GLASGOW ELLEN GHOLSON

VIRGINIA

Ellen Glasgow

Virginia

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Содержание

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Virginia

BOOK FIRST
THE DREAM

CHAPTER I
THE SYSTEM

Toward the close of a May afternoon in the year 1884, Miss Priscilla Batte, having learned by heart the lesson in physical geography she would teach her senior class on the morrow, stood feeding her canary on the little square porch of the Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies. The day had been hot, and the fitful wind, which had risen in the direction of the river, was just beginning to blow in soft gusts under the old mulberry trees in the street, and to scatter the loosened petals of syringa blossoms in a flowery snow over the grass. For a moment Miss Priscilla turned her flushed face to the scented air, while her eyes rested lovingly on the narrow walk, edged with pointed bricks and bordered by cowslips and wallflowers, which led through the short garden to the three stone steps and the tall iron gate. She was a shapeless yet majestic woman of some fifty years, with a large mottled face in which a steadfast expression of gentle obstinacy appeared to underly the more evanescent ripples of thought or of emotion. Her severe black silk gown, to which she had just changed from her morning dress of alpaca, was softened under her full double chin by a knot of lace and a cameo brooch bearing the helmeted profile of Pallas Athene. On her head she wore a three-cornered cap trimmed with a ruching of organdie, and beneath it her thin gray hair still showed a gleam of faded yellow in the sunlight. She had never been handsome, but her prodigious size had endowed her with an impressiveness which had passed in her youth, and among an indulgent people, for beauty. Only in the last few years had her fleshiness, due to rich food which she could not resist and to lack of exercise for which she had an instinctive aversion, begun seriously to inconvenience her.

Beyond the wire cage, in which the canary spent his involuntarily celibate life, an ancient microphylla rose-bush, with a single imperfect bud blooming ahead of summer amid its glossy foliage, clambered over a green lattice to the gabled pediment of the porch, while the delicate shadows of the leaves rippled like lace-work on the gravel below. In the miniature garden, where the small spring blossoms strayed from the prim beds into the long feathery grasses, there were syringa bushes, a little overblown; crape-myrtles not yet in bud; a holly tree veiled in bright green near the iron fence; a flowering almond shrub in late bloom against the shaded side of the house; and where a west wing put out on the left, a bower of red and white roses was steeped now in the faint sunshine. At the foot of the three steps ran the sunken moss-edged bricks of High Street, and across High Street there floated, like wind-blown flowers, the figures of Susan Treadwell and Virginia Pendleton.

Opening the rusty gate, the two girls tripped with carefully held flounces up the stone steps and between the cowslips and wallflowers that bordered the walk. Their white lawn dresses were made with the close-fitting sleeves and the narrow waists of the period, and their elaborately draped overskirts were looped on the left with graduated bows of light blue ottoman ribbon. They wore no hats, and Virginia, who was the shorter of the two, had fastened a Jacqueminot rose in the thick dark braid which was wound in a wreath about her head. Above her arched black eyebrows, which lent an expression of surprise and animation to her vivid oval face, her hair was parted, after an earlier fashion, under its plaited crown, and allowed to break in a mist of little curls over her temples. Even

in repose there was a joyousness in her look which seemed less the effect of an inward gaiety of mind than of some happy outward accident of form and colour. Her eyes, very far apart and set in black lashes, were of a deep soft blue – the blue of wild hyacinths after rain. By her eyes, and by an old-world charm of personality which she exhaled like a perfume, it was easy to discern that she embodied the feminine ideal of the ages. To look at her was to think inevitably of love. For that end, obedient to the powers of Life, the centuries had formed and coloured her, as they had formed and coloured the wild rose with its whorl of delicate petals. The air of a spoiled beauty which rested not ungracefully upon her was sweetened by her expression of natural simplicity and goodness.

For an instant she stood listening in silence to the querulous pipes of the bird and the earnest exhortations of the teacher on the joys of cage life for both bird and lady. Then plucking the solitary early bud from the microphylla rose-bush, she tossed it over the railing of the porch on the large and placid bosom of Miss Priscilla.

"Do leave Dicky alone for a minute!" she called in a winning soprano voice.

At the sound, Miss Priscilla dropped the bit of cake she held, and turned to lean delightedly over the walk, while her face beamed like a beneficent moon through the shining cloud of rose-leaves.

"Why, Jinny, I hadn't any idea that you and Susan were there!"

Her smile included Virginia's companion, a tall, rather heavy girl, with intelligent grey eyes and fair hair cut in a straight fringe across her forehead. She was the daughter of Cyrus Treadwell, the wealthiest and therefore the most prominent citizen of the town, and she was also as intellectual as the early eighties and the twenty-one thousand inhabitants of Dinwiddie permitted a woman to be. Her friendship for Virginia had been one of those swift and absorbing emotions which come to women in their school-days. The stronger of the two, she dominated the other, as she dominated every person or situation in life, not by charm, but by the force of an energetic and capable mind. Though her dress matched Virginia's in every detail, from the soft folds of tulle at the neck to the fancy striped stockings under the *bouffant* draperies, the different shapes of the wearers gave to the one gown an air of decorous composure and to the other a quaint and appealing grace. Flushed, ardent, expectant, both girls stood now at the beginning of womanhood. Life was theirs; it belonged to them, this veiled, radiant thing that was approaching. Nothing wonderful had come as yet – but to-morrow, the day after, or next year, the miracle would happen, and everything would be different! Experience floated in a luminous mystery before them. The unknown, which had borrowed the sweetness and the colour of their illusions, possessed them like a secret ecstasy and shone, in spite of their shyness, in their startled and joyous look.

"Father asked me to take a message over to General Goode," explained Virginia, with a little laugh as gay as the song of a bird, "but I couldn't go by without thanking you for the cherry bounce. I made mother drink some of it before dinner, and it almost gave her an appetite."

"I knew it was what she needed," answered Miss Priscilla, showing her pleasure by an increasing beam. "It was made right here in the house, and there's nothing better in the world, my poor mother used to say, to keep you from running down in the spring. But why can't you and Susan come in and sit a while?"

"We'll be straight back in a minute," replied Susan before Virginia could answer. "I've got a piece of news I want to tell you before any one else does. Oliver came home last night."

"Oliver?" repeated Miss Priscilla, a little perplexed. "You don't mean the son of your uncle Henry, who went out to Australia? I thought your father had washed his hands of him because he had started play-acting or something?" Curiosity, that devouring passion of the middle-aged, worked in her breast, and her placid face grew almost intense in expression.

"Yes, that's the one," replied Susan. "They went to Australia when Oliver was ten years old, and he's now twenty-two. He lost both his parents about three years ago," she added.

"I know. His mother was my cousin," returned Miss Priscilla. "I lost sight of her after she left Dinwiddie, but somebody was telling me the other day that Henry's investments all turned out badly

and they came down to real poverty. Sarah Jane was a pretty girl and I was always very fond of her, but she was one of the improvident sort that couldn't make two ends meet without tying them into a bow-knot."

"Then Oliver must be just like her. After his mother's death he went to Germany to study, and he gave away the little money he had to some student he found starving there in a garret."

"That was generous," commented Miss Priscilla thoughtfully, "but I should hardly call it sensible. I hope some day, Jinny, that your father will tell us in a sermon whether there is biblical sanction for immoderate generosity or not."

"But what does he say?" asked Virginia softly, meaning not the rector, but the immoderate young man.

"Oh, Oliver says that there wasn't enough for both and that the other student is worth more to the world than he is," answered Susan. "Then, of course, when he got so poor that he had to pawn his clothes or starve, he wrote father an almost condescending letter and said that as much as he hated business, he supposed he'd have to come back and go to work. 'Only,' he added, 'for God's sake, don't make it tobacco!' Wasn't that dreadful?"

"It was extremely impertinent," replied Miss Priscilla sternly, "and to Cyrus of all persons! I am surprised that he allowed him to come into the house."

"Oh, father doesn't take any of his talk seriously. He calls it 'starvation foolishness,' and says that Oliver will get over it as soon as he has a nice little bank account. Perhaps he will – he is only twenty-two, you know – but just now his head is full of all kinds of new ideas he picked up somewhere abroad. He's as clever as he can be, there's no doubt of that, and he'd be really good-looking, too, if he didn't have the crooked nose of the Treadwells. Virginia has seen him only once in the street, but she's more than half in love with him already."

"Do come, Susan!" remonstrated Virginia, blushing as red as the rose in her hair. "It's past six o'clock and the General will have gone if we don't hurry." And turning away from the porch, she ran between the flowering syringa bushes down the path to the gate.

Having lost his bit of cake, the bird began to pipe shrilly, while Miss Priscilla drew a straight wicker chair (she never used rockers) beside the cage, and, stretching out her feet in their large cloth shoes with elastic sides, counted the stitches in an afghan she was knitting in narrow blue and orange strips. In front of her, the street trailed between cool, dim houses which were filled with quiet, and from the hall at her back there came a whispering sound as the breeze moved like a ghostly footstep through an alcove window. With that strange power of reflecting the variable moods of humanity which one sometimes finds in inanimate objects, the face of the old house had borrowed from the face of its mistress the look of cheerful fortitude with which her generation had survived the agony of defeat and the humiliation of reconstruction. After nineteen years, the Academy still bore the scars of war on its battered front. Once it had watched the spectre of famine stalk over the grass-grown pavement, and had heard the rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon borne on the southern breeze that now wafted the sounds of the saw and the hammer from an adjacent street. Once it had seen the flight of refugees, the overflow of the wounded from hospitals and churches, the panic of liberated slaves, the steady conquering march of the army of invasion. And though it would never have occurred to Miss Priscilla that either she or her house had borne any relation to history (which she regarded strictly as a branch of study and visualized as a list of dates or as a king wearing his crown), she had, in fact, played a modest yet effective part in the rapidly changing civilization of her age. But events were powerless against the genial heroism in which she was armoured, and it was characteristic of her, as well as of her race, that, while she sat now in the midst of encircling battlefields, with her eyes on the walk over which she had seen the blood of the wounded drip when they were lifted into her door, she should be brooding not over the tremendous tragedies through which she had passed, but over the lesson in physical geography she must teach in the morning. Her lips moved gently, and a listener, had there been one, might have heard her murmur: "The four great alluvial plains of Asia

– those of China and of the Amoo Daria in temperate regions; of the Euphrates and Tigris in the warm temperate; of the Indus and Ganges under the Tropic – with the Nile valley in Africa, were the theatres of the most ancient civilizations known to history or tradition – "

As she ended, a sigh escaped her, for the instruction of the young was for her a matter not of choice, but of necessity. With the majority of maiden ladies left destitute in Dinwiddie after the war, she had turned naturally to teaching as the only nice and respectable occupation which required neither preparation of mind nor considerable outlay of money. The fact that she was the single surviving child of a gallant Confederate general, who, having distinguished himself and his descendants, fell at last in the Battle of Gettysburg, was sufficient recommendation of her abilities in the eyes of her fellow citizens. Had she chosen to paint portraits or to write poems, they would have rallied quite as loyally to her support. Few, indeed, were the girls born in Dinwiddie since the war who had not learned reading, penmanship ("up to the right, down to the left, my dear"), geography, history, arithmetic, deportment, and the fine arts, in the Academy for Young Ladies. The brilliant military record of the General still shed a legendary lustre upon the school, and it was earnestly believed that no girl, after leaving there with a diploma for good conduct, could possibly go wrong or become eccentric in her later years. To be sure, she might remain a trifle weak in her spelling (Miss Priscilla having, as she confessed, a poor head for that branch of study), but, after all, as the rector had once remarked, good spelling was by no means a necessary accomplishment for a lady; and, for the rest, it was certain that the moral education of a pupil of the Academy would be firmly rooted in such fundamental verities as the superiority of man and the aristocratic supremacy of the Episcopal Church. From charming Sally Goode, now married to Tom Peachey, known familiarly as "honest Tom," the editor of the Dinwiddie *Bee*, to lovely Virginia Pendleton, the mark of Miss Priscilla was ineffaceably impressed upon the daughters of the leading families.

