further – further – had made frantic efforts to regain his footing; and had gone down hopelessly at last. Those terrible years before his arrest crowded like minutes into his brain, and he knew now that there had been relief – comfort – almost tranquillity in his life in prison. The strain was lifted at last, and the days when he had moved in dull hope or acute despair through the crowd in Wall Street were over forever. To hold a place in the little world one needed great wealth; and it had seemed to him in the time of temptation that this wealth was not a fugitive possession, but an inherent necessity – a thing which belonged to the inner structure of Lydia's nature.

A shudder ran over him, while he drew a convulsive breath like one in physical pain. The slow minutes in which he had waited for a rise in the market were still ticking in agony somewhere

in his brain. Time moved on, yet those minutes never passed – his memory had become like the face of a clock where the hands pointed, motionless, day or night, to the same hour. Then hours, days, weeks, months, years, when he lived with ruin in his thoughts and the sound of merriment, which was like the pipe of hollow flutes, in his ears. At the end it came almost suddenly – the blow for which he had waited, the blow which brought something akin to relief because it ended the quivering torture of his suspense, and compelled, for the hour at least, decisive action. He had known that before evening he would be under arrest, and yet he had walked slowly along Fifth Avenue from his office to his home; he recalled now that he had even joked with a club wit, who had stopped him at the corner to divulge the latest bit of gossip. At the very instant when he felt himself to be approaching ruin in his house, he remembered that he had complained a little irritably of the breaking wrapper of his cigar. Yet he was thinking then that he must reach his home in time to prevent his wife from keeping a luncheon engagement, of which she had spoken to him at breakfast; and ten minutes later it was with a sensation of relief that he met the blank face of his butler in the hall. On the staircase his daughter ran after him, her short white, beruffled skirts standing out stiffly like the skirts of a ballet dancer. She was taking her music lesson, she cried out, and she called to him to come into the music room and hear how wonderfully she could run her scales! Her blue eyes, which were his eyes in a child's face, looked joyously up at him from under

the thatch of dark curls which she had inherited from him, not from her blond mother.

"Not now, Alice," he answered, almost impatiently, "not now – I will come a little later."

Then she darted back, and the stumbling music preceded him up the staircase to the door of his wife's dressing-room. When he entered Lydia was standing before her mirror, fastening a spotted veil with a diamond butterfly at the back of her blond head; and as she turned smilingly toward him, he put out his hand with a gesture of irritation.

"Take that veil off, Lydia, I can't see you for the spots," he said.

Complaisant always, she unfastened the diamond butterfly without a word, and taking off the veil, flung it carelessly across the golden-topped bottles upon her dressing-table.

"You look ill," she said with her charming smile; "shall I ring for Marie to bring you whiskey?"

At her words he turned from her, driven by a torment of pity which caused his voice to sound harsh and constrained in his own ears.

"No – no – don't put that on again," he protested, for while she waited she had taken up the spotted veil and the diamond pin.

Something in his tone startled her into attention, and moving a step forward, she stood before him on a white bearskin rug. Her face had hardly changed, yet in some way she seemed to have put him at a distance, and he felt all at once that he had never

known her.

From the room downstairs he heard Alice's music lesson go on at broken intervals, the uncertain scales she ran now stopping, now beginning violently again. The sound wrought suddenly on his nerves like anger, and he felt that his voice was querulous in spite of the torment of pity at his heart.

"There's no use putting on your veil," he said, "a warrant is out for my arrest and I must wait here till it comes."

His memory stopped now, as if it had snapped suddenly beneath the strain. After this there was a mere blank of existence upon which people and objects moved without visible impression. From that minute to this one appeared so short a time that he started up half expecting to hear Alice's scales filling Mrs. Twine's empty lodgings. Then his eyes fell on the whitewashed walls, the smoking lamp, the bare table, and the little square window with the branches of the locust tree frosted against the pane.

Rising from the bed, he fell on his knees and pressed his quivering face to the patchwork quilt.

"Give me a new life, O God – give me a new life!"

CHAPTER V
At Tappahannock

AFTER a sleepless night, he rose as soon as the dawn had broken, and sitting down before the pine table wrote a letter to Lydia, on a sheet of paper which had evidently been left in the drawer by the former lodger. "It isn't likely that you'll ever want me," he added at the end, "but if you should happen to, remember that I am yours, as I have always been, for whatever I am worth." When he had sealed the envelope and written her name above that of the town of Botetourt, he put it into his pocket and went down to the dining-room, where he found Mrs. Twine pouring steaming coffee into a row of broken cups. A little mulatto girl, with her hair plaited in a dozen fine braids, was placing a dish of fried bacon at one end of the walnut-coloured oil-cloth on the table, around which the six children, already clothed and hungry, were beating an impatient tattoo with pewter spoons. Bill Twine, the father of the family, was evidently sleeping off a drunken headache – a weakness which appeared to afford his wife endless material for admonition and philosophy.

"Thar now, Canty," she was remarking to her son, "yo' po' daddy may not be anything to be proud of as a man, but I reckon he's as big an example as you'll ever see. He's had sermons p'inted at him from the pulpit; they've took him up twice to the police court, an' if you'll believe me, suh," she added with a kind of

outraged pride to Ordway, "thar's been a time when they've had out the whole fire department to protect me."

The coffee though poor was hot, and while Ordway drank it, he listened with an attention not unmixed with sympathy to Mrs. Twine's continuous flow of speech. She was coarse and shrewish and unshapely, but his judgment was softened by the marks of anxious thought on her forehead and the disfigurements of honest labour on her hands. Any toil appeared to him now to be invested with peculiar dignity; and he felt, sitting there at her slovenly breakfast table, that he was closer to the enduring heart of humanity than he had been among the shallow refinements of his past life. Mrs. Twine was unpleasant, but at her worst he felt her to be the real thing.

"Not that I'm blamin' Bill, suh, as much as some folks," she proceeded charitably, while she helped her youngest child to gravy, "for it made me downright sick myself to hear them carryin' on over his beatin' his own wife jest as much as if he'd been beatin' somebody else's. An' I ain't one, when it comes to that, to put up with a white-livered, knock-kneed, pulin' sort of a critter, as I told the Jedge a-settin' upon his bench. When a woman is obleeged to take a strappin' thar's some real satisfaction in her feelin' that she takes it from a man – an' the kind that would lay on softly with never a broken head to show for it – well, he ain't the kind, suh, that I could have helt in any respect an' honour. And as to that, as I said to 'em right then an' thar, take the manly health an' spirit out o' Bill, an' he's jest about as decent an' law

abidin' as the rest. Why, when he was laid up with malaria, he never so much as rized his hand agin me, an' it'll be my belief untwel my dyin' day that chills an' fever will keep a man moral when all the sermons sence Moses will leave him unteched. Feed him low an' work him hard, an' you kin make a saint out of most any male critter, that's my way of thinkin'."

While she talked she was busily selecting the choicest bit of bacon for Bill's plate, and as Ordway left the house a little later, he saw her toiling up the staircase with her husband's breakfast on a tin tray in her hands.

"If you think I'm goin' to set an' wait all day for you to get out o' bed, you've jest about clean lost yo' wits, Bill Twine," she remarked in furious tones, as she flung open a door on the landing above.

Out of doors Ordway found that the wind had died down, though a sharp edge of frost was still in the air. The movement of the day had already begun; and as he passed the big house on the brow of the hill he saw a pretty girl, with her hair tied back with a velvet ribbon, run along the gravelled walk to meet the postman at the gate. A little farther, when he had reached the corner, he turned back to hand his letter to the postman, and found to his surprise that the pretty girl was still gazing after him. No possible interest could attach to her in his thoughts; and with a careless acknowledgment of her beauty, she faded from his consciousness as rapidly as if she had been a ray of sunshine which he had admired as he passed along. Then as he turned into the main

street at the corner, he saw that Emily Brooke was riding slowly up the hill on her old white horse. She still wore her red cape, which fell over the saddle on one side, and completely hid the short riding-skirt beneath. On her head there was a small knitted Tam-o'-shanter cap, and this, with the easy freedom of her seat in the saddle, gave her an air which was gallant rather than graceful. The more feminine adjective hardly seemed to apply to her at the moment; she looked brave, strong, buoyant, a creature that had not as yet become aware of its sex. Yet she was older, he discovered now, than he had at first imagined her to be. In the barn he had supposed her age to be not more than twenty years; seen in the morning light it was impossible to decide whether she was a year younger or ten years older than he had believed. The radiant energy in her look belonged, after all, less to the accident of youth than to some enduring quality of spirit.

As she neared him, she looked up from her horse's neck, rested her eyes upon him for an instant, and smiled brightly, much as a charming boy might have done. Then, just as she was about to pass on, the girth of her saddle slipped under her, and she was thrown lightly to the ground, while the old horse stopped and stood perfectly motionless above her.

"My skirt has caught in the stirrup," she said to Ordway, and while he bent to release her, he noticed that she clung, not to his arm, but to the neck of the horse for support.

To his surprise there was neither embarrassment nor amusement in her voice. She spoke with the cool authority which

had impressed him during the incident of the ram's attack upon "Sis Mehitable."