Remembering this now, as she was disposed to do whenever she was knitting without company, Miss Priscilla dropped her long wooden needles in her lap, and leaning forward in her chair, gazed out upon the town with an expression of child-like confidence, of touching innocence. This innocence, which belonged to the very essence of her soul, had survived both the fugitive joys and the brutal disillusionments of life. Experience could not shatter it, for it was the product of a courage that feared nothing except opinions. Just as the town had battled for a principle without understanding it, so she was capable of dying for an idea, but not of conceiving one. She had suffered everything from the war except the necessity of thinking independently about it, and, though in later years memory had become so sacred to her that she rarely indulged in it, she still clung passionately to the habits of her ancestors under the impression that she was clinging to their ideals. Little things filled her days – the trivial details of the classroom and of the market, the small domestic disturbances of her neighbours, the moral or mental delinquencies of her two coloured servants – and even her religious veneration for the Episcopal Church had crystallized at last into a worship of customs.

To-day, at the beginning of the industrial awakening of the South, she (who was but the embodied spirit of her race) stood firmly rooted in all that was static, in all that was obsolete and outgrown in the Virginia of the eighties. Though she felt as yet merely the vague uneasiness with which her mind recoiled from the first stirrings of change, she was beginning dimly to realize that the car of progress would move through the quiet streets before the decade was over. The smoke of factories was already succeeding the smoke of the battlefields, and out of the ashes of a vanquished idealism the spirit of commercial materialism was born. What was left of the old was fighting valiantly, but hopelessly, against what had come of the new. The two forces filled the streets of Dinwiddie. They were embodied in classes, in individuals, in articles of faith, in ideals of manners. The symbol of the one spirit was the memorial wreaths on the battlefields; of the other it was the prophetic smoke of the factories. From where she stood in High Street, she could see this incense to Mammon rising above the spires of the churches, above the houses and the hovels, above the charm and the provincialism which made the Dinwiddie of the eighties. And this charm, as well as this provincialism, appeared

to her to be so inalienable a part of the old order, with its intrepid faith in itself, with its militant enthusiasm, with its courageous battle against industrial evolution, with its strength, its narrowness, its nobility, its blindness, that, looking ahead, she could discern only the arid stretch of a civilization from which the last remnant of beauty was banished forever. Already she felt the breaking of those bonds of sympathy which had held the twenty-one thousand inhabitants of Dinwiddie, as they had held the entire South, solidly knit together in a passive yet effectual resistance to the spirit of change. Of the world beyond the borders of Virginia, Dinwiddians knew merely that it was either Yankee or foreign, and therefore to be pitied or condemned according to the Evangelical or the Calvinistic convictions of the observer. Philosophy, they regarded with the distrust of a people whose notable achievements have not been in the direction of the contemplative virtues; and having lived comfortably and created a civilization without the aid of science, they could afford not unreasonably to despise it. It was a quarter of a century since "The Origin of Species" had changed the course of the world's thought, yet it had never reached them. To be sure, there was an old gentleman in Tabb Street whose title, "the professor," had been conferred in public recognition of peaceful pursuits; but since he never went to church, his learning was chiefly effective when used to point a moral from the pulpit. There was, also, a tradition that General Goode had been seen reading Plato before the Battle of Seven Pines; and this picturesque incident had contributed the distinction of the scholar to the more effulgent glory of the soldier. But for purely abstract thought – for the thought that did not construct an heroic attitude or a concrete image – there was as little room in the newer industrial system as there had been in the aristocratic society which preceded it. The world still clung to the belief that the business of humanity was confined to the preservation of the institutions which existed in the present moment of history – and Dinwiddie was only a quiet backwater into which opinions, like fashions, were borne on the current of some tributary stream of thought. Human nature in this town of twenty-one thousand inhabitants differed from human nature in London or in the Desert of Sahara mainly in the things that it ate and the manner in which it carried its clothes. The same passions stirred its heart, the same instincts moved its body, the same contentment with things as they are, and the same terror of things as they might be, warped its mind.

The canary fluted on, and from beyond the mulberry trees there floated the droning voice of an aged negress, in tatters and a red bandanna turban, who persuasively offered strawberries to the silent houses.

"I'se got sw-eet straw-ber'-ies! I'se got swe-e-t str-aw-ber'-ies! Yes'm, I'se got sw-e-et straw-ber'ies des f'om de coun-try!"

Then, suddenly, out of nothing, it seemed to Miss Priscilla, a miracle occurred! The immemorial calm of High Street was broken by the sound of rapidly moving wheels (not the jingling rattle of market wagons nor the comfortable roll of doctors' buggies), and a strange new vehicle, belonging to the Dinwiddie Livery Stables, and containing a young man with longish hair and a flowing tie, turned the corner by Saint James' Church, and passed over the earthen roadbed in front of the green lattice. As the young man went by, he looked up quickly, smiled with the engaging frankness of a genial nature, and lifting his hat with a charming bow, revealed to Miss Priscilla's eyes the fact that his hair was thick and dark as well as long and wavy. While he looked at her, she noticed, also, that he had a thin, high-coloured face, lighted by a pair of eager dark eyes which lent a glow of impetuous energy to his features. The Treadwell nose, she recognized, but beneath the Treadwell nose there was a clean-shaven, boyish mouth which belied the Treadwell nature in every sensitive curve and outline.

"I'd have known him anywhere from Susan's description," she thought, and added suspiciously, "I wonder why he peered so long around that corner? It wouldn't surprise me a bit if those girls were coming back that way."

Impelled by her mounting excitement, she leaned forward until the ball of orange-coloured yarn rolled from her short lap and over the polished floor of the porch. Before she could stoop to

pick it up, she was arrested by the reappearance of the two girls at the corner beyond which Oliver had gazed so intently. Then, as they drew nearer, she saw that Virginia's face was pink and her eyes starry under their lowered lashes. An inward radiance shone in the girl's look, and appeared to shape her soul and body to its secret influence. Miss Priscilla, who had known her since the first day she came to school (with her lunch, from which she refused to be parted, tightly tied up in a red and white napkin), felt suddenly that she was a stranger. A quality which she had never realized her pupil possessed had risen supreme in an instant over the familiar attributes of her character. So quickly does emotion separate the individual from the inherent soul of the race.

Susan, who was a little in advance, came rapidly up the walk, and the older woman greeted her with the words:

"My dear, I have seen him!"

"Yes, he just passed us at the corner, and I wondered if you were looking. Do tell us what you think of him."

She sat down in a low chair by the teacher's side, while Virginia went over to the cage and stood gazing thoughtfully at the singing bird.

"Well, I don't think his nose spoils him," replied Miss Priscilla after a minute, "but there's something foreign looking about him, and I hope Cyrus isn't thinking seriously about putting him into the bank."

"That was the first thing that occurred to father," answered Susan, "but Oliver told me last night while we were unpacking his books – he has a quantity of books and he kept them even when he had to sell his clothes – that he didn't see to save his life how he was going to stand it."

"Stand what?" inquired Miss Priscilla, a trifle tartly, for after the vicissitudes of her life it was but natural that she should hesitate to regard so stable an institution as the Dinwiddie Bank as something to be "stood." "Why, I thought a young man couldn't do better than get a place in the bank. Jinny's father was telling me in the market last Saturday that he wanted his nephew John Henry to start right in there if they could find room for him."

"Oh, of course, it's just what John Henry would like," said Virginia, speaking for the first time.

"Then if it's good enough for John Henry, it's good enough for Oliver, I reckon," rejoined Miss Priscilla. "Anybody who has mixed with beggars oughtn't to turn up his nose at a respectable bank."

"But he says it's because the bank is so respectable that he doesn't think he could stand it," answered Susan.

Virginia, who had been looking with her rapt gaze down the deserted street, quivered at the words as if they had stabbed her.

"But he wants to be a writer, Susan," she protested. "A great many very nice people are writers."

"Then why doesn't he go about it in a proper way, if he isn't ashamed of it?" asked the teacher, and she added reflectively after a pause, "I wish he'd write a good history of the war – one that doesn't deal so much with the North. I've almost had to stop teaching United States history because there is hardly one written now that I would let come inside my doors."

"He doesn't want to write histories," replied Susan. "Father suggested to him at supper last night that if he would try his hand at a history of Virginia, and be careful not to put in anything that might offend anybody, he could get it taught in every private school in the State. But he said he'd be shot first."

"Perhaps he's a genius," said Virginia in a startled voice. "Geniuses are always different from other people, aren't they?"

"I don't know," answered Susan doubtfully. "He talks of things I never heard of before, and he seems to think that they are the most important things in the world."

"What things?" asked Virginia breathlessly.

"Oh, I can't tell you because they are so new, but he seems on fire when he talks of them. He talks for hours about art and its service to humanity and about going down to the people and uplifting the masses."

"I hope he doesn't mean the negroes," commented Miss Priscilla suspiciously.

"He means the whole world, I believe," responded Susan. "He quotes all the time from writers I've never heard of, and he laughs at every book he sees in the house. Yesterday he picked up one of Mrs. Southworth's novels on mother's bureau and asked her how she could allow such immoral stuff in her room. She had got it out of the bookcase to lend to Miss Willy Whitlow, who was there making my dress, but he scolded her so about it that at last Miss Willy went off with Mill's 'Essay on Liberty,' and mother burned all of Mrs. Southworth's that she had in the house. Oliver has been so nice to mother that I believe she would make a bonfire of her furniture if he asked her to do it."

"Is he really trying to unsettle Miss Willy's mind?" questioned the teacher anxiously. "How on earth could she go out sewing by the day if she didn't have her religious convictions?"

"That's just what I asked him," returned Susan, who, besides being dangerously clever, had a remarkably level head to keep her balanced. "But he answered that until people got unsettled they would never move, and when I wanted to find out where he thought poor little Miss Willy could possibly move to, he only got impatient and said that I was trying to bury the principle under the facts. We very nearly quarrelled over Miss Willy, but of course she took the book to please Oliver and couldn't worry through a line of it to save her soul."

"Did he say anything about his work? What he wants to do, I mean?" asked Virginia, and her voice was so charged with feeling that it gave an emotional quality to the question.

"He wants to write," replied Susan. "His whole heart is in it, and when he isn't talking about reaching the people, he talks about what he calls 'technique.'"

"Are you sure it isn't poetry?" inquired Miss Priscilla, humming back like a bee to the tempting sweets of conjecture. "I've always heard that poetry was the ruination of Poe."

"No, it isn't poetry – not exactly at least – it's plays," answered Susan. "He talked to me till twelve o'clock last night while we were arranging his books, and he told me that he meant to write really great dramas, but that America wasn't ready for them yet and that was why he had had to sell his clothes. He looked positively starved, but he says he doesn't mind starving a while if he can only live up to his ideal."

"Well, I wonder what his ideal is?" remarked Miss Priscilla grimly.

"It has something to do with his belief that art can grow only out of sacrifice," said Susan. "I never heard anybody – not even Jinny's father in church – talk so much about sacrifice."

"But the rector doesn't talk about sacrifice for the theatre," retorted the teacher, and she added with crushing finality, "I don't believe there is a particle of sense in it. If he is going to write, why on earth doesn't he sit straight down and do it? Why, when little Miss Amanda Sheppard was left at sixty without a roof over her head, she began at once, without saying a word to anybody, to write historical novels."

"It does seem funny until you talk with him," admitted Susan. "But he is so much in earnest that when you listen to him, you can't help believing in him. He is so full of convictions that he convinces you in spite of yourself."

"Convictions about what?" demanded Miss Priscilla. "I don't see how a young man who refuses to be confirmed can have any convictions."

"Well, he has, and he feels just as strongly about them as we do about ours."

"But how can he possibly feel as strongly about a wrong conviction as we do about a right one?" insisted the older woman stubbornly, for she realized vaguely that they were approaching dangerous ground and set out to check their advance in true Dinwiddie fashion, which was strictly prohibitive.

"I like a man who has opinions of his own and isn't ashamed to stand up for them," said Virginia with a resolution that made her appear suddenly taller.

"Not *false* opinions, Jinny!" rejoined Miss Priscilla, and her manner carried them with a bound back to the schoolroom, for her mental vision saw in a flash the beribboned diploma for good conduct which her favourite pupil had borne away from the Academy on Commencement day two years ago, and a shudder seized her lest she should have left a single unprotected breach in the girl's mind through which an unauthorized idea might enter. Had she trusted too confidently to the fact that Virginia's father was a clergyman, and therefore spiritually armed for the defence and guidance of his daughter? Virginia, in spite of her gaiety, had been what Miss Priscilla called "a docile pupil," meaning one who deferentially submitted her opinions to her superiors, and to go through life perpetually submitting her opinions was, in the eyes of her parents and her teacher, the divinely appointed task of woman. Her education was founded upon the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would be to contend with it. Knowledge of any sort (except the rudiments of reading and writing, the geography of countries she would never visit, and the dates of battles she would never mention) was kept from her as rigorously as if it contained the germs of a contagious disease. And this ignorance of anything that could possibly be useful to her was supposed in some mysterious way to add to her value as a woman and to make her a more desirable companion to a man who, either by experience or by instinct, was expected "to know his world." Unlike Susan (who, in a community which offered few opportunities to women outside of the nursery or the kitchen, had been born with the inquiring spirit and would ask questions), Virginia had until to-day accepted with humility the doctrine that a natural curiosity about the universe is the beginning of infidelity. The chief object of her upbringing, which differed in no essential particular from that of every other well-born and well-bred Southern woman of her day, was to paralyze her reasoning faculties so completely that all danger of mental "unsettling" or even movement was eliminated from her future. To solidify the forces of mind into the inherited mould of fixed beliefs was, in the opinion of the age, to achieve the definite end of all education. When the child ceased to wonder before the veil of appearances, the battle of orthodoxy with speculation was over, and Miss Priscilla felt that she could rest on her victory. With Susan she had failed, because the daughter of Cyrus Treadwell was one of those inexplicable variations from ancestral stock over which the naturalists were still waging their merry war; but Virginia, with a line of earnest theologians and of saintly self-effacing women at her back, offered as little resistance as some exquisite plastic material in the teacher's hands.

Now, as if the same lightning flash which had illuminated the beribboned diploma in Miss Priscilla's mind had passed to Virginia also, the girl bit back a retort that was trembling on her lips. "I wonder if she can be getting to know things?" thought the older woman as she watched her, and she added half resentfully, "I've sometimes suspected that Gabriel Pendleton was almost too mild and easy going for a clergyman. If the Lord hadn't made him a saint, Heaven knows what would have become of him!"

"Don't try to put notions into Jinny's head, Susan," she said after a thoughtful pause. "If Oliver were the right kind of young man, he'd give up this nonsense and settle down to some sober work. The first time I get a chance I'm going to tell him so."

"I don't believe it will be any use," responded Susan. "Father tried to reason with him last night, and they almost quarrelled."

"Quarrelled with Cyrus!" gasped the teacher.

"At one time I thought he'd walk out of the house and never come back," pursued Susan. "He told father that his sordid commercialism would end by destroying all that was charming in Dinwiddie. Afterward he apologized for his rudeness, but when he did so, he said, 'I meant every word of it.'"

"Well, I never!" was Miss Priscilla's feeble rejoinder. "The idea of his daring to talk that way when Cyrus had to pay his fare down from New York."

"Of course father brought it on," returned Susan judicially. "You know he doesn't like anybody to disagree with him, and when Oliver began to argue about its being unscrupulous to write history the way people wanted it, he lost his temper and said some angry things about the theatre and actors."

"I suppose a great man like your father may expect his family to bow to his opinions," replied the teacher, for so obscure was her mental connection between the construction of the future and the destruction of the past, that she could honestly admire Cyrus Treadwell for possessing the qualities her soul abhorred. The simple awe of financial success, which occupies in the American mind the vacant space of the monarchical cult, had begun already to generate the myth of greatness around Cyrus, and, like all other myths, this owed its origin less to the wilful conspiracy of the few than it did to the confiding superstition of the many.

"I hope Oliver won't do anything rash," said Susan, ignoring Miss Priscilla's tribute. "He is so impulsive and headstrong that I don't see how he can get on with father."

At this Virginia broke her quivering silence. "Can't you make him careful, Susan?" she asked, and without waiting for an answer, bent over and kissed Miss Priscilla on the cheek. "I must be going now or mother will worry," she added before she tripped ahead of Susan down the steps and along the palely shining path to the gate.

Rising from her chair, Miss Priscilla leaned over the railing of the porch, and gazed wistfully after the girls' vanishing figures.

"If there was ever a girl who looked as if she were cut out for happiness, it is Jinny Pendleton," she said aloud after a minute. A tear welled in her eye, and rolling over her cheek, dropped on her bosom. From some obscure corner of her memory, undevastated by war or by ruin, her own youth appeared to take the place of Virginia's. She saw herself, as she had seen the other an instant before, standing flushed and expectant before the untrodden road of the future. She heard again the wings of happiness rustling unseen about her, and she felt again the great hope which is the challenge that youth flings to destiny. Life rose before her, not as she had found it, but as she had once believed it to be. The days when little things had not filled her thoughts returned in the fugitive glow of her memory – for she, also, middle-aged, obese, cumbered with trivial cares, had had her dream of a love that would change and glorify the reality. The heritage of woman was hers as well as Virginia's. And for the first time, standing there, she grew dimly conscious of the portion of suffering which Nature had allotted to them both from the beginning. Was it all waiting – waiting, as it had been while battles were fought and armies were marching? Did the future hold this for Virginia also? Would life yield nothing more to that radiant girl than it had yielded to her or to the other women whom she had known? Strange how the terrible innocence of youth had moved her placid middle-age as if it were sadness!

CHAPTER II
HER INHERITANCE

A block away, near the head of High Street, stood the old church of Saint James, and at its back, separated by a white paling fence from the squat pinkish tower and the solitary grave in the churchyard (which was that of a Southern soldier who had fallen in the Battle of Dinwiddie), was the oblong wooden rectory in which Gabriel Pendleton had lived since he had exchanged his sword for a prayer-book and his worn Confederate uniform for a surplice. The church, which was redeemed from architectural damnation by its sacred cruciform and its low ivied buttresses where innumerable sparrows nested, cast its shadow, on clear days, over the beds of bleeding hearts and lilies-of-the-valley in the neglected garden, to the quaint old house, with its spreading wings, its outside chimneys, and its sloping shingled roof, from which five dormer-windows stared in a row over the slender columns of the porch. The garden had been planned in the days when it was easy to put a dozen slaves to uprooting weeds or trimming flower beds, and had passed in later years to the breathless ministrations of negro infants, whose experience varied from the doubtful innocence of the crawling age to the complete sophistication of six or seven years. Dandelion and wire-grass rioted, in spite of their earnest efforts, over the crooked path from the porch, and periwinkle, once an intruder from the churchyard, spread now in rank disorder down the terraced hillside on the left, where a steep flight of steps fell clear to the narrow cross street descending gradually into the crowded quarters of the town. Directly in front of the porch on either side of the path grew two giant paulownia trees, royal at this season in a mantle of violet blossoms, and it was under their arching boughs that the girls stopped when they had entered the garden. Ever since Virginia could remember, she had heard threats of cutting down the paulownias because of the litter the falling petals made in the spring, and ever since she could lisp at all she had begged her father to spare them for the sake of the enormous roots, into which she had loved to cuddle and hide.

"If I were ever to go away, I believe they would cut down these trees," she said now a little wistfully, but she was not thinking of the paulownias.

"Why should they when they give such splendid shade? And, besides, they wouldn't do anything you didn't like for worlds."

"Oh, of course they wouldn't, but as soon as I was out of sight they might persuade themselves that I liked it," answered Virginia, with a tender laugh. Though she was not by nature discerning, there were moments when she surprised Susan by her penetrating insight into the character of her parents, and this insight, which was emotional rather than intellectual, had enabled her to dominate them almost from infancy.

Silence fell between them, while they gazed through the veil of twilight at the marble shaft above the grave of the Confederate soldier. Then suddenly Susan spoke in a constrained voice, without turning her head.

"Jinny, Oliver isn't one bit of a hero – not the kind of hero we used to talk about." It was with difficulty, urged by a vigorous and uncompromising conscience, that she had uttered the words.

"And besides," retorted Virginia merrily, "he is in love with Abby Goode."

"I don't believe that. They stayed in the same boarding-house once, and you know how Abby is about men."

"Yes, I know, and it's just the way men are about Abby."

"Well, Oliver isn't, I'm sure. I don't believe he's ever given her more than a thought, and he told me last night that he couldn't abide a bouncing woman."

"Does Abby bounce?"

"You know she does – dreadfully. But it wasn't because of Abby that I said what I did."

Something quivered softly between them, and a petal from the Jacqueminot rose in Virginia's hair fluttered like a crimson moth out into the twilight. "Was it because of him, then?" she asked in a whisper.