"I don't think it is quite safe yet," he said, after he had drawn the rotten girth as tight as he dared. "It looks as if it wouldn't last, you see."

"Well, I dare say, it may be excused after forty years of service," she returned, smiling.

"What? this saddle? It does look a little quaint when one examines it."

"Oh, it's been repaired, but even then one must forgive an old servant for growing decrepit."

"Then you'll ride it again?" he asked, seeing that she was about to mount.

"Of course – this isn't my first tumble – but Major expects them now and he knows how to behave. So do I," she added, laughing, "you see it doesn't take me by surprise."

"Yes, I see it doesn't," he answered gaily.

"Then if you chance to be about the next time it happens, I hope it won't disturb you either," she remarked, as she rode up the hill.

The meeting lingered in Ordway's mind with a freshness which was associated less with the incident itself than with some vivid quality in the appearance of the girl. Her face, her voice, her carriage – even the little brown curls blowing on her temples, all united in his thoughts to form a memory in which Alice appeared to hold a place. Why should this country girl, he wondered, bring

back to him so clearly the figure of his daughter?

But there was no room for a memory in his life just now, and by the time he reached Baxter's Warehouse, he had forgotten the interest aroused in him a moment before. Baxter had not yet appeared in his office, but two men, belonging evidently to the labouring class, were talking together under the brick archway. When Ordway joined them they did not interrupt their conversation, which he found, after a minute, to concern the domestic and financial troubles of the one whom he judged to be the poorer of the two. He was a meanly clad, wretched looking workman, with a shock of uncombed sandy hair, a cowed manner, and the expression of one who has been beaten into apathy rather than into submission. A sordid pathos in his voice and figure brought Ordway a step closer to his side, and after a moment's careless attention, he found his mind adjusting itself to the small financial problems in which the man had become entangled. The workman had been forced to borrow upon his pathetic personal securities; and in meeting from year to year the exorbitant rate of interest, he had paid back several times the sum of the original debt. Now his wife was ill, with an incurable cancer; he had no hope, as he advanced beyond middle age, of any increase in his earning capacity, and the debt under which he had struggled so long had become at the end an intolerable burden. His wife had begged him to consult a lawyer – but who, he questioned doggedly, would take an interest in him since he had no money for a fee? He was afraid of lawyers anyway, for

he could give you a hundred cases where they had stood banded together against the poor.

As Ordway listened to the story, he felt for an instant a return of his youthful enthusiasm, and standing there amid the tobacco stems in Baxter's warehouse, he remembered a great flour trust from which he had withdrawn because it seemed to him to bear unjustly upon the small, isolated farmers. Beyond this he went back still further to his college days, when during his vacation, he had read Virginia law in the office of his uncle, Richard Ordway, in the town of Botetourt. He could see the shining rows of legal volumes in the walnut bookcases, the engraving of Latane's Burial, framed in black wood above the mantel, and against this background the silent, gray haired, self-righteous old man so like his father. Through the window, he could see still the sparrows that built in the ivied walls of the old church.

With a start he came back to the workman, who was unfolding his troubles in an abandon of misery under the archway.

"If you'll talk things over with me to-night when we get through work, I think I may be able to straighten them out for you," he said.

The man stared at him out of his dogged eyes with a helpless incredulity.

"But I ain't got any money," he responded sullenly, as if driven to the defensive.

"Well, we'll see," said Ordway, "I don't want your money."

"You want something, though – my money or my vote, and I

ain't got either."

Ordway laughed shortly. "I? – oh, I just want the fun," he answered.

The beginning was trivial enough, the case sordid, and the client only a dull-witted labourer; but to Ordway it came as the commencement of the new life for which he had prayed – the life which would find its centre not in possession, but in surrender, which would seek as its achievement not personal happiness, but the joy of service.

CHAPTER VI
The Pretty Daughter Of The Mayor

THE pretty girl whom Ordway had seen on the gravelled walk was Milly Trend, the only child of the Mayor of Tappahannock. People said of Jasper Trend that his daughter was the one soft spot in a heart that was otherwise as small and hard as a silver dollar, and of Milly Trend the same people said – well, that she was pretty. Her prettiness was invariably the first and the last thing to be mentioned about her. Whatever sterner qualities she may have possessed were utterly obscured by an exterior which made one think of peach blossoms and spring sunshine. She had a bunch of curls the colour of ripe corn, which she wore tied back from her neck with a velvet ribbon; her eyes were the eyes of a baby; and her mouth had an adorable little trick of closing over her small, though slightly prominent teeth. The one flaw in her face was this projection of her teeth, and when she looked at herself in the glass it was her habit to bite her lips closely together until the irregular ivory line was lost. It was this fault, perhaps, which kept her prettiness, though it was superlative in its own degree, from ever rising to the height of beauty. In Milly's opinion it had meant the difference between the glory of a world-wide reputation and the lesser honour of reigning as the acknowledged belle of Tappahannock. She remembered that the magnificent manager of a theatrical company, a gentleman who

wore a fur-lined coat and a top hat all day long, had almost lost his train while he stopped to look back at her on the crowded platform of the station. Her heart had beat quickly at the tribute, yet even in that dazzling minute she had felt a desperate certainty that her single imperfection would decide her future. But for her teeth, she was convinced to-day, that he might have returned.

If a woman cannot be a heroine in reality, perhaps the next best thing is to look as if she might have been one in the age of romance; and this was what Milly Trend's appearance suggested to perfection. Her manner of dressing, the black velvet ribbon on her flaxen curls, her wide white collars open at her soft throat, her floating sky-blue sashes and the delicate peach bloom of her cheeks and lips – all these combined to produce a poetic atmosphere about an exceedingly poetic little figure. Being plain she would probably have made currant jelly for her pastor, and have taught sedately in the infant class in Sunday school: being pretty she read extravagant romances and dreamed strange adventures of fascinating highwaymen on lonely roads.

But many a woman who has dreamed of a highwayman at eighteen has compromised with a bank clerk at twenty-two. Even at Tappahannock – the veriest prose piece of a town – romance might sometimes bud and blossom, though it usually brought nothing more dangerous than respectability to fruit. Milly had read Longfellow and *Lucille*, and her heroic ideal had been taken bodily from one of Bulwer's novels. She had played the graceful part of heroine in a hundred imaginary dramas; yet in actual life

she had been engaged for two years to a sandy-haired, freckled face young fellow, who chewed tobacco, and bought the dry leaf in lots for a factory in Richmond. From romance to reality is a hard distance, and the most passionate dreamer is often the patient drudge of domestic service.

And yet even to-day Milly was not without secret misgivings as to the wisdom of her choice. She knew he was not her hero, but in her short visits to larger cities she had met no one who had come nearer her ideal lover. To be sure she had seen this ideal, in highly coloured glimpses, upon the stage – though these gallant gentlemen in trunks had never so much as condescended to glance across the foot-lights to the little girl in the dark third row of the balcony. Then, too, all the ladies upon the stage were beautiful enough for any hero, and just here she was apt to remember dismally the fatal projection of her teeth.

So, perhaps, after all, Harry Banks was as near Olympus as she could hope to approach; and there was a mild consolation in the thought that there was probably more sentiment in the inner than in the outward man. Whatever came of it, she had learned that in a prose age it is safer to think only in prose.

On the morning upon which Ordway had first passed her gate, she had left the breakfast table at the postman's call, and had run down the gravelled walk to receive a letter from Mr. Banks, who was off on a short business trip for his firm. With the letter in her hand she had turned to find Ordway's blue eyes fixed in careless admiration upon her figure; and for one breathless instant she

had felt her insatiable dream rise again and clutch at her heart. Some subtle distinction in his appearance – an unlikeness to the masculine portion of Tappahannock – had caught her eye in spite of his common and ill-fitting clothes. Though she had known few men of his class, the sensitive perceptions of the girl had made her instantly aware of the difference between him and Harry Banks. For a moment her extravagant fancy dwelt on his figure – on this distinction which she had noticed, on his square dark face and the singular effect of his bright blue eyes. Then turning back in the yard, she went slowly up the gravelled walk, while she read with a vague feeling of disappointment the love letter written laboriously by Mr. Banks. It was, doubtless, but the average love letter of the average plain young man, but to Milly in her rosy world of fiction, it appeared suddenly as if there had protruded upon her attention one of the great, ugly, wholesome facts of life. What was the use, she wondered, in being beautiful if her love letters were to be filled with enthusiastic accounts of her lover's prowess in the tobacco market?

At the breakfast table Jasper Trend was pouring maple syrup on the buckwheat cakes he had piled on his plate, and at the girl's entrance he spoke without removing his gaze from the plated silver pitcher in his hand.

"Any letters, daughter?" he inquired, carefully running his knife along the mouth of the pitcher to catch the last drop of syrup.

"One," said Milly, as she sat down beside the coffee pot and

looked at her father with a ripple of annoyance in her babyish eyes.

"I reckon I can guess about that all right," remarked Jasper with his cackling chuckle, which was as little related to a sense of humour as was the beating of a tin plate. He was a long, scraggy man, with drab hair that grew in scallops on his narrow forehead and a large nose where the prominent red veins turned purple when he became excited.

"There's a stranger in town, father," said Milly as she gave him his second cup of coffee. "I think he is boarding at Mrs. Twine's."