For a moment Susan did not answer. Her gaze was on the flight of steps, and drawing Virginia with her, she began to walk slowly toward the terraced side of the garden. An old lamplighter, carrying his ladder to a lamp-post at the corner, smiled up at them with his sunken toothless mouth as he went by.

"Partly, darling," said Susan. "He is so – I don't know how to make you understand – so unsettled. No, that isn't exactly what I mean."

Her fine, serious face showed clear and pale in the twilight. From the high forehead, under the girlish fringe of fair hair, to the thin, firm lips, which were too straight and colourless for beauty, it was the face of a woman who could feel strongly, but whose affections would never blur the definite forms or outlines of life. She looked out upon the world with level, dispassionate eyes in which there was none of Virginia's uncritical, emotional softness. Temperamentally she was uncompromisingly honest in her attitude toward the universe, which appeared to her, not as it did to Virginia, in mere formless masses of colour out of which people and objects emerged like figures painted on air, but as distinct, impersonal, and final as a geometrical problem. She was one of those women who are called "sensible" by their acquaintances – meaning that they are born already disciplined and confirmed in the quieter and more orderly processes of life. Her natural intelligence having overcome the defects of her education, she thought not vaguely, but with clearness and precision, and something of this clearness and precision was revealed in her manner and in her appearance, as if she had escaped at twenty years from the impulsive judgments and the troublous solicitudes of youth. At forty, she would probably begin to grow young again, and at fifty, it is not unlikely that she would turn her back upon old age forever. Just now she was too tremendously earnest about life, which she treated quite in the large manner, to take a serious interest in living.

"Promise me, Jinny, that you'll never let anybody take my place," she said, turning when they had reached the head of the steps.

"You silly Susan! Why, of course, they shan't," replied Virginia, and they kissed ecstatically.

"Nobody will ever love you as I do."

"And I you, darling."

With arms interlaced they stood gazing down into the street, where the shadow of the old lamplighter glided like a ghost under the row of pale flickering lights. From a honeysuckle-trellis on the other side of the porch, a penetrating sweetness came in breaths, now rising, now dying away. In Virginia's heart, Love stirred suddenly, and blind, wingless, imprisoned, struggled for freedom.

"It is late, I must be going," said Susan. "I wish we lived nearer each other."

"Isn't it too dark for you to go alone? John Henry will stop on his way from work, and he'll take you – if you really won't stay to supper."

"No, I don't mind in the least going by myself. It isn't night, anyway, and people are sitting out on their porches."

A minute afterwards they parted, Susan going swiftly down High Street, while Virginia went back along the path to the porch, and passing under the paulownias, stopped beside the honeysuckle-trellis, which extended to the ruined kitchen garden at the rear of the house. Once vegetables were grown here, but except for a square bed of mint which spread hardily beneath the back windows of the dining-room, the place was left now a prey to such barbarian invaders as burdock and moth mullein. On the brow of the hill, where the garden ended, there was a gnarled and twisted ailanthus tree, and from its roots the ground fell sharply to a distant view of rear enclosures and grim smoking factories. Some clothes fluttered on a line that stretched from a bough of the tree, and turning away as if they offended her, Virginia closed her eyes and breathed in the sweetness of the honeysuckle, which mingled deliciously with the strange new sense of approaching happiness in her heart. The awakening

of her imagination – an event more tumultuous in its effects than the mere awakening of emotion – had changed not only her inner life, but the ordinary details of the world in which she lived. Because a young man, who differed in no appreciable manner from dozens of other young men, had gazed into her eyes for an instant, the whole universe was altered. What had been until to-day a vague, wind-driven longing for happiness, the reaching out of the dream toward the reality, had assumed suddenly a fixed and definite purpose. Her bright girlish visions had wrapped themselves in a garment of flesh. A miracle more wonderful than any she had read of had occurred in the streets of Dinwiddie – in the very spot where she had walked, with blind eyes and deaf ears, every day since she could remember. Her soul blossomed in the twilight, as a flower blossoms, and shed its virginal sweetness. For the first time in her twenty years she felt that an unexplored region of happiness surrounded her. Life appeared so beautiful that she wanted to grasp and hold each fugitive sensation before it escaped her. "This is different from anything I've ever known. I never imagined it would be like this," she thought, and the next minute: "I wonder why no one has ever told me that it would happen? I wonder if it has ever really happened before, just like this, since the world began? Of all the ways I've dreamed of his coming, I never thought of this way – no, not for an instant. That I should see him first in the street like any stranger – that he should be Susan's cousin – that we should not have spoken a word before I knew it was he!" Everything about him, his smile, his clothes, the way he held his head and brushed his hair straight back from his forehead, his manner of reclining with a slight slouch on the seat of the cart, the picturesque blue dotted tie he wore, his hands, his way of bowing, the red-brown of his face, and above all the eager, impetuous look in his dark eyes – these things possessed a glowing quality of interest which irradiated a delicious excitement over the bare round of living. It was enough merely to be alive and conscious that some day – to-morrow, next week, or the next hour, perhaps, she might meet again the look that had caused this mixture of ecstasy and terror in her heart. The knowledge that he was in the same town with her, watching the same lights, thinking the same thoughts, breathing the same fragrance of honeysuckle – this knowledge was a fact of such tremendous importance that it dwarfed to insignificance all the proud historic past of Dinwiddie. Her imagination, seizing upon this bit of actuality, spun around it the iridescent gossamer web of her fancy. She felt that it was sufficient happiness just to stand motionless for hours and let this thought take possession of her. Nothing else mattered as long as this one thing was blissfully true.

Lights came out softly like stars in the houses beyond the church-tower, and in the parlour of the rectory a lamp flared up and then burned dimly under a red shade. Looking through the low window, she could see the prim set of mahogany and horsehair furniture, with its deep, heavily carved sofa midway of the opposite wall and the twelve chairs which custom demanded arranged stiffly at equal distances on the faded Axminster carpet.

For a moment her gaze rested on the claw-footed mahogany table, bearing a family Bible and a photograph album bound in morocco; on the engraving of the "Burial of Latane" between the long windows at the back of the room; on the cloudy, gilt-framed mirror above the mantel, with the two standing candelabra reflected in its surface – and all these familiar objects appeared to her as vividly as if she had not lived with them from her infancy. A new light had fallen over them, and it seemed to her that this light released an inner meaning, a hidden soul, even in the claw-footed table and the threadbare Axminster carpet. Then the door into the hall opened and her mother entered, wearing the patched black silk dress which she had bought before the war and had turned and darned ever since with untiring fingers. Shrinking back into the dusk, Virginia watched the thin, slightly stooping figure as it stood arrested there in the subdued glow of the lamplight. She saw the pale oval face, so transparent that it was like the face of a ghost, the fine brown hair parted smoothly under the small net cap, the soft faded eyes in their hollowed and faintly bluish sockets, and the sweet, patient lips, with their expression of anxious sympathy, as of one who had lived not in her own joys and sorrows, but in those of others. Vaguely, the girl realized that her mother had had what is called "a hard life," but this knowledge brought no tremor of apprehension for herself, no shadow of disbelief

in her own unquestionable right to happiness. A glorious certainty possessed her that her own life would be different from anything that had ever been in the past.

The front door opened and shut; there was a step on the soft grass under the honeysuckle-trellis, and her father came towards her, with his long black coat flapping about him. He always wore clothes several sizes too large for him under the impression that it was a point of economy and that they would last longer if there was no "strain" put upon them. He was a small, wiry man, with an amazing amount of strength for his build, and a keen, humorous face, ornamented by a pointed chin beard which he called his "goatee." His eyes were light grey with a twinkle which rarely left them except at the altar, and the skin of his cheeks had never lost the drawn and parchment-like look acquired during the last years of the war. One of the many martial Christians of the Confederacy, he had laid aside his surplice at the first call for troops to defend the borders, and had resumed it immediately after the surrender at Appomattox. It was still an open question in Dinwiddie whether Gabriel Pendleton, who was admitted to have been born a saint, had achieved greater distinction as a fighter or a clergyman; though he himself had accepted the opposite vocations with equal humility. Only in the dead of sweltering summer nights did he sometimes arouse his wife with a groan and the halting words, "Lucy, I can't sleep for thinking of those men I killed in the war." But with the earliest breeze of dawn, his remorse usually left him, and he would rise and go about his parochial duties with the serene and child-like trust in Providence that had once carried him into battle. A militant idealism had ennobled his fighting as it now exalted his preaching. He had never in his life seen things as they are because he had seen them always by the white flame of a soul on fire with righteousness. To reach his mind, impressions of persons or objects had first to pass through a refining atmosphere in which all baser substances were eliminated, and no fact had ever penetrated this medium except in the flattering disguise of a sentiment. Having married at twenty an idealist only less ignorant of the world than himself, he had, inspired by her example, immediately directed his energies towards the whitewashing of the actuality. Both cherished the naïve conviction that to acknowledge an evil is in a manner to countenance its existence, and both clung fervently to the belief that a pretty sham has a more intimate relation to morality than has an ugly truth. Yet so unconscious were they of weaving this elaborate tissue of illusion around the world they inhabited that they called the mental process by which they distorted the reality, "taking a true view of life." To "take a true view" was to believe what was pleasant against what was painful in spite of evidence: to grant honesty to all men (with the possible exception of the Yankee army and a few local scalawags known as Readjusters); to deny virtue to no woman, not even to the New England Abolitionist; to regard the period before the war in Virginia as attained perfection, and the present as falling short of that perfection only inasmuch as it had occurred since the surrender. As life in a small place, among a simple and guileless class of gentlefolk, all passionately cherishing the same opinions, had never shaken these illusions, it was but natural that they should have done their best to hand them down as sacred heirlooms to their only child. Even Gabriel's four years of hard fighting and scant rations were enkindled by so much of the disinterested idealism that had sent his State into the Confederacy, that he had emerged from them with an impoverished body, but an enriched spirit. Combined with his inherent inability to face the facts of life, there was an almost superhuman capacity for cheerful recovery from the shocks of adversity. Since he had married by accident the one woman who was made for him, he had managed to preserve untarnished his innocent assumption that marriages were arranged in Heaven – for the domestic infelicities of many of his parishioners were powerless to affect a belief that was founded upon a solitary personal experience. Unhappy marriages, like all other misfortunes of society, he was inclined to regard as entirely modern and due mainly to the decay of antebellum institutions. "I don't remember that I ever heard of a discontented servant or an unhappy marriage in my boyhood," he would say when he was forced against his will to consider either of these disturbing problems. Not progress, but a return to the "ideals of our ancestors," was his sole hope for the future; and in

Virginia's childhood she had grown to regard this phrase as second in reverence only to that other familiar invocation: "If it be the will of God."

As he stood now in the square of lamplight that streamed from the drawing-room window, she looked into his thin, humorous face, so spiritualized by poverty and self-sacrifice that it had become merely the veil for his soul, and the thought came to her that she had never really seen him as he was until to-day.

"You're out late, daughter. Isn't it time for supper?" he asked, putting his arm about her. Beneath the simple words she felt the profound affection which he rarely expressed, but of which she was conscious whenever he looked at her or spoke to her. Two days ago this affection, of which she never thought because it belonged to her by right like the air she breathed, had been sufficient to fill her life to overflowing; and now, in less than a moment, the simplest accident had pushed it into the background. In the place where it had been there was a restless longing which seemed at one instant a part of the universal stirring of the spring, and became the next an importunate desire for the coming of the lover to whom she had been taught to look as to the fulfilment of her womanhood. At times this lover appeared to have no connection with Oliver Treadwell; then the memory of his eager and searching look would flush the world with a magic enchantment. "He might pass here at any minute," she thought, and immediately every simple detail of her life was illuminated as if a quivering rosy light had fallen aslant it. His drive down High Street in the afternoon had left a trail of glory over the earthen roadbed.

"Yes, I was just going in," she replied to the rector's question, and added: "How sweet the honeysuckle smells! I never knew it to be so fragrant."

"The end of the trellis needs propping up. I noticed it this morning," he returned, keeping his arm around her as they passed over the short grassy walk and up the steps to the porch. Then the door of the rectory opened, and the silhouette of Mrs. Pendleton, in her threadbare black silk dress with her cameo-like profile softened by the dark bands of her hair, showed motionless against the lighted space of the hall.

"We're here, Lucy," said the rector, kissing her; and a minute later they entered the dining-room, which was on the right of the staircase. The old mahogany table, scarred by a century of service, was laid with a simple supper of bread, tea, and sliced ham on a willow dish. At one end there was a bowl of freshly gathered strawberries, with the dew still on them, and Mrs. Pendleton hastened to explain that they were a present from Tom Peachey, who had driven out into the country in order to get them. "Well, I hope his wife has some, also," commented the rector. "Tom's a good fellow, but he could never keep a closed fist, there's no use denying it."

Mrs. Pendleton, who had never denied anything in her life, except the biblical sanction for the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, shook her head gently and began to talk in the inattentive and anxious manner she had acquired at scantily furnished tables. Ever since the war, with the exception of the Reconstruction period, when she had lived practically on charity, she had managed to exist with serenity, and numerous negro dependents, on the rector's salary of a thousand dollars a year. Simple and wholesome food she had supplied to her family and her followers, and for their desserts, as she called the sweet things of life, she had relied with touching confidence upon her neighbours. What they would be for the day, she did not know, but since poverty, not prosperity, breeds the generous heart, she was perfectly assured that when Miss Priscilla was putting up raspberries, or Mrs. Goode was making lemon pie, she should not be forgotten. During the terrible war years, it had become the custom of Dinwiddie housekeepers to remember the wife of the rector who had plucked off his surplice for the Confederacy, and among the older generation the habit still persisted, like all other links that bound them to a past which they cherished the more passionately because it guarded a defeated cause. Like the soft apologetic murmur of Mrs. Pendleton's voice, which was meant to distract attention rather than to impart information, this impassioned memory of the thing that was dead sweetened the less romantic fact of the things that were living. The young

were ignorant of it, but the old *knew*. Mrs. Pendleton, who was born a great lady, remained one when the props and the background of a great lady had crumbled around her; and though the part she filled was a narrow part – a mere niche in the world's history – she filled it superbly. From the dignity of possessions she had passed to the finer dignity of a poverty that can do without. All the intellect in her (for she was not clever) had been transmuted into character by this fiery passage from romance into reality, and though life had done its worst with her, some fine invincible blade in the depths of her being she had never surrendered. She would have gone to the stake for a principle as cheerfully as she had descended from her aristocratic niche into unceasing poverty and self-denial, but she would have gone wearing garlands on her head and with her faint, grave smile, in which there was almost every quality except that of humour, touching her lips. Her hands, which were once lovely, were now knotted and worn; for she had toiled when it was necessary, though she had toiled always with the manner of a lady. Even to-day it was a part of her triumph that this dignity was so vital a factor in her life that there was none of her husband's laughter at circumstances to lighten her burden. To her the daily struggle of keeping an open house on starvation fare was not a pathetic comedy, as with Gabriel, but a desperately smiling tragedy. What to Gabriel had been merely the discomfort of being poor when everybody you respected was poor with you, had been to his wife the slow agony of crucifixion. It was she, not he, who had lain awake to wonder where to-morrow's dinner could be got without begging; it was she, also, who had feared to doze at dawn lest she should oversleep herself and not be downstairs in time to scrub the floors and the furniture before the neighbours were stirring. Uncle Isam, whose knees were crippled with rheumatism, and Docia, who had a "stitch" in her side whenever she stooped, were the only servants that remained with her, and the nursing of these was usually added to the pitiless drudgery of her winter. But the bitter edge to all her suffering was the feeling which her husband spoke of in the pulpit as "false pride" – the feeling she prayed over fervently yet without avail in church every Sunday – and this was the ignoble terror of being seen on her knees in her old black calico dress before she had gone upstairs again, washed her hands with cornmeal, powdered her face with her pink flannel starchbag, and descended in her breakfast gown of black cashmere or lawn, with a net scarf tied daintily around her thin throat, and a pair of exquisitely darned lace ruffles hiding her wrists.

As she sat now, smiling and calm, at the head of her table, there was no hint in her face of the gnawing anxiety behind the delicate blue-veined hollows in her forehead. "I thought John Henry would come to supper," she observed, while her hands worked lovingly among the old white and gold teacups which had belonged to her mother, "so I gathered a few flowers."

In the centre of the table there was a handful of garden flowers arranged, with a generous disregard of colour, in a cut-glass bowl, as though all blossoms were intended by their Creator to go peaceably together. Only on formal occasions was such a decoration used on the table of the rectory, since the happiest adornment for a meal was supposed to be a bountiful supply of visible viands; but the hopelessly mended mats had pierced Mrs. Pendleton's heart, and the cut-glass bowl, like her endless prattle, was but a pitiful subterfuge.

"Oh, I like them!" Virginia had started to answer, when a hearty voice called, "May I come in?" from the darkness, and a large, carelessly dressed young man, with an amiable and rather heavy countenance, entered the hall and passed on into the dining-room. In reply to Mrs. Pendleton's offer of tea, he answered that he had stopped at the Treadwells' on his way up from work. "I could hardly break away from Oliver," he added, "but I remembered that I'd promised Aunt Lucy to take her down to Tin Pot Alley after supper, so I made a bolt while he was convincing me that it's better to be poor with an idea, as he calls it, than rich without one." Then turning to Virginia, he asked suddenly: "What's the matter, little cousin? Been about too much in the sun?"

"Oh, it's only the rose in my hair," responded Virginia, and she felt that there was a fierce joy in blushing like this even while she told herself that she would give everything she possessed if she could only stop it.

"If you aren't well, you'd better not go with us, Jinny," said Mrs. Pendleton. "It was so sweet of John Henry to remember that I'd promised to take Aunt Ailsey some of the bitters we used to make before the war." Everything was "so sweet" to her, the weather, her husband's sermons, the little trays that came continually from her neighbours, and she lived in a perpetual state of thankfulness for favours so insignificant that a less impressionable soul would have accepted them as undeserving of more than the barest acknowledgment.

"I am perfectly well," insisted Virginia, a little angry with John Henry because he had been the first to notice her blushes.

Rising hurriedly from the table, she went to the door and stood looking out into the spangled dusk under the paulownias, while her mother wrapped the bottle in a piece of white tissue paper and remarked with an animation which served to hide her fatigue from the unobservant eyes of her husband, that a walk would do her good on such a "perfectly lovely night."

Gabriel, who loved her as much as a man can love a wife who has sacrificed herself to him wisely and unwisely for nearly thirty years, had grown so used to seeing her suffer with a smile that he had drifted at last into the belief that it was the only form of activity she really enjoyed. From the day of his marriage he had never been able to deny her anything she had set her heart upon – not even the privilege of working herself to death for his sake when the opportunity offered.

"Well, well, if you feel like it, of course you must go, my dear," he replied. "I'll step over and sit a minute with Miss Priscilla while you are away. Never could bear the house without you, Lucy."

While this protest was still on his lips, he followed her from the house, and turned with Virginia and John Henry in the direction of the Young Ladies' Academy. From the darkness beyond the iron gate there came the soothing flow of Miss Priscilla's voice entertaining an evening caller, and when the rector left them, as if irresistibly drawn toward the honeyed sound of gossip, Virginia walked on in silence between John Henry and her mother. At each corner a flickering street lamp burned with a thin yellow flame, and in the midst of the narrow orbit of its light several shining moths circled swiftly like white moons revolving about a sun. In the centre of the blocks, where the darkness was broken only by small flower-like flakes of light that fell in clusters through boughs of mulberry or linden trees, there was the sound of whispering voices and of rustling palm-leaf fans on the crowded porches behind screens of roses or honeysuckle. Mrs. Pendleton, whose instinct prompted her to efface herself whenever she made a third at the meeting of maid and man (even though the man was only her nephew John Henry), began to talk at last after waiting modestly for her daughter to begin the conversation. The story of Aunt Ailsey, of her great age, and her dictatorial temper, which made living with other servants impossible to her, started valiantly on its familiar road, and tripped but little when the poor lady realized that neither John Henry nor Virginia was listening. She was so used to talking for the sake of the sound she made rather than the impression she produced that her silvery ripple had become almost as lacking in self-consciousness as the song of a canary.

But Virginia, walking so quietly at her side, was inhabiting at the moment a separate universe – a universe smelling of honeysuckle and filled with starry pathways to happiness. In this universe Aunt Ailsey and her peculiarities, her mother's innocent prattle, and the solid body of John Henry touching her arm, were all as remote and trivial as the night moths circling around the lamps. Looking at John Henry from under her lowered lashes, she felt a sudden pity for him because he was so far – so very far indeed from being the right man. She saw him too clearly as he was – he stood before her in all the hard brightness of the reality, and first love, like beauty, depends less upon the truth of an outline than it does upon the softening quality of an atmosphere. There was no mystery for her in the simple fact of his being. There was nothing left to discover about his great stature, his excellent heart, and his safe, slow mind that had been compelled to forego even the sort of education she had derived from Miss Priscilla. She knew that he had left school at the age of eight in order to become the support of a widowed mother, and she was pitifully aware of the tireless efforts he had made after reaching manhood to remedy his ignorance of the elementary studies he had missed.

Never had she heard a complaint from him, never a regret for the sacrifice, never so much as an idle wonder why it should have been necessary. If the texture of his soul was not finely wrought, the proportions of it were heroic. In him the Pendleton idealism had left the skies and been transmuted into the common substance of clay. He was of a practical bent of mind and had developed a talent for his branch of business, which, to the bitter humiliation of his mother, was that of hardware, with a successful specialty in bathtubs. Until to-day Virginia had always believed that John Henry interested her, but now she wondered how she had ever spent so many hours listening to his talk about business. And with the thought her whole existence appeared to her as dull and commonplace as those hours. A single instant of experience seemed longer to her than all the years she had lived, and this instant had drained the colour and the sweetness from the rest of life. The shape of her universe had trembled suddenly and altered. Dimly she was beginning to realize that sensation, not time, is the true measure of life. Nothing and everything had happened to her since yesterday.