"A drummer, I reckon – thar're a plenty of 'em about this season."

"No, I don't believe he is a drummer – he isn't – isn't quite so sparky looking. But I wish you wouldn't say 'thar,' father. You promised me you wouldn't do it."

"Well, it ain't stood in the way of my getting on," returned Jasper without resentment. Had Milly told him to shave his head, he might have protested freely, but in the end he would have gone out obediently to his barber. Yet people outside said that he ground the wages of his workers in the cotton mills down to starvation point, and that he had been elected Mayor not through popularity, but through terror. It was rumoured even that he stood with his wealth behind the syndicate of saloons which was giving an ugly local character to the town. But whatever his public vices may have been, his private life was securely hedged about by the paternal virtues.

"I can't place him, but I'm sure he isn't a 'buyer,'" repeated Milly, after a moment's devotion to the sugar bowl.

"Well, I'll let you know when I see him," responded Jasper as he left the table and got into his overcoat, while Milly jumped up to wrap his neck in a blue spotted muffler.

When he had gone from the house, she took out her lover's letter again, but it proved, on a second trial, even more unsatisfactory than she had found it to be at her first reading. As a schoolgirl Milly had known every attribute of her divinity from the chivalry of his soul to the shining gloss upon his boots – but to-day there remained to her only the despairing conviction that he was unlike Banks. Banks appeared to her suddenly in the hard prosaic light in which he, on his own account, probably viewed his tobacco. Even her trousseau and the lace of her wedding gown ceased to afford her the shadow of consolation, since she remembered that neither of these accessories would occupy in marriage quite so prominent a place as Banks.

The next day Ordway passed at the same hour, still on the opposite side of the street. After this she began to watch regularly for his figure, looking for it when it appeared on Mrs. Twine's little porch, and following it wistfully until it was lost beyond the new brick church at the corner. She was not aware of cultivating a facile sentiment about the stranger, but place a riotous imagination in an empty house and it requires little effort to weave a romance from the opposite side of the street. Distance, that subtle magnifier of attachments, had come to her aid now

as it had failed her in the person of Harry Banks. Even from across the street it was impossible to invest Mr. Banks with any quality which might have suggested an historic background or a mysterious past. He was flagrantly, almost outrageously himself; in no fictitious circumstances could he have appeared as anything except the unvarnished fact that he was. No legendary light could have glorified his features or improved the set of his trousers – which had taken their shape and substance from the legs within. With these features and in these trousers, she felt that he must usurp the sacred precincts where her dream had dwelt. "It would all be so easy if one could only be born where one belongs," she cried out hopelessly, in the unconscious utterance of a philosophy larger than her own.

And so as the week went by, she allowed her rosy fancies to surround the figure that passed three times daily along the sidewalk across the way. In the morning he walked by with a swinging stride; at midday he passed rapidly, absorbed in thought; in the evening he came back slowly, sometimes stopping to watch the sunset from the brow of the hill. Not since the first morning had he turned his blue eyes toward Milly's gate.

At the end of the month Mr. Banks returned to Tappahannock from a business trip through the tobacco districts. He was an ugly, freckled face, sandy-haired young fellow – an excellent judge of tobacco – with a simple soul that attired itself in large checks, usually of a black and white variety. On the day of his first visit to Milly he wore a crimson necktie pierced by a scarf-pin bearing

a turtle-dove in diamonds.

"Who's that fellow over there?" he inquired as Ordway came up the hill to his dinner. "I wonder if he's the chap Hudge was telling me about at breakfast?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Milly, in a voice that sounded flat in her own ears. "Nobody knows anything about him, father says. But what was Hudge telling you?" she asked, impelled by a devouring yet timid curiosity.

"Well, if he's the man I mean, he seems to be a kind of revivalist out of a job – or something or other queer. Hudge says he broke up a fight last Saturday evening in Kelly's saloon – that's the place you've never heard the name of, I reckon," he added hesitatingly, "it's where all the factory hands gather after work on Saturday to drink up their week's wages."

For once Milly's interest was stronger than her modesty.

"And did he fight?" she demanded in a suspense that was almost breathless.

"He wasn't there, you know – only passing along the street outside, at least that's what they say – when the rumpus broke out. Then he went in through the window and – "

"And?" repeated Milly, with an entrancing vision of heroic blows, for beneath her soft exterior the blood of the primitive woman flowed.

"And preached!" finished Banks, with a prodigious burst of merriment.

"Preached?" gasped Milly, "do you mean a sermon?"

"Not a regular sermon, but he spoke just like a preacher for a solid hour. Before he'd finished the men who were drunk were crying like babies and the men who weren't were breaking their necks to sign the pledge – at any rate that's something like the tale they tell. There was never such speaking (Hudge says he was there) heard before in Tappahannock, and Kelly is as mad as a hornet because he swears the town is going dry."

"And he didn't strike a single blow?" asked Milly, with a feeling of disappointment.

"Why, he had those drunken fools all blubbering like kids," said Banks, "and then when it was over he got hold of Kit Berry (he started the row, you know) and carried him all the way home to the little cottage in the hollow across the town where Kit lives with his mother. Next Sunday if it's fine there's going to be an open air meeting in Baxter's field."

There was a sore little spot in Milly's heart, a vague sentiment of disenchantment. Her house of dreams, which she had reared so patiently, stood cold and tenantless once more.

"Did you ever find out his name?" she asked, with a last courageous hope.

"Smith," replied Banks, with luminous simplicity. "The boys have nick-named him 'Ten Commandment Smith.'"

"Ten Commandment Smith?" echoed Milly in a lifeless voice. Her house of dreams had tottered at the blow and fallen from its foundation stone.

CHAPTER VII
Shows The Graces Of Adversity

ON the morning after the episode in the barroom which Banks had described to Milly, Ordway found Baxter awaiting him in a condition which in a smaller person would have appeared to be a flutter of excitement.

"So you got mixed up in a barroom row last night, I hear, Smith?"

"Well, hardly that," returned Ordway, smiling as he saw the other's embarrassment break out in drops of perspiration upon his forehead. "I was in it, I admit, but I can't exactly say that I was 'mixed up.'"

"You got Kit Berry out, eh? – and took him home."

"Nothing short of a sober man could have done it. He lives on the other side of the town in Bullfinch's Hollow."

"Oh, I've been there," said Baxter, "I've taken him home myself."

The boyish sparkle had leaped to Ordway's eyes which appeared in the animation of the moment to lend an expression of gaiety to his face. As Baxter looked at him he felt something of the charm which had touched the drunken crowd in the saloon.

"His mother was at my house before breakfast," he said, in a tone that softened as he went on until it sounded as if his whole perspiring person had melted into it. "She was in a great state,

poor creature, for it seemed that when Kit woke up this morning he promised her never to touch another drop."

"Well, I hope he'll keep his word, but I doubt it," responded Ordway. He thought of the bare little room he had seen last night, of the patched garments drying before the fire, of the scant supper spread upon the table, and of the gray-haired, weeping woman who had received his burden from him.

"He may – for a week," commented Baxter, and he added with a big, shaking laugh, "they tell me you gave 'em a sermon that was as good as a preacher's."

"Nonsense. I got angry and spoke a few words, that's all."

"Well, if they were few, they seem to have been pretty pointed. I hear Kelly closed his place two hours before midnight. Even William Cotton went home without falling once, he said."

"There was a good reason for that. I happened to have some information Cotton wanted."

"I know," said Baxter, drawing out the words with a lingering emphasis while his eyes searched Ordway's face with a curiosity before which the younger man felt himself redden painfully. "Cotton told me you got him out of a scrape as well as a lawyer could have done."

"I remembered the law and wrote it down for him, that's all."

"Have you ever practised law in Virginia?"

"I've never practised anywhere, but I intended to when – " he was going to add "when I finished college," but with a sudden caution, he stopped short and then selected his words

more carefully, "when I was a boy. I read a good deal then and some of it still sticks in my memory."

"I see," commented Baxter. His heart swelled until he became positively uncomfortable, and he coughed loudly in the effort to appear perfectly indifferent. What was it about the chap, he questioned, that had pulled at him from the start? Was it only the peculiar mingling of pathos and gaiety in his look?

"Well, I wouldn't set about reforming things too much if I were you," he said at last, "it ain't worth it, for even when people accept the reforms they are pretty likely to reject the reformer. A man's got to have a mighty tough stomach to be able to do good immoderately. But all the same," he concluded heartily, "you're the right stuff and I like you. I respect pluck no matter whether it comes out in preaching or in blows. I reckon, by the way, if you'd care to turn bookkeeper, you'd be worth as good as a hundred a month to me."

There was a round coffee stain, freshly spilled at breakfast, on his cravat, and Ordway's eyes were fixed upon it with a kind of fascination during the whole of his speech. The very slovenliness of the man – the unshaven cheeks, the wilted collar, the spotted necktie, the loosely fitting alpaca coat he wore, all seemed in some inexplicable way, to emphasise the large benignity of his aspect. Strangely enough his failures as a gentleman appeared to add to his impressiveness as a man. One felt that his faults were merely virtues swelled to abnormal proportions – as the carelessness in his dress was but a degraded form of the lavish

generosity of his heart.