As they turned into Short Market Street, Mrs. Pendleton's voice trailed off at last into silence, and she did not speak again while they passed hurriedly between the crumbling houses and the dilapidated shops which rose darkly on either side of the narrow cinder-strewn walks. The scent of honeysuckle did not reach here, and when they stopped presently at the beginning of Tin Pot Alley, there floated out to them the sharp acrid odour of huddled negroes. In these squalid alleys, where the lamps burned at longer distances, the more primitive forms of life appeared to swarm like distorted images under the transparent civilization of the town. The sound of banjo strumming came faintly from the dimness beyond, while at their feet the Problem of the South sprawled innocently amid tomato cans and rotting cabbage leaves.

"Wait here just a minute and I'll run up and speak to Aunt Ailsey," remarked Mrs. Pendleton with the dignity of a soul that is superior to smells; and without noticing her daughter's reproachful nod of acquiescence, she entered the alley and disappeared through the doorway of the nearest hovel. A minute later her serene face looked down at them over a patchwork quilt which hung airing at half length from the window above. "But this is not life – it has nothing to do with life," thought Virginia, while the Pendleton blood in her rose in a fierce rebellion against all that was ugly and sordid in existence. Then her mother's tread was heard descending the short flight of steps, and the sensation vanished as quickly and as inexplicably as it had come.

"I tried not to keep you waiting, dear," said Mrs. Pendleton, hastening toward them while she fanned herself rapidly with the small black fan she carried. Her face looked tired and worn, and before moving on, she paused a moment and held her hand to her thin fluttering breast, while deep bluish circles appeared to start out under the expression of pathetic cheerfulness in her eyes. This pathetic cheerfulness, so characteristic of the women of her generation, was the first thing, perhaps, that a stranger would have noticed about her face; yet it was a trait which neither her husband nor her child had ever observed. There was a fine moisture on her forehead, and this added so greatly to the natural transparency of her features that, standing there in the wan light, she might have been mistaken for the phantom of her daughter's vivid flesh and blood beauty. "I wonder if you would mind going on to Bolingbroke Street, so I may speak to Belinda Treadwell a minute?" she asked, as soon as she had recovered her breath. "I want to find out if she has engaged Miss Willy Whitlow for the whole week, or if there is any use my sending a message to her over in Botetourt. If she doesn't begin at once, Jinny, you won't have a dress to wear to Abby Goode's party."

Virginia's heart gave a single bound of joy and lay quiet. Not for worlds would she have asked to go to the Treadwells', yet ever since they had started, she had longed unceasingly to have her mother suggest it. The very stars, she felt, had worked together to bring about her desire.

"But aren't you tired, mother? It really doesn't matter about my dress," she murmured, for it was not in vain that she had wrested a diploma for deportment from Miss Priscilla.

"Why can't I take the message for you, Aunt Lucy? You look tired to death," urged John Henry.

"Oh, I shan't mind the walk as soon as we get out into the breeze," replied Mrs. Pendleton. "It's a lovely night, only a little close in this alley." And as she spoke she looked gently down on the Problem of the South as the Southern woman had looked down on it for generations and would continue to look down on it for generations still to come – without seeing that it was a problem.

"Well, it's good to get a breath of air, anyway!" exclaimed John Henry with fervour, when they had passed out of the alley into the lighted street. Around them the town seemed to beat with a single heart, as if it waited, like Virginia, in breathless suspense for some secret that must come out of the darkness. Sometimes the sidewalks over which they passed were of flag-stones, sometimes they were of gravel or of strewn cinders. Now and then an old stone house, which had once sheltered crinoline and lace ruffles, or had served as a trading station with the Indians before Dinwiddie had become a city, would loom between two small shops where the owners, coatless and covered with sweat, were selling flat beer to jaded and miserable customers. Up Bolingbroke Street a faint breeze blew, lifting the moist satin-like hair on Mrs. Pendleton's forehead. Already its ancient dignity had deserted the quarter in which the Treadwells lived, and it had begun to wear a forsaken and injured look, as though it resented the degradation of commerce into which it had descended.

"I can't understand why Cyrus Treadwell doesn't move over to Sycamore Street," remarked John Henry after a moment of reflection in which he had appeared to weigh this simple sentence with scrupulous exactness. "He's rich enough, I suppose, to buy anything he wants."

"I've heard Susan say that it was her mother's old home and she didn't care to leave it," said Mrs. Pendleton.

"I don't believe it's that a bit," broke in Virginia with characteristic impulsiveness. "The only reason is that Mr. Treadwell is stingy. With all his money, I know Mrs. Treadwell and Susan hardly ever have a dollar they can spend on themselves."

Though she spoke with her accustomed energy, she was conscious all the time that the words she uttered were not the ones in her thoughts. What did Cyrus Treadwell's stinginess matter when his only relation to life consisted in his being the uncle of Oliver? It was as if a single shape moved alive through a universe peopled with shadows. Only a borrowed radiance attached itself now to the persons and objects that had illumined the world for her yesterday. Yet she approached the crisis of her life so silently that those around her did not recognize it beneath the cover of ordinary circumstances. Like most great moments it had come unheralded; and though the rustling of its wings filled her soul, neither her mother nor John Henry heard a stir in the quiet air that surrounded them. Walking between the two who loved her, she felt that she was separated from them both by an eternity of experience.

There were several blocks of Bolingbroke Street to walk before the Treadwells' house was reached, and as they sauntered slowly past decayed dwellings, Virginia's imagination ran joyously ahead of her to the meeting. Would it happen this time as it had happened before when he looked at her that something would pass between them which would make her feel that she belonged to him? So little resistance did she offer to the purpose of Life that she seemed to have existed from the beginning merely as an exquisite medium for a single emotion. It was as if the dreams of all the dead women of her race, who had lived only in loving, were concentrated into a single shining centre of bliss – for the accumulated vibrations of centuries were in her soul when she trembled for the first time beneath the eyes of a lover. And yet all this blissful violence was powerless to change the most insignificant external fact in the universe. Though it was the greatest thing that could ever happen to her, it was nothing to the other twenty-one thousand human beings among whom she lived; it left no mark upon that procession of unimportant details which they called life.

They were in sight of the small old-fashioned brick house of the Treadwells, with its narrow windows set discreetly between outside shutters, and she saw that the little marble porch was deserted except for the two pink oleander trees, which stood in green tubs on either side of the curved iron railings. A minute later John Henry's imperative ring brought a young coloured maid to the door,

and Virginia, who had lingered on the pavement, heard almost immediately an effusive duet from her mother and Mrs. Treadwell.

"Oh, do come in, Lucy, just for a minute!"

"I can't possibly, my dear; I only wanted to ask you if you have engaged Miss Willy Whitlow for the entire week or if you could let me have her for Friday and Saturday? Jinny hasn't a rag to wear to Abby Goode's lawn party and I don't know anybody who does quite so well for her as poor Miss Willy. Oh, that's so sweet of you! I can't thank you enough! And you'll tell her without my sending all the way over to Botetourt!"

By this time Susan had joined Virginia on the sidewalk, and the liquid honey of Mrs. Pendleton's voice dropped softly into indistinctness.

"Oh, Jinny, if I'd only known you were coming!" said Susan. "Oliver wanted me to take him to see you, and when I couldn't, he went over to call on Abby."

So this was the end of her walk winged with expectancy! A disappointment as sharp as her joy had been pierced her through as she stood there smiling into Susan's discomfited face. With the tragic power of youth to create its own torment, she told herself that life could never be the same after this first taste of its bitterness.

CHAPTER III
FIRST LOVE

The next morning, so indestructible is the happiness of youth, she awoke with her hope as fresh as if it had not been blighted the evening before. As she lay in bed, with her loosened hair making a cloud over the pillows, and her eyes shining like blue flowers in the band of sunlight that fell through the dormer-window, she quivered to the early sweetness of honeysuckle as though it were the charmed sweetness of love of which she had dreamed in the night. She was only one of the many millions of women who were awaking at the same hour to the same miracle of Nature, yet she might have been the first woman seeking the first man through the vastness and the mystery of an uninhabited earth. Impossible to believe that an experience so wonderful was as common as the bursting of the spring buds or the humming of the thirsty bees around the honeysuckle arbour!

Slipping out of bed, she threw her dressing-gown over her shoulders, and kneeling beside the window, drank in the flower-scented air of the May morning. During the night, the paulownia trees had shed a rain of violet blossoms over the wet grass, where little wings of sunshine, like golden moths, hovered above them. Beyond the border of lilies-of-the-valley she saw the squat pinkish tower of the church, and beneath it, in the narrow churchyard, rose the gleaming shaft above the grave of the Confederate soldier. On her right, in the centre of the crooked path, three negro infants were prodding earnestly at roots of wire-grass and dandelion; and brushing carelessly their huddled figures, her gaze descended the twelve steps of the almost obliterated terrace, and followed the steep street down which a mulatto vegetable vendor was urging his slow-footed mule.

A wave of joy rose in her breast, and she felt that her heart melted in gratitude for the divine beauty of life. The world showed to her as a place filled with shining vistas of happiness, and at the end of each of these vistas there awaited the unknown enchanting thing which she called in her thoughts "the future." The fact that it was the same world in which Miss Priscilla and her mother lived their narrow and prosaic lives did not alter by a breath her unshakable conviction that she herself was predestined for something more wonderful than they had ever dreamed of. "He may come this evening!" she thought, and immediately the light of magic suffused the room, the street outside, and every scarred roof in Dinwiddie.

At the head of her bed, wedged in between the candle stand and the window, there was a cheap little bookcase of walnut which contained the only volumes she had ever been permitted to own – the poems of Mrs. Hemans and of Adelaide Anne Procter, a carefully expurgated edition of Shakespeare, with an inscription in the rector's handwriting on the flyleaf; Miss Strickland's "Lives of the Queens of England"; and several works of fiction belonging to the class which Mrs. Pendleton vaguely characterized as "sweet stories." Among the more prominent of these were "Thaddeus of Warsaw," a complete set of Miss Yonge's novels, with a conspicuously tear-stained volume of "The Heir of Redclyffe," and a romance or two by obscure but innocuous authors. That any book which told, however mildly, the truth about life should have entered their daughter's bedroom would have seemed little short of profanation to both the rector and Mrs. Pendleton. The sacred shelves of that bookcase (which had been ceremoniously presented to her on her fourteenth birthday) had never suffered the contaminating presence of realism. The solitary purpose of art was, in Mrs. Pendleton's eyes, to be "sweet," and she scrupulously judged all literature by its success or failure in this particular quality. It seemed to her as wholesome to feed her daughter's growing fancy on an imaginary line of pious heroes, as it appeared to her moral to screen her from all suspicion of the existence of immorality. She did not honestly believe that any living man resembled the "Heir of Redclyffe," any more than she believed that the path of self-sacrifice leads inevitably to happiness; but there was no doubt in her mind that she advanced the cause of righteousness when she taught these sanctified fallacies to Virginia.