"To tell the truth, I'd hoped for that all along," said Ordway, withdrawing his gaze with an effort from the soiled cravat. "Do you want me to start in at the books to-day?"

For an instant Baxter hesitated; then he coughed and went on as if he found difficulty in selecting the words that would convey his meaning.

"Well, if you don't mind there's a delicate little matter I'd like you to attend to first. Being a stranger I thought it would be easier for you than for me – have you ever heard anybody speak of Beverly Brooke?"

The interest quickened in Ordway's face.

"Why, yes. I came along the road one day with a farmer who gave me his whole story – Adam Whaley, I heard afterward, was his name."

Baxter whistled. "Oh, I reckon, he hardly told you the whole story – for I don't believe there's anybody living except myself who knows what a darn fool Mr. Beverly is. That man has never done an honest piece of work in his life; he's spent every red cent of his wife's money, and his sister's too, in some wild goose kind of speculation – and yet, bless my soul, he has the face to strut in here any day and lord it over me just as if he were his grandfather's ghost or George Washington. It's queer about those old families, now ain't it? When they begin to peter out it ain't just an ordinary petering, but a sort of mortal rottenness that takes 'em root and branch."

"And so I am to interview this interesting example of degeneration?" asked Ordway, smiling.

"You've got to make him understand that he can't ship me any more of his worthless tobacco," exclaimed Baxter in an outburst of indignation. "Do you know what he does, sir? – Well, he raises a lazy, shiftless, worm-eaten crop of tobacco in an old field – plants it too late, tops it too late, cuts it too late, cures it too late, and then lets it lie around in some leaky smokehouse until it isn't fit for a hog to chew. After he has left it there to rot all winter, he gathers the stuff up on the first pleasant day in spring and gets an old nigger to cart it to me in an open wagon. The next day he lounges in here with his palavering ways, and demands the highest price in the market – and I give it to him! That's the damned outrage of it, I give it to him!" concluded Baxter with an excitement in which his huge person heaved like a shaken mountain. "I've bought his trash for twenty years and ground it into snuff because I was afraid to refuse a Brooke – but Brooke or no Brooke there's an end to it now," he turned and waved his hand furiously to a pile of tobacco lying on the warehouse floor, "there's his trash and it ain't fit even for snuff!"

He led Ordway back into the building, picked up several leaves from the pile, smelt them, and threw them down with a contemptuous oath. "Worm-eaten, frost-bitten, mildewed. I want you to go out to Cedar Hill and tell the man that his stuff ain't fit for anything but fertiliser," he went on. "If he wants it he'd better come for it and haul it away."

"And if he refuses?"

"He most likely will – then tell him I'll throw it into the ditch."

"Oh, I'll tell him," responded Ordway, and he was aware of a peculiar excitement in the prospect of an encounter with the redoubtable Mr. Beverly. "I'll do my best," he added, going through the archway, while Baxter followed him with a few last words of instruction and advice. The big man's courage had evidently begun to ebb, for as Ordway passed into the street, he hurried after him to suggest that he should approach the subject with as much delicacy as he possessed. "I wouldn't butt at Mr. Beverly, if I were you," he cautioned, "just edge around and work in slowly when you get the chance."

But the advice was wasted upon Ordway, for he had started out in an impatience not unmixed with anger. Who was this fool of a Brooke? he wondered, and what power did he possess that kept Tappahannock in a state of slavery? He was glad that Baxter had sent him on the errand, and the next minute he laughed aloud because the big man had been too timid to come in person.

He had reached the top of the hill, and was about to turn into the road he had taken his first night in Tappahannock, when a woman, wrapped in a shawl, hurried across the street from one of the smaller houses fronting upon the green.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but are you the man that helped William Cotton?"

Clearly William Cotton was bringing him into notice. At the thought Ordway looked down upon his questioner with a

sensation that was almost one of pleasure.

"He needed business advice and I gave it, that was all," he answered.

"But you wrote down the whole case for him so that he could understand it and speak for himself," she said, catching her breath in a sob, as she pulled her thin shawl together. "You got him out of his troubles and asked nothing, so I hoped you might be willing to do as much by me. I am a widow with five little children, and though I've paid every penny I could scrape together for the mortgage, the farm is to be sold over our heads and we have nowhere to go."

Again the glow that was like the glow of pleasure illuminated Ordway's mind.

"There's not one chance in a hundred that I can help you," he said; "in the case of William Cotton it was a mere accident. Still if you will tell me where you live, I will come to you this evening and talk matters over. If I can help you, I promise you I will with pleasure."

"And for nothing? I am very poor."

He shook his head with a laugh. "Oh, I get more fun out of it than you could understand!"

After writing down the woman's name in his notebook, he passed into the country road and bent his thoughts again upon the approaching visit to Mr. Beverly.

When he reached Cedar Hill, which lay a sombre shadow against the young green of the landscape, he saw that the dead

cedars still lay where they had fallen across the avenue. Evidently the family temper had assumed an opposite, though equally stubborn form, in the person of the girl in the red cape, and she had, he surmised, refused to allow Beverly to profit by his desecration even to the extent of selling the trees he had already cut down. Was it from a sentiment, or as a warning, he wondered, that she left the great cedars barring the single approach to the house? In either case the magnificent insolence of her revenge moved him to an acknowledgment of her spirit and her justice.

In the avenue a brood of young turkeys were scratching in the fragrant dust shed by the trees; and at his approach they scattered and fled before him. It was long evidently since a stranger had penetrated into the melancholy twilight of the cedars; for the flutter of the turkeys, he discovered presently, was repeated in an excited movement he felt rather than saw as he ascended the stone steps and knocked at the door. The old hound he had seen the first night rose from under a bench on the porch, and came up to lick his hand; a window somewhere in the right wing shut with a loud noise; and through the bare old hall, which he could see from the half open door, a breeze blew dispersing an odour of hot soapsuds. The hall was dim and empty except for a dilapidated sofa in one corner, on which a brown and white setter lay asleep, and a rusty sword which clanked against the wall with a regular, swinging motion. In response to his repeated knocks there was a sound of slow steps on the staircase, and a handsome, shabbily dressed man, holding a box of dominoes, came to the door and

held out his hand with an apologetic murmur.

"I beg your pardon, but the wind makes such a noise I did not hear your knock. Will you come inside or do you prefer to sit on the porch where we can get the view?"

As he spoke he edged his way courteously across the threshold and with a hospitable wave of his hand, sat down upon one of the pine benches against the decaying railing. In spite of the shabbiness of his clothes he presented a singularly attractive, even picturesque appearance, from the abundant white hair above his forehead to his small, shapely feet encased now in an ancient pair of carpet slippers. His figure was graceful and well built, his brown eyes soft and melancholy, and the dark moustache drooping over his mouth had been trained evidently into an immaculate precision. His moustache, however, was the one immaculate feature of his person, for even his carpet slippers were dirty and worn threadbare in places. Yet his beauty, which was obscured in the first view by what in a famous portrait might have been called "the tone of time," produced, after a closer and more sympathetic study, an effect which, upon Ordway at least, fell little short of the romantic. In his youth Beverly had been, probably, one of the handsomest men of his time, and this distinction, it was easy to conjecture, must have been the occasion, if not the cause, of his ruin. Even now, pompous and slovenly as he appeared, it was difficult to resist a certain mysterious fascination which he still possessed. When he left Tappahannock Ordway had felt only a humorous contempt for

the owner of Cedar Hill, but sitting now beside him on the hard pine bench, he found himself yielding against his will to an impulse of admiration. Was there not a certain spiritual kinship in the fact that they were both failures in life?

"You are visiting Tappahannock, then?" asked Beverly with his engaging smile; "I go in seldom or I should perhaps have seen you. When a man gets as old and as much of an invalid as I am, he usually prefers to spend his days by the fireside in the bosom of his family."

The bloom of health was in his cheeks, yet as he spoke he pressed his hand to his chest with the habitual gesture of an invalid. "A chronic trouble which has prevented my taking an active part in the world's affairs," he explained, with a sad, yet cheerful dignity as of one who could enliven tragedy with a comic sparkle. "I had my ambitions once, sir," he added, "but we will not speak of them for they are over, and at this time of my life I can do little more than try to amuse myself with a box of dominoes."

As he spoke he placed the box on the bench between them and began patiently matching the little ivory blocks. Ordway expressed a casual sympathy, and then, forgetting Baxter's warning, he attempted to bring the conversation to a practical level.

"I am employed now at Baxter's warehouse," he began, "and the object of my call is to speak with you about your last load of tobacco."

"Ah!" said Beverly, with warming interest, "it is a sufficient recommendation to have come from Robert Baxter – for that man has been the best, almost the only, friend I have had in life. It is impossible to overestimate either his character or my admiration. He has come to my assistance, sir, when I hardly knew where to turn for help. If you are employed by him, you are indeed to be envied."

"I am entirely of your opinion," observed Ordway, "but the point this morning – "

"Well, we'll let that rest a while now," interrupted Beverly, pushing the dominoes away, and turning his beautiful, serious face upon his companion. "When there is an opportunity for me to speak of Baxter's generosity, I feel that I cannot let it escape me. Something tells me that you will understand and pardon my enthusiasm. There is no boy like an old boy, sir."