As she rose from her knees, Virginia glanced at her white dress, which was too crumpled for her to wear again before it was smoothed, and thought regretfully of Aunt Docia's heart, which invariably gave warning whenever there was extra work to be done. "I shall have to wear either my blue lawn or my green organdie this evening," she thought. "I wish I could have the sleeves changed. I wonder if mother could run a tuck in them?"

It did not occur to her that she might smooth the dress herself, because she knew that the iron would be wrested from her by her mother's hands, which were so knotted and worn that tears came to Virginia's eyes when she looked at them. She let her mother slave over her because she had been born into a world where the slaving of mothers was a part of the natural order, and she had not as yet become independent enough to question the morality of the commonplace. At any minute she would gladly have worked, too, but the phrase "spare Virginia" had been uttered so often in her hearing that it had acquired at last almost a religious significance. To have been forced to train her daughter in any profitable occupation which might have lifted her out of the class of unskilled labour in which indigent gentlewomen by right belonged, would have been the final dregs of humiliation in Mrs. Pendleton's cup. On one of Aunt Docia's bad days, when Jinny had begged to be allowed to do part of the washing, she had met an almost passionate refusal from her mother. "It will be time enough to spoil your hands after you are married, darling!" And again, "Don't do that rough sewing, Jinny. Give it to me." From the cradle she had borne her part in this racial custom of the sacrifice of generation to generation – of the perpetual immolation of age on the flowery altars of youth. Like most customs in which we are nurtured, it had seemed natural and pleasant enough until she had watched the hollows deepen in her mother's temples and the tireless knotted hands stumble at their work. Then a pang had seized her and she had pleaded earnestly to be permitted to help.

"If you only knew how unhappy it makes me to see you ruining your pretty fingers, Jinny. My child, the one comfort I have is the thought that I am sparing you."

Sparing her! Always that from the first! Even Gabriel chimed in when it became a matter of Jinny. "Let me wash the dishes, Lucy," he would implore. "What? Will you trust me with other people's souls, but not with your china?"

"It's not a man's work, Mr. Pendleton. What would the neighbours think?"

"They would think, I hope, my dear, that I was doing my duty."

"But it would not be dignified for a clergyman. No, I cannot bear the sight of you with a dishcloth."

In the end she invariably had her way with them, for she was the strongest. Jinny must be spared, and Gabriel must do nothing undignified. About herself it made no difference unless the neighbours were looking; she had not thought of herself, except in the indomitable failing of her "false pride," since her marriage, which had taken place in her twentieth year. A clergyman's wife might do menial tasks in secret, and nobody minded, but they were not for a clergyman.

For a minute, while she was dressing, Virginia thought of these things – of how hard life had been to her mother, of how pretty she must have been in her youth. What she did not think of was that her mother, like herself, was but one of the endless procession of women who pass perpetually from the sphere of pleasure into the sphere of service. It was as impossible for her to picture her mother as a girl of twenty as it was for her to imagine herself ever becoming a woman of fifty.

When she had finished dressing she closed the door softly after her as if she were afraid of disturbing the silence, and ran downstairs to the dining-room, where the rector and Mrs. Pendleton greeted her with subdued murmurs of joy.

"I was afraid I'd miss you, daughter," from the rector, as he drew her chair nearer.

"I was just going to carry up your tray, Jinny," from her mother. "I kept a nice breast of chicken for you which one of the neighbours sent me."

"I'd so much rather you'd eat it, mother," protested Jinny, on the point of tears.

"But I couldn't, darling, I really couldn't manage it. A cup of coffee and a bit of toast is all I can possibly stand in the morning. I was up early, for Docia was threatened with one of her heart attacks, and it always gives me a little headache to miss my morning nap."

"Then you can't go to market, Lucy; it is out of the question," insisted the rector. "After thirty years you might as well make up your mind to trust me, my dear."

"But the last time you went you gave away our shoulder of lamb to a beggar," replied his wife, and she hastened to add tenderly, lest he should accept the remark as a reproof, "it's sweet of you, dearest, but a little walk will be good for my head if I am careful to keep on the shady side of the street. I can easily find a boy to bring home the things, and I am sure it won't hurt me a bit."

"Why can't I go, mother?" implored Virginia. "Susan always markets for Mrs. Treadwell." And she felt that even the task of marketing was irradiated by this inner glow which had changed the common aspect of life.

"Oh, Jinny, you know how you hate to feel the chickens, and one can never tell how plump they are by the feathers."

"Well, I'll feel them, mother, if you'll let me try."

"No, darling, but you may go with me and carry my sunshade. I'm so sorry Docia can't smooth your dress. Was it much crumpled?"

"Oh, dreadfully! And I did so want to wear it this evening. Do you think Aunt Docia could show me how to iron?"

Docia, who stood like an ebony image of Bellona behind her mistress's chair, waving a variegated tissue paper fly screen over the coffee-urn, was heard to think aloud that "dish yer stitch ain' helt up er blessed minute sence befo' daylight." Not unnaturally, perhaps, since she was the most prominent figure in her own vision of the universe, she had come at last to regard her recurrent "stitch" as an event of greater consequence than Virginia's appearance in immaculate white muslin. An uncertain heart combined with a certain temper had elevated her from a servile position to one of absolute autocracy in the household. Everybody feared her, so nobody had ever dared ask her to leave. As she had rebelled long ago against the badge of a cap and an apron, she appeared in the dining-room clad in garments of various hues, and her dress on this particular morning was a purple calico crowned majestically by a pink cotton turban. There was a tradition still afloat that Docia had been an excellent servant before the war; but this amiable superstition had, perhaps, as much reason to support it as had Gabriel's innocent conviction that there were no faithless husbands when there were no divorces.

"I'm afraid Docia can't do it," sighed Mrs. Pendleton, for her ears had caught the faint thunder of the war goddess behind her chair, and her soul, which feared neither armies nor adversities, trembled before her former slaves. "But it won't take me a minute if you'll have it ready right after dinner."

"Oh, mother, of course I couldn't let you for anything. I only thought Aunt Docia might be able to teach me how to iron."

At this, Docia muttered audibly that she "ain' got no time ter be sho'in' nobody nuttin'."

"There, now, Docia, you mustn't lose your temper," observed Gabriel as he rose from his chair. It was at such moments that the remembered joys of slavery left a bitter after taste on his lips. Clearly it was impossible to turn into the streets a servant who had once belonged to you!

When they were in the hall together, Mrs. Pendleton whispered nervously to her husband that it must be "poor Docia's heart that made her so disagreeable and that she would feel better to-morrow."

"Wouldn't it be possible, my dear?" inquired the rector in his pulpit manner, to which his wife's only answer was a startled "Sh-sh-ush."

An hour later the door of Gabriel's study opened softly, and Mrs. Pendleton entered with the humble and apologetic manner in which she always intruded upon her husband's pursuits. There was an accepted theory in the family, shared even by Uncle Isam and Aunt Docia, that whenever Gabriel was left alone for an instant, his thoughts naturally deflected into spiritual paths. In the early days of

his marriage he had tried honestly to live up to this exalted idea of his character; then finding the effort beyond him, and being a man with an innate detestation of hypocrisy, he had earnestly endeavoured to disabuse his wife's imagination of the mistaken belief in his divinity. But a notion once firmly fixed in Mrs. Pendleton's mind might as well have been embedded in rock. By virtue of that gentle obstinacy which enabled her to believe in an illusion the more intensely because it had vanished, she had triumphed not only over circumstances, but over truth itself. By virtue of this quality, she had created the world in which she moved and had wrought beauty out of chaos.

"Are you busy with your sermon, dear?" she asked, pausing in the doorway, and gazing reverently at her husband over the small black silk bag she carried. Like the other women of Dinwiddie who had lost relatives by the war, she had never laid aside her mourning since the surrender; and the frame of crape to her face gave her the pensive look of one who has stepped out of the pageant of life into the sacred shadows of memory.

"No, no, Lucy, I'm ready to start out with you," replied the rector apologetically, putting a box of fishing tackle he had been sorting back into the drawer of his desk. He was as fond as a child of a day's sport, and never quite so happy as when he set out with his rod and an old tomato can filled with worms, which he had dug out of the back garden, in his hands; but owing to the many calls upon him and his wife's conception of his clerical dignity, he was seldom able to gratify his natural tastes.

"Oh, father, please hurry!" called Virginia from the porch, and rising obediently, he followed Mrs. Pendleton through the hall and out into the May sunshine, where the little negroes stopped an excited chase of a black and orange butterfly to return doggedly to their weeding.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather I'd go to market, Lucy?"

"Quite sure, dear," replied his wife, sniffing the scent of lilies-of-the-valley with her delicate, slightly pinched nostrils. "I thought you were going to see Mr. Treadwell about putting John Henry into the bank," she added. "It is such a pity to keep the poor boy selling bathtubs. His mother felt it so terribly."

"Ah, so I was – so I was," reflected Gabriel, who, though both of them would have been indignant at the suggestion, was as putty in the hands of his wife. "Well, I'll look into the bank on Cyrus after I've paid my sick calls."

With that they parted, Gabriel going on to visit a bedridden widow in the Old Ladies' Home, while Mrs. Pendleton and Virginia turned down a cross street that led toward the market. At every corner, it seemed to Virginia, middle-aged ladies, stout or thin, wearing crape veils and holding small black silk bags in their hands, sprang out of the shadows of mulberry trees, and barred their leisurely progress. And though nothing had happened in Dinwiddie since the war, and Mrs. Pendleton had seen many of these ladies the day before, she stopped for a sympathetic chat with each one of them, while Virginia, standing a little apart, patiently prodded the cinders of the walk with the end of her sunshade. All her life the girl had been taught to regard time as the thing of least importance in the universe; but occasionally, while she listened in silence to the liquid murmur of her mother's voice, she wondered vaguely how the day's work was ever finished in Dinwiddie. The story of Docia's impertinence was told and retold a dozen times before they reached the market. "And you really mean that you can't get rid of her? Why, my dear Lucy, I wouldn't stand it a day! Now, there was my Mandy. Such an excellent servant until she got her head turned – " This from Mrs. Tom Peachey, an energetic little woman, with a rosy face and a straight gray "bang" cut short over her eyebrows. "But, Lucy, my child, are you doing right to submit to impertinence? In the old days, I remember, before the war – " This from Mrs. William Goode, who had been Sally Peterson, the beauty of Dinwiddie, and who was still superbly handsome in a tragic fashion, with a haunted look in her eyes and masses of snow-white hair under her mourning bonnet. Years ago Virginia had imagined her as dwelling perpetually with the memory of her young husband, who had fallen in his twenty-fifth year in the Battle of Cold Harbor, but she knew now that the haunted eyes, like all things human, were under the despotism of trifles. To the girl, who saw in this universal acquiescence in littleness merely the

pitiful surrender of feeble souls, there was a passionate triumph in the thought that her own dreams were larger than the actuality that surrounded her. Youth's scorn of the narrow details of life left no room in her mind for an understanding of the compromise which middle-age makes with necessity. The pathos of resignation – of that inevitable submission to the petty powers which the years bring – was lost upon the wistful ignorance of inexperience. While she waited dutifully, with her absent gaze fixed on the old mulberry trees, which whitened as the wind blew over them and then slowly darkened again, she wondered if servants and gossip were the only things that Oliver had heard of in his travels? Then she remembered that even in Dinwiddie men were less interested in such matters than they were in the industries of peanuts and tobacco. Was it only women, after all, who were in subjection to particulars?