His voice broke, and drawing a ragged handkerchief from the pocket of his corduroy coat, he blew his nose and wiped away two large teardrops from his eyes. After such an outburst of sentiment it seemed a positive indecency to inform him that Baxter had threatened to throw his tobacco into a ditch.

"He regrets very much that your crop was a failure this year," said Ordway, after what he felt to be a respectable pause.

"And yet," returned Beverly, with his irrepressible optimism, "if things had been worse it might even have rotted in the ground. As it was, I never saw more beautiful seedlings – they were perfect specimens. Had not the tobacco worms and the frost and

the leak in the smokehouse all combined against me, I should have raised the most splendid crop in Virginia, sir." The spectacle of this imaginary crop suffused his face with a glow of ardour. "My health permits me to pay little attention to the farm," he continued in his eloquent voice, "I see it falling to rains about me, and I am fortunate in being able to enjoy the beauty of its decay. Yes, my crop was a failure, I admit," he added, with a touching cheerfulness, "it lay several months too long in the barn before I could get it sent to the warehouse – but this was my misfortune, not my fault, as I am sure Robert Baxter will understand."

"He will find it easier to understand the case than to sell the tobacco, I fancy."

"However that may be, he is aware that I place the utmost confidence in his judgment. What he does will be the right thing, sir."

This confession of artless trust was so overpowering that for a moment Ordway hung back, feeling that any ground would be dangerous ground upon which to proceed. The very absorption in which Beverly arranged the dominoes upon the bench added to the childlike simplicity of his appearance. Then a sudden irritation against the man possessed him, for he remembered the girl in the red cape and the fallen cedars. From where he sat now they were hidden by the curve of the avenue, but the wonderful trees, which shed their rich gloom almost upon the roof of the house, made him realise afresh the full extent of Beverly's folly. In the fine spring sunshine whatever beauties were left in the

ruined place showed in an intenser and more vernal aspect. Every spear of grass on the lawn was tipped with light, and the young green leaves on the lilacs stood out as if illuminated on a golden background. In one of the ivy-covered eaves a wren was building, and he could see the flutter of a bluebird in an ancient cedar.

"It is a beautiful day," remarked Beverly, pensively, "but the lawn needs trimming." His gaze wandered gently over the tangled sheep mint, orchard grass and Ailantus shoots which swept from the front steps to the fallen fence which had once surrounded the place, and he added with an outburst of animation, "I must tell Micah to turn in the cattle."

Remembering the solitary cow he had seen in a sheltered corner of the barn, Ordway bit back a smile as he rose and held out his hand.

"After all, I haven't delivered my message," he said, "which was to the effect that the tobacco is practically unfit for use. Baxter told me to request you to send for it at your convenience."

Beverly gathered up his dominoes, and rising with no appearance of haste, turned upon him an expression of suffering dignity.

"Such an act upon my part," he said, "would be a reflection upon Baxter's ability as a merchant, and after thirty years of friendship I refuse to put an affront upon him. I would rather, sir, lose every penny my tobacco might bring me."

His sincerity was so admirable, that for a moment it obscured even in Ordway's mind the illusion upon which it rested. When

a man is honestly ready to sacrifice his fortune in the cause of friendship, it becomes the part of mere vulgarity to suggest to him that his affairs are in a state of penury.

"Then it must be used for fertilisers or thrown away," said Ordway, shortly.

"I trust myself entirely in Baxter's hands," replied Beverly, in sad but noble tones, "whatever he does will be the best that could be done under the circumstances. You may assure him of this with my compliments."

"Well, I fear, there's nothing further to be said," remarked Ordway; and he was about to make his final good-bye, when a faded lady, wrapped in a Paisley shawl, appeared in the doorway and came out upon the porch.

"Amelia," said Beverly, "allow me to present Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith, Mrs. Brooke."

Mrs. Brooke smiled at him wanly with a pretty, thin-lipped mouth and a pair of large rather prominent eyes, which had once been gray but were now washed into a cloudy drab. She was still pretty in a hopeless, depressed, ineffectual fashion; and though her skirt was frayed about the edges and her shoes run down at the heel, her pale, fawn-coloured hair was arranged in elaborate spirals and the hand she held out to Ordway was still delicately fine and white. She was like a philosopher, who, having sunk into a universal pessimism of thought, preserves, in spite of himself, a small belief or so in the minor pleasures of existence. Out of the general wreck of her appearance she had clung desperately

to the beauties of her hair and hands.

"I had hoped you would stay to dinner," she remarked in her listless manner to Ordway. Fate had whipped her into submission, but there was that in her aspect which never permitted one for an instant to forget the whipping. If her husband had dominated by his utter incapacity, she had found a smaller consolation in feeling that though she had been obliged to drudge she had never learned to do it well. To do it badly, indeed, had become at last the solitary proof that by right of birth she was entitled not to do it at all.

At Ordway's embarrassed excuse she made no effort to insist, but stood, smiling like a ghost of her own past prettiness, in the doorway. Behind her the bare hall and the dim staircase appeared more empty, more gloomy, more forlornly naked than they had done before.

Again Ordway reached for his hat, and prepared to pick his way carefully down the sunken steps; but this time he was arrested by the sound of smothered laughter at the side of the house, which ran back to the vegetable garden. A moment later the girl in the red cape appeared running at full speed across the lawn, pursued by several shrieking children that followed closely at her skirts. Her clear, ringing laugh – the laugh of youth and buoyant health – held Ordway motionless for an instant upon the porch; then as she came nearer he saw that she held an old, earth-covered spade in her hands and that her boots and short woollen skirt were soiled with stains from the garden beds. But the smell

of the warm earth that clung about her seemed only to increase the vitality and freshness in her look. Her vivid animation, her sparkling glance, struck him even more forcibly than they had done in the street of Tappahannock.

At sight of Ordway her laugh was held back breathlessly for an instant; then breaking out again, it began afresh with redoubled merriment, and sinking with exhaustion on the lowest step, she let the spade fall to the ground while she buried her wind-blown head in her hands.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered presently, lifting her radiant brown eyes, "but I've run so fast that I'm quite out of breath." Stopping with an effort she sought in vain to extinguish her laughter in the curls of the smallest child.

"Emily," said Beverly with dignity, "allow me to present Mr. Smith."

The girl looked up from the step; and then, rising, smiled brightly upon Ordway over the spade which she had picked up from the ground.

"I can't shake hands," she explained, "because I've been spading the garden."

If she recognised him for the tramp who had slept in her barn there was no hint of it in her voice or manner.

"Do you mean, Emily," asked Beverly, in his plaintive voice, "that you have been actually digging in the ground?"

"Actually," repeated Emily, in a manner which made Ordway suspect that the traditional feminine softness was not included

among her virtues, "I actually stepped on dirt and saw – worms."

"But where is Micah?"

"Micah has an attack of old age. He was eighty-two yesterday."

"Is it possible?" remarked Beverly, and the discovery appeared to afford him ground for cheerful meditation.

"No, it isn't possible, but it's true," returned the girl, with good-humoured merriment. "As there are only two able-bodied persons on the place, the mare and I, it seemed to me that one of us had better take a hand at the spade. But I had to leave off after the first round," she added to Ordway, showing him her right hand, from the palm of which the skin had been rubbed away. She was so much like a gallant boy that Ordway felt an impulse to take the hand in his own and examine it more carefully.

"Well, I'm very much surprised to hear that Micah is so old," commented Beverly, dwelling upon the single fact which had riveted his attention. "I must be making him a little present upon his birthday."

The girl's eyes flashed under her dark lashes, but remembering Ordway's presence, she turned to him with a casual remark about the promise of the spring. He saw at once that she had achieved an indignant detachment from her thriftless family, and the ardent, almost impatient energy with which she fell to labour was, in itself, a rebuke to the pleasant indolence which had hastened, if it had not brought about, the ruin of the house. Was it some temperamental disgust for the hereditary idleness which

had spurred her on to take issue with the worn-out traditions of her ancestors and to place herself among the labouring rather than the leisure class? As she stood there in her freshness and charm, with the short brown curls blown from her forehead, the edge of light shining in her eyes and on her lips, and the rich blood kindling in her vivid face, it seemed to Ordway, looking back at her from the end of his forty years, that he was brought face to face with the spirit of the future rising amid the decaying sentiment of the past.

CHAPTER VIII
"Ten Commandment Smith"

WHEN Ordway had disappeared beyond the curve in the avenue, Emily went slowly up the steps, her spade clanking against the stone as she ascended.

"Did he come about the tobacco, Beverly?" she asked.

Beverly rose languidly from the bench, and stood rubbing his hand across his forehead with an exhausted air.

"My head was very painful and he talked so rapidly I could hardly follow him," he replied; "but is it possible, Emily, that you have been digging in the garden?"

"There is nobody else to do it," replied Emily, with an impatient flash in her eyes; "only half the garden has been spaded. If you disapprove so heartily, I wish you'd produce someone to do the work."

Mrs. Brooke, who had produced nothing in her life except nine children, six of whom had died in infancy, offered at this a feeble and resigned rebuke.

"I am sure you could get Salem," she replied.

"We owe him already three months' wages," returned the girl, "I am still paying him for last autumn."

"All I ask of you, Emily, is peace," remarked Beverly, in a gentle voice, as he prepared to enter the house. "Nothing – no amount of brilliant argument can take the place of peace in a

family circle. My poor head is almost distracted when you raise your voice."

The three children flocked out of the dining-room and came, with a rush, to fling themselves upon him. They adored him – and there was a live terrapin which they had brought in a box for him to see! In an instant his depression vanished, and he went off, his beautiful face beaming with animation, while the children clung rapturously to his corduroy coat.

"Amelia," said Emily, lowering her voice, "don't you think it would improve Beverly's health if he were to try working for an hour every day in the garden?"

Mrs. Brooke appeared troubled by the suggestion. "If he could only make up his mind to it, I've no doubt it would," she answered, "he has had no exercise since he was obliged to give up his horse. Walking he has always felt to be ungentlemanly."

She spoke in a softly tolerant voice, though she herself drudged day and night in her anxious, tearful, and perfectly ineffectual manner. For twenty years she had toiled patiently without, so far as one could perceive, achieving a single definite result – for by some unfortunate accident of temperament, she was doomed to do badly whatever she undertook to do at all. Yet her intention was so admirable that she appeared forever apologising in her heart for the incompetence of her hands.

Emily placed the spade in the corner of the porch, and desisting from her purpose, went upstairs to wash her hands before going in to dinner. As she ascended the wide, dimly

lighted staircase, upon which the sun shone with a greenish light from the gallery above, she stopped twice to wonder why Beverly's visitor had slept in the barn like a tramp only six weeks ago. Before her mirror, a minute later, she put the same question to herself while she braided her hair.

The room was large, cool, high-ceiled, with a great brick fireplace, and windows which looked out on the garden, where purple and white lilacs were blooming beside the gate. On the southern side the ivy had grown through the slats of the old green shutters, until they were held back, crumbling, against the house, and in the space between one of the cedars brushed always, with a whispering sound, against the discoloured panes. In Emily's absence a curious melancholy descended on the old mahogany furniture, the greenish windows and the fireless hearth; but with the opening of the door and the entrance of her vivid youth, there appeared also a light and gracious atmosphere in her surroundings. She remembered the day upon which she had returned after ten years' absence, and how as she opened the closed shutters, the gloom of the place had resisted the passage of the sunshine, retreating stubbornly from the ceiling to the black old furniture and then across the uncarpeted floor to the hall where it still held control. For months after her return it had seemed to her that the fight was between her spirit and the spirit of the past – between hope and melancholy, between growth and decay. The burden of debt, of poverty, of hopeless impotence had fallen upon her shoulders, and she had struggled under it with

impetuous gusts of anger, but with an energy that never faltered. To keep the children fed and clothed, to work the poor farm as far as she was able, to stay clear of any further debts, and to pay off the yearly mortgage with her small income, these were the things which had filled her thoughts and absorbed the gallant fervour of her youth. Her salary at the public school had seemed to Beverly, though he disapproved of her position, to represent the possibility of luxury; and in some loose, vague way he was never able to understand why the same amount could not be made to serve in several opposite directions at the same time.

"That fifty dollars will come in very well, indeed, my dear," he would remark, with cheerfulness, gloating over the unfamiliar sight of the bank notes, "it's exactly the amount of Wilson's bill which he's been sending in for the last year, and he refuses to furnish any groceries until the account is settled. Then there's the roof which must be repaired – it will help us there – then we must all have a supply of shoes, and the wages of the hands are due to-morrow, I overlooked that item."

"But if you pay it all to Wilson," Emily would ask, as a kind of elementary lesson in arithmetic, "how is the money going to buy all the other things?"

"Ah, to be sure," Beverly would respond, as if struck by the lucidity of the idea, "that is the question."

And it was likely to remain the question until the end of Beverly – for he had grown so accustomed to the weight of poverty upon his shoulders that he would probably have

felt a sense of loss if it had been suddenly removed. But it was impossible to live in the house with him, to receive his confidences and meet his charming smile and not to entertain a sentiment of affection for him in one's heart. His unfailing courtesy was his defence, though even this at times worked in Emily an unreasonable resentment. He had ruined his family, and she felt that she could have forgiven him more easily if he had ruined it with a less irreproachable demeanour.

After her question he had said nothing further about the tobacco, but a chance meeting with Adam Whaley, as she rode into Tappahannock on the Sunday after Ordway's visit, made clear to her exactly what the purpose of that visit had been.

"It's a pity Mr. Beverly let his tobacco spoil, particular' arter his wheat turned out to be no account," remarked Adam. "I hope you don't mind my sayin', Miss Em'ly, that Mr. Beverly is about as po' a farmer as he is a first rate gentleman."

"Oh, no, I don't mind in the least, Adam," said Emily. "Do you know," she asked presently, "any hands that I can get to work the garden this week?"

Whaley shook his head. "They get better paid at the factories," he answered; "an' them that ain't got thar little patch to labour in, usually manage to git a job in town."

Emily was on her old horse – an animal discarded by Mr. Beverly on account of age – and she looked down at his hanging neck with a feeling that was almost one of hopelessness. Beverly, who had never paid his bills, had seldom paid his servants; and of

the old slave generation that would work for its master for a song, there were only Micah and poor half-demented Aunt Mehitable now left.

"The trouble with Mr. Beverly," continued Adam, laying his hand on the neck of the old horse, "is that he was born loose-fingered jest as some folks are born loose-moraled. He's never held on to anything sense he came into the world an' I doubt if he ever will. Why, bless yo' life, even as a leetle boy he never could git a good grip on his fishin' line. It was always a-slidin' an' slippin' into the water."

They had reached Tappahannock in the midst of Adam's philosophic reflection; and as they were about to pass an open field on the edge of the town, Emily pointed to a little crowd which had gathered in the centre of the grass-grown space.

"Is it a Sunday frolic, do you suppose?" she inquired.

"That? Oh no – it's 'Ten Commandment Smith,' as they call him now. He gives a leetle talk out thar every fine Sunday arternoon."

"A talk? About what?"

"Wall, I ain't much of a listener, Miss, when it comes to that. My soul is willin' an' peart enough, but it's my hands an' feet that make the trouble. I declar' I've only got to set down in a pew for 'em to twitch untwel you'd think I had the Saint Vitus dance. It don't look well to be twitchin' the whole time you are in church, so that's the reason I'm obleeged to stay away. As for 'Ten Commandment Smith,' though, he's got a voice that's better

than the doxology, an' his words jest boom along like cannon."

"And do the people like it?"

"Some, of 'em do, I reckon, bein' as even sermons have thar followers, but thar're t'others that go jest out of the sperit to be obleegin', an' it seems to them that a man's got a pretty fair licence to preach who gives away about two-thirds of what he gits a month. Good Lord, he could drum up a respectable sized congregation jest from those whose back mortgages he's helped pay up."

While he spoke Emily had turned her horse's head into the field, and riding slowly toward the group, she stopped again upon discovering that it was composed entirely of men. Then going a little nearer, she drew rein just beyond the outside circle, and paused for a moment with her eyes fixed intently upon the speaker's face.

In the distance a forest, still young in leaf, lent a radiant, springlike background to the field, which rose in soft green swells that changed to golden as they melted gradually into the landscape. Ordway's head was bare, and she saw now that the thick locks upon his forehead were powdered heavily with gray. She could not catch his words, but his voice reached her beyond the crowd; and she found herself presently straining her ears lest she miss the sound which seemed to pass with a peculiar richness into the atmosphere about the speaker. The religious significance of the scene moved her but little – for she came of a race that scorned emotional conversions or any faith, for that

matter, which did not confine itself within four well-built walls. Yet, in spite of her convictions, something in the voice whose words she could not distinguish, held her there, as if she were rooted on her old horse to the spot of ground. The unconventional preacher, in his cheap clothes, aroused in her an interest which seemed in some vague way to have its beginning in a mystery that she could not solve. The man was neither a professional revivalist nor a member of the Salvation Army, yet he appeared to hold the attention of his listeners as if either their money or their faith was in his words. And it was no uncultured oratory – "Ten Commandment Smith," for all his rough clothes, his muddy boots and his hardened hands, was beneath all a gentleman, no matter what his work – no matter even what his class. Though she had lived far out of the world in which he had had his place, she felt instinctively that the voice she heard had been trained to reach another audience than the one before him in the old field. His words might be simple and straight from the heart – doubtless they were – but the voice of the preacher – the vibrant, musical, exquisitely modulated voice – was not merely a personal gift, but the result of generations of culture. The atmosphere of a larger world was around him as he stood there, bare-headed in the sunshine, speaking to a breathless crowd of factory workers as if his heart went out to them in the words he uttered. Perfectly motionless on the grass at his feet his congregation sat in circles with their pathetic dumb eyes fixed on his face.

"What is it about, Adam? Can't you find out?" asked Emily,

stirred by an impulsive desire to be one of the attentive group of listeners – to come under the spell of personality which drew its magic circle in the centre of the green field.

Adam crossed the space slowly, and returned after what was to Emily an impatient interval.