When they turned into Old Street, John Henry hailed them from the doorway of a shop, where he stood flanked by a row of spotless bathtubs. He wore a loose pongee coat, which sagged at the shoulders, his straight flaxen hair had been freshly cut, and his crimson necktie had got a stain on it at breakfast; but to Virginia's astonishment, he appeared sublimely unconscious both of his bathtubs and his appearance. He was doubtless under the delusion that a pongee coat, being worn for comfort, was entirely successful when it achieved that end; and as for his business, it was beyond his comprehension that a Pendleton could have reason to blush for a bathtub or for any other object that afforded him an honest livelihood.

He called to them at sight, and Mrs. Pendleton, following her instinct of fitness, left the conversation to youth.

"John Henry, father is going to see Mr. Treadwell about the place in the bank. Won't it be lovely if he gives it to you!"

"He won't," replied John Henry. "I'll bet you anything he's keeping it for his nephew."

Virginia's blush came quickly, and turning her head away, she gazed earnestly down the street to the octagonal market, which stood on the spot where slaves were offered for sale when she was born.

"Mr. Treadwell is crossing the street now," she said after a minute. "I wonder why he keeps his mouth shut so tight when he is alone?"

A covered cart, which had been passing slowly, moved up the hill, and from beyond it there appeared the tall spare figure of a man with iron-gray hair, curling a little on the temples, a sallow skin, splotched with red over the nose, and narrow colourless lips that looked as if they were cut out of steel. As he walked quickly up the street, every person whom he passed turned to glance after him.

"I wonder if it is true that he hasn't made his money honestly?" asked Virginia.

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Mrs. Pendleton, who in her natural desire to believe only good about people was occasionally led into believing the truth.

"Well, I don't care," retorted Virginia, "he's mean. I know just by the way his wife dresses."

"Oh, Jinny!" gasped Mrs. Pendleton, and glanced in embarrassment at her nephew, whose face, to her surprise, was beaming with enjoyment. The truth was that John Henry, who would have condemned so unreasonable an accusation had it been uttered by a full-grown male, was enraptured by the piquancy of hearing it on the lovely lips of his cousin. To demand that a pretty woman should possess the mental responsibility of a human being would have seemed an affront to his inherited ideas of gallantry. His slow wit was enslaved by Jinny's audacity as completely as his kind ox-like eyes were enthralled by the young red and white of her beauty.

"But he's a great man. You can't deny that," he said with the playful manner in which he might have prodded a kitten in order to make it claw.

"A great man! Just because he has made money!"

"Well, he couldn't have got rich, you know, if he hadn't had the sense to see how to do it," replied the young man with enthusiasm. Like most Southerners who had been forced without preparation into the hard school of industry, he had found that his standards followed inevitably the changing measure of his circumstances. From his altered point of view, the part of owing property appeared so easy, and

the part of winning it so difficult, that his respect for culture had yielded almost unconsciously to his admiration for commerce. When the South came again to the front, he felt instinctively that it would come, shorn of its traditional plumage, a victor from the hard-fought industrial battlefields of the century; and because Cyrus Treadwell led the way toward this triumph, he was ready to follow him. Of the whole town, this grim, half legendary figure (passionately revered and as passionately hated) appeared to him to stand alone not for the decaying past, but for the growing future. The stories of the too rapid development of the Treadwell fortune he cast scornfully aside as the malicious slanders of failure. What did all this tittle-tattle about a great man prove anyhow except his greatness? Suppose he *had* used his railroad to make a fortune – well, but for him where would the Dinwiddie and Central be to-day if not in the junk shop? Where would the lumber market be? the cotton market? the tobacco market? For around Cyrus, standing alone and solitary on his height, there had gathered the great illusion that makes theft honest and falsehood truth – the illusion of Success; and simple John Henry Pendleton, who, after nineteen years of poverty and memory, was bereft alike of classical pedantry and of physical comforts, had grown a little weary of the endless lip-worship of a single moment in history. Granted even that it was the greatest moment the world had seen, still why couldn't one be satisfied to have it take its place beside the wars of the Spartans and of the ancient Britons? Perpetual mourning was well enough for ladies in crape veils and heroic gentlemen on crutches; but when your bread and meat depended not upon the graves you had decorated, but upon the bathtubs you had sold, surely something could be said for the Treadwell point of view.

As Virginia could find no answer to this remark, the three stood in silence, gazing dreamily, with three pairs of Pendleton eyes, down toward the site of the old slave market. Directly in their line of vision, an over-laden mule with a sore shoulder was straining painfully under the lash, but none of them saw it, because each of them was morally incapable of looking an unpleasant fact in the face if there was any honourable manner of avoiding it. What they beheld, indeed, was the most interesting street in the world, filled with the most interesting people, who drove happy animals that enjoyed their servitude and needed the sound of the lash to add cheer and liveliness to their labours. Never had the Pendleton idealism achieved a more absolute triumph over the actuality.

"Well, we must go on," murmured Mrs. Pendleton, withdrawing her visionary gaze from the hot street littered with fruit rinds and blood-stained papers from a neighbouring butcher shop. "It was lovely to have this glimpse of you, John Henry. What nice bathtubs you have!" Smiling her still lovely smile into the young man's eyes, she proceeded on her leisurely way, while Virginia raised the black silk sunshade over her head. In front of them they could see long rows of fish-carts and vegetable stalls around which hovered an army of eager housekeepers. The social hours in Dinwiddie at that period were the early morning ones in the old market, and Virginia knew that she should hear Docia's story repeated again for the benefit of the curious or sympathetic listeners that would soon gather about her mother. Mrs. Pendleton's marketing, unlike the hurried and irresponsible sort of to-day, was an affair of time and ceremony. Among the greetings and the condolences from other marketers there would ensue lengthy conversations with the vendors of poultry, of fish, or of vegetables. Every vegetable must be carefully selected by her own hands and laid aside into her special basket, which was in the anxious charge of a small coloured urchin. While she felt the plump breasts of Mr. Dewlap's chickens, she would inquire with flattering condescension after the members of Mr. Dewlap's family. Not only did she remember each one of them by name, but she never forgot either the dates of their birthdays or the number of turkeys Mrs. Dewlap had raised in a season. If marketing is ever to be elevated from an occupation to an art, it will be by a return to Mrs. Pendleton's method.

"Mother, please buy some strawberries," begged Virginia.

"Darling, you know we never buy fruit, or desserts. Somebody will certainly send us something. I saw Mrs. Carrington whipping syllabub on her back porch as we passed."

"But they're only five cents a basket."

"Well, put a basket with my marketing, Mr. Dewlap. Yes, I'll take that white pullet if you're sure that she is plumper than the red one."

She moved on a step or two, while the white pullet was handed over by its feet to the small coloured urchin and to destruction. If Mrs. Pendleton had ever reflected on the tragic fate of pullets, she would probably have concluded that it was "best" for them to be fried and eaten, or Providence, whose merciful wisdom she never questioned, would not have permitted it. So, in the old days, she had known where the slave market stood, without realizing in the least that men and women were sold there. "Poor things, it does seem dreadful, but I suppose it is better for them to have a change sometimes," she would doubtless have reasoned had the horror of the custom ever occurred to her – for her heart was so sensitive to pain that she could exist at all only by inventing a world of exquisite fiction around her.

"Aren't you nearly through, mother?" pleaded Virginia at last. "The sun will be so hot going home that it will make your head worse."

Mrs. Pendleton, who was splitting a pea-shell with her thumb in order to ascertain the size and quality of the peas, murmured soothingly, "Just a minute, dear"; and the girl, finding it impossible to share her mother's enthusiasm for slaughtered animals, fell back again into the narrow shade of the stalls. She revolted with a feeling of outrage against the side of life that confronted her – against the dirty floor, strewn with withered vegetables above which flies swarmed incessantly, and against the pathos of the small bleeding forms which seemed related neither to the lamb in the fields nor to the Sunday roast on the table. That divine gift of evasion, which enabled Mrs. Pendleton to see only the thing she wanted to see in every occurrence, was but partially developed as yet in Virginia; and while she stood there in the midst of her unromantic surroundings, the girl shuddered lest Oliver Treadwell should know that she had ever waited, hot, perspiring, with a draggled skirt, and a bag of tomatoes grasped in her hands, while her mother wandered from stall to stall in a tireless search for peas a few cents cheaper than those of Mr. Dewlap. Youth, with its ingenuous belief that love dwells in external circumstances, was protesting against the bland assumption of age that love creates its own peculiar circumstances out of itself. It was absurd, she knew, to imagine that her father's affection for her mother would alter because she haggled over the price of peas; yet the emotion with which she endowed Oliver Treadwell was so delicate and elusive that she felt that the sight of a soiled skirt and a perspiring face would blast it forever. It appeared imperative that he should see her in white muslin, and she resolved that if it cost Docia her life she would have the flounces of her dress smoothed before evening. She, who was by nature almost morbidly sensitive to suffering, became, in the hands of this new and implacable power, as ruthless as Fate.

"Now I'm ready, Jinny dear. Are you tired waiting?" asked Mrs. Pendleton, coming toward her with the coloured urchin in her train. "Why, there's Susan Treadwell. Have you spoken to her?"

The next instant, before the startled girl could turn, a voice cried out triumphantly: "O Jinny!" and in front of her, looking over Susan's shoulder, she saw the eager eyes and the thin, high-coloured face of Oliver Treadwell. For a moment she told herself that he had read her thoughts with his penetrating gaze, which seemed to pierce through her; and she blushed pink while her eyes burned under her trembling lashes. Then the paper bag, containing the tomatoes, burst in her hands, and its contents rolled, one by one, over the littered floor to his feet. Both stooped at once to recover it, and while their hands touched amid wilted cabbage leaves, the girl felt that love had taken gilded wings and departed forever!

"Put them in the basket, dear," Mrs. Pendleton could be heard saying calmly in the midst of her daughter's agony – for, having lived through the brief illumination of romance, she had come at last into that steady glow which encompasses the commonplace.

"This is my cousin Oliver, Virginia," remarked Susan as casually as if the meeting of the two had not been planned from all eternity by the beneficent Powers.

"I'm afraid I've spoiled your nice red tomatoes," said a voice that filled Virginia's whirling mind with a kind of ecstatic dizziness. As the owner of the voice held out his hand, she saw that it was long and thin like the rest of him, with blue veins crossing the back, and slender, slightly crooked fingers that hurt hers with the strength of their pressure. "To confess the truth," he added gaily after an instant, "my breath was quite taken away because, somehow, this was the last place on earth in which I expected to find you. It's a dreadful spot – don't you think so? If we've got to be cannibals, why in Heaven's name make a show and a parade