"It's one of his talks on the Ten Commandments – that's why they gave him his nickname. I didn't stay to find out whether 'twas the top or the bottom of 'em, Miss, as I thought you might be in a hurry."

"But they can get that in church. What makes them come out here?"

"Oh, he tells 'em things," said Adam, "about people and places, and how to get on in life. Then he's al'ays so ready to listen to anybody's troubles arterward; and he's taken over Martha Frayley's mortgage – you know she's the widow of Mike Frayley who was a fireman and lost his life last January in the fire at Bingham's Wall – I reckon, a man's got a right to talk big when he lives big, too."

"Yes, I suppose he has," said Emily. "Well, I must be going now, so I'll ride on ahead of you."

Touching the neck of the horse with her bare hand, she passed at a gentle amble into one of the smaller streets of Tappahannock. Her purpose was to call upon one of her pupils who had been absent from school for several days, but upon reaching the house she found that the child, after a slight illness, had recovered sufficiently to be out of doors. This was a relief rather than a

disappointment, and mounting again, she started slowly back in the direction of Cedar Hill. A crowd of men, walking in groups along the roadside, made her aware that the gathering in the field had dispersed, and as she rode by she glanced curiously among them in the hope of discovering the face of the speaker. He was walking slightly behind the crowd, listening with an expression of interest, to a man in faded blue overalls, who kept a timid yet determined hold upon his arm. His face, which had appeared grave to Emily when she saw it at Cedar Hill, wore now a look which seemed a mixture of spiritual passion and boyish amusement. He impressed her as both sad and gay, both bitter and sympathetic, and she was struck again by the contrast between his hard mouth and his gentle eyes. As she met his glance, he bowed without a smile, while he stepped back into the little wayside path among the dusty thistles.

Unconsciously, she had searched his face as Milly Trend had done before her, and like her, she had found there only an impersonal kindliness.

CHAPTER IX
The Old And The New

WHEN she reached home she found Beverly, seated before a light blaze in the dining-room, plunged in the condition of pious indolence which constituted his single observance of the Sabbath. To do nothing had always seemed to him in its way as religious as to attend church, and so he sat now perfectly motionless, with the box of dominoes reposing beside his tobacco pouch on the mantel above his head. The room was in great confusion, and the threadbare carpet, ripped up in places, was littered with the broken bindings of old books and children's toys made of birchwood or corncob, upon which Beverly delighted to work during the six secular days of the week. At his left hand the table was already laid for supper, which consisted of a dish of batter-bread, a half bared ham bone and a pot of coffee, from which floated a thin and cheap aroma. A wire shovel for popping corn stood at one side of the big brick fireplace, and on the hearth there was a small pile of half shelled red and yellow ears. Between the two long windows a tall mahogany clock, one of the few pieces left by the collector of old furniture, ticked with a loud, monotonous sound, which seemed to increase in volume with each passage of the hands.

"Did you hear any news, my dear?" inquired Beverly, as Emily entered, for in spite of the fact that he rarely left his fireside, he

was an insatiable consumer of small bits of gossip.

"I didn't see anybody," answered Emily in her cheerful voice. "Shall I pour the coffee?"

She went to the head of the table, while her brother, after shelling an ear of corn into the wire shovel, began shaking it slowly over the hickory log.

"I thought you might have heard if Milly Trend had really made up her mind to marry that young tobacco merchant," he observed.

Before Emily could reply the door opened and the three children rushed in, pursued by Aunt Mehitable, who announced that "Miss Meely" had gone to bed with one of her sick headaches and would not come down to supper. The information afforded Beverly some concern, and he rose to leave the room with the intention of going upstairs to his wife's chamber; but observing, as he did so, that the corn was popping finely, he sat down again and devoted his attention to the shovel, which he began to shake more rapidly.

"The terrapin's sick, papa," piped one of the children, a little girl called Lila, as she pulled back her chair with a grating noise and slipped into her seat. "Do you s'pose it would like a little molasses for its supper?"

"Terrapins don't eat molasses," said the boy, whose name was Blair. "They eat flies – I've seen 'em."

"My terrapin shan't eat flies," protested Bella, the second little girl.

"It ain't your terrapin!"

"It is."

"It ain't her terrapin, is it, papa?"

Beverly, having finished his task, unfastened the lid of the shovel with the poker, and suggested that the terrapin might try a little popcorn for a change. As he stood there with his white hair and his flushed face in the red firelight, he made a picture of beautiful and serene domesticity.

"I shouldn't wonder if he'd get quite a taste for popcorn if you could once persuade him to try it," he remarked, his mind having wandered whimsically from his wife to the terrapin.

Emily had given the children batter-bread and buttermilk, and she sat now regarding her brother's profile as it was limned boldly in shadow against the quivering flames. It was impossible; she discovered, to survey Beverly's character with softness or his profile with severity.

"Don't you think," she ventured presently, after a wholesome effort to achieve diplomacy, "that you might try to-morrow to spade the seed rows in the garden. Adam can't find anybody, and if the corn isn't dropped this week we'll probably get none until late in the summer."

"'I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed,'" quoted Beverly, as he drank his coffee. "It would lay me up for a week, Emily, I am surprised that you ask it."

She was surprised herself, the moment after she had put the question, so hopeless appeared any attempt to bend Beverly to

utilitarian purposes.

"Well, the tomatoes which I had counted on for the market will come too late," she said with a barely suppressed impatience in her voice.

"I shouldn't worry about it if I were you," returned Beverly, "there's nothing that puts wrinkles in a pretty face so soon as little worries. I remember Uncle Bolingbroke (he used to be my ideal as a little boy) told me once that he had lived to be upward of ninety on the worries from which he had been saved. As a small child I was taken to see him once when he had just come to absolute ruin and had been obliged to sell his horses and his house and even his wife's jewellery for debt. A red flag was flying at the gate, but inside sat Uncle Bolingbroke, drinking port wine and cracking nuts with two of his old cronies. 'Yes, I've lost everything, my boy,' he cried, 'but it doesn't worry me a bit!' At that instant I remember noticing that his forehead was the smoothest I had ever seen."

"But his wife had to take in dressmaking," commented Emily, "and his children grew up without a particle of education."

"Ah, so they did," admitted Beverly, with sadness, "the details had escaped me."

As they had escaped him with equal success all his life, the fact seemed to Emily hardly deserving of comment, and leaving him to his supper, she went upstairs to find Mrs. Brooke prostrate, in a cold room, with her head swathed in camphor bandages. In answer to Emily's inquiries, she moaned plaintively that the

pantry shelves needed scouring and that she must get up at daybreak and begin the work. "I've just remembered lying here that I planned to clean them last week," she said excitedly, "and will you remind me, Emily, as soon as I get up that Beverly's old brown velveteen coat needs a patch at the elbow?"

"Don't think of such things now, Amelia, there's plenty of time. You are shivering all over – I'll start the fire in a moment. It has turned quite cool again."

"But I wanted to save the pine knots until Beverly came up," sighed Mrs. Brooke, "he is so fond of them."

Without replying to her nervous protest, Emily knelt on the hearth and kindled a blaze which leaped rosily over the knots of resinous pine. Of the two family failings with which she was obliged to contend, she had long ago decided that Beverly's selfishness was less harmful in its results than Amelia's self-sacrifice. Inordinate at all times, it waxed positively violent during her severe attacks of headache, and between two spasms of pain her feverish imagination conjured up dozens of small self-denials which served to increase her discomfort while they conferred no possible benefit upon either her husband or her children. Her temperament had fitted her for immolation; but the character of the age in which she lived had compelled her to embrace a domestic rather than a religious martyrdom. The rack would have been to her morally a bed of roses, and some exalted grace belonging to the high destiny that she had missed was visible at times in her faded gray eyes and impassive features.

"Mehitable brought me an egg," she groaned presently, growing more comfortable in spite of her resolve, as the rosy fire-light penetrated into the chill gloom where she lay, "but I sent it down to Blair – I heard him coughing."

"He didn't want it. There was plenty of batter-bread."

"Yes, but the poor boy is fond of eggs and he so seldom has one. It is very sad. Emily, have you noticed how inert and lifeless Mr. Brooke has grown?"

"It's nothing new, Amelia, he has always been that way. Can't you sleep now?"

"Oh, but if you could have seen him when we became engaged, Emily – such life! such spirits! I remember the first time I dined at your father's – that was before Beverly's mother died, so, of course, your mother wasn't even thought of in the family. I suppose second marriages are quite proper, since the Lord permits them, but they always seem to me like trying to sing the same hymn over again with equal fervour. Well, I was going to say that when your father asked me what part of the fowl I preferred and I answered 'dark meat, sir,' he fairly rapped the table in his delight: 'Oh, Amelia, what a capital wife you'll make for Beverly,' he cried, 'if you will only continue to prefer dark meat!'"

She stopped breathlessly, lay silent for a moment, and then began to moan softly with pain. Emily swept the hearth, and after putting on a fresh log, went out, closing the door after her. There was no light in her room, but she reflected with a kind of

desperation that there was no Beverly and no Amelia. The weight of the family had left her bruised and helpless, yet she knew that she must go downstairs again, remove the supper things, and send the three resisting children off to bed. She was quite equal to the task she had undertaken, yet there were moments when, because of her youth and her vitality, she found it harder to control her temper than to accomplish her work.

At ten o'clock, when she had coaxed the children to sleep, and persuaded Amelia to drink a cup of gruel, she came to her room again and began to undress slowly by the full moonlight which streamed through the window. Outside, beyond the lilac bushes, she could see the tangled garden, with the dried stubble of last year's corn protruding from the unspaded rows. This was the last sight upon which her eyes turned before she climbed into the high tester bed and fell into the prompt and untroubled sleep of youth.

Awaking at six o'clock she went again to the window, and at the first glance it seemed to her that she must have slipped back into some orderly and quiet dream – for the corn rows which had presented a blighted aspect under the moonlight were now spaded and harrowed into furrows ready for planting. The suggestion that Beverly had prepared a surprise for her occurred first to her mind, but she dismissed this the next instant and thought of Adam, Micah, even of the demented Aunt Mehitable. The memory of the fairy godmother in the story book brought a laugh to her lips, and as she dressed herself and ran downstairs to the garden gate, she half expected to see the pumpkin chariot

disappearing down the weed-grown path and over the fallen fence. The lilac blossoms shed a delicious perfume into her face, and leaning against the rotting posts of the gate, she looked with mingled delight and wonder upon the freshly turned earth, which flushed faintly pink in the sunshine. A heavy dew lay over the landscape and as the sun rose slowly higher the mist was drawn back from the green fields like a sheet of gauze that is gathered up.

"Beverly? Micah? Mehitable?" each name was a question she put to herself, and after each she answered decisively, "No, it is impossible." Micah, who appeared at the moment, doting, half blind and wholly rheumatic, shook his aged head helplessly in response to her eager inquiries. There was clearly no help to be had from him except the bewildered assistance he rendered in the afternoon by following on her footsteps with a split basket while she dropped the grains of corn into the opened furrows. His help in this case even was hardly more than a hindrance, for twice in his slow progress he stumbled and fell over a trailing brier in the path, and Emily was obliged to stop her work and gather up the grain which he had scattered.

"Dese yer ole briers is des a-layin' out fur you," he muttered as he sat on the ground rubbing the variegated patch on his rheumatic knee. When the planting was over he went grumbling back to his cabin, while Emily walked slowly up and down the garden path and dreamed of the vegetables which would ripen for the market. In the midst of her business calculations she

remembered the little congregation in the green field on Sunday afternoon and the look of generous enthusiasm in the face of the man who passed her in the road. Why had she thought of him? she wondered idly, and why should that group of listeners gathered out of doors in the faint sunshine awake in her a sentiment which was associated with some religious emotion of which she had been half unconscious?

The next night she awoke from a profound sleep with the same memory in her mind, and turning on her pillow, lay wide awake in the moonlight, which brought with it a faint spring chill from the dew outside. On the ivy the light shone almost like dawn, and as she could not fall asleep again, she rose presently, and slipping into her flannel dressing-gown, crossed to the window and looked out upon the shining fields, the garden and the blossoming lilacs at the gate. The shadow of the lilacs lay thick and black along the garden walk, and her eyes were resting upon them, when it seemed to her that a portion of the darkness detached itself and melted out into the moonlight. At first she perceived only the moving shadow; then gradually a figure was outlined on the bare rows of the garden, and as her eyes grew accustomed to the light, she saw that the figure had assumed a human shape, though it was still followed so closely by its semblance upon the ground that it was impossible at a distance to distinguish the living worker from his airy double. Yet she realised instantly that her mysterious gardener was at work before her eyes, and hastening into her clothes, she caught

up her cape from a chair, and started toward the door with an impulsive determination to discover his identity. With her hand on the knob, she hesitated and stopped, full of perplexity, upon the threshold. Since he had wished to remain undiscovered was it fair, she questioned, to thrust recognition upon his kindness? On the other hand was it not more than unfair – was it not positively ungrateful – to allow his work to pass without any sign of acceptance or appreciation? In the chill white moonlight outside she could see the pointed tops of the cedars rising like silver spires. As the boughs moved the wind entered, bringing mingled odours of cedar berries, lilacs and freshly turned soil. For an instant longer her hesitation lasted; then throwing aside her cape, she undressed quickly, without glancing again down into the garden. When she fell asleep now it was to dream of the shadowy gardener spading in the moonlight among the lilacs.

CHAPTER X
His Neighbour's Garden

IN his nightly work in the Brookes' garden, Ordway was prompted at first by a mere boyish impulse to repay people whose bread he had eaten and in whose straw he had slept. But at the end of the first hour's labour the beauty of the moonlight wrought its spell upon him, and he felt that the fragrance of the lilacs went like strong wine to his head. So the next night he borrowed Mrs. Twine's spade again and went back for the pure pleasure of the exercise; and the end of the week found him still digging among the last year's plants in the loamy beds. By spading less than two hours a night, he had turned the soil of half the garden before Sunday put a stop to his work.

On his last visit, he paused at the full of the moon, and stood looking almost with sadness at the blossoming lilacs and the overgrown path powdered with wild flowers which had strayed in through the broken fence. For the hours he had spent there the place had given him back his freedom and his strength and even a reminiscent sentiment of his youth. While he worked Lydia had been only a little farther off in the beauty of the moonlight, and he had felt her presence with a spiritual sense which was keener than the sense of touch.

As he drew his spade for the last time from the earth, he straightened himself, and standing erect, faced the cool wind

which tossed the hair back from his heated forehead. At the moment he was content with the moonlight and the lilacs and the wind that blew over the spring fields, and it seemed easy enough to let the future rest with the past in the hands of God. Swinging the spade at his side, he lowered his eyes and moved a step toward the open gate. Then he stopped short, for he saw that Emily Brooke was standing there between the old posts under the purple and white lilacs.

"It seemed too ungrateful to accept such a service and not even to say 'thank you,'" she remarked gravely. There was a drowsy sound in her voice; her lids hung heavily like a child's over her brown eyes, and her hair was flattened into little curls on one side by the pressure of the pillow.

"It has been a pleasure to me," he answered, "so I deserve no thanks for doing the thing that I enjoyed."

Drawing nearer he stood before her with the spade on his shoulder and his head uncovered. The smell of the earth hung about him, and even in the moonlight she could see that his blue eyes looked almost gay. She felt all at once that he was younger, larger, more masculine than she had at first believed.

"And yet it is work," she said in her voice of cheerful authority, "and sorely needed work at that. I can thank you even though I cannot understand why you have done it."

"Let's put it down to my passion to improve things," he responded with a whimsical gravity, "don't you think the garden as I first saw it justified that explanation of my behaviour?"

"The explanation, yes – but not you," she answered, smiling.

"Then let my work justify itself. I've made a neat job of it, haven't I?"

"It's more than neat, it's positively ornamental," she replied, "but even your success doesn't explain your motive."

"Well, the truth is – if you will have it – I needed exercise."

"You might have walked."

"That doesn't reach the shoulders – there's the trouble."

She laughed with an easy friendliness which struck him as belonging to her gallant manner.

"Oh, I assure you I shan't insist upon a reason, I'm too much obliged to you," she returned, coming inside the gate. "Indeed, I'm too good a farmer, I believe, to insist upon a reason anyway. Providence disposes and I accept with thanks. I may wish, though, that the coloured population shared your leaning toward the spade. By the way, I see it isn't mine. It looks too shiny."

"I borrowed it from Mrs. Twine, and it is my suspicion that she scrubs it every night."

"In that case I wonder that she lets it go out to other people's gardens."

"She doesn't usually," he laughed as he spoke, "but you see I am a very useful person to Mrs. Twine. She talks at her husband by way of me."

"Oh, I see," said Emily. "Well, I'm much obliged to her."

"You needn't be. She hadn't the remotest idea where it went."

Her merriment, joining with his, brought them suddenly

together in a feeling of good fellowship.

"So you don't like divided thanks," she commented gaily.

"Not when they are undeserved," he answered, "as they are in this case."

For a moment she was silent; then going slowly back to the gate, she turned there and looked at him wonderingly, he thought.

"After all, it must have been a good wind that blew you to Tappahannock," she observed.

Her friendliness – which impressed him as that of a creature who had met no rebuffs or disappointments from human nature, made an impetuous, almost childlike, appeal to his confidence.

"Do you remember the night I slept in your barn?" he asked suddenly.

She bent down to pick up a broken spray of lilac.

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I was at the parting of the ways that night – I was beaten down, desperate, hopeless. Something in your kindness and – yes, and in your courage, too, put new life into me, and the next morning I turned back to Tappahannock. But for you I should still have followed the road."

"It is more likely to have been the cup of coffee," she said in her frank, almost boyish way.

"There's something in that, of course," he answered quietly. "I *was* hungry, God knows, but I was more than hungry, I was hurt. It was all my fault, you understand – I had made an awful mess of things, and I had to begin again low down – at the very bottom." It

was in his mind to tell her the truth then, from the moment of his fall to the day that he had returned to Tappahannock; but he was schooling himself hard to resist the sudden impulses which had wrecked his life, so checking his words with an effort, he lowered the spade from his shoulder, and leaning upon the handle, stood waiting for her to speak.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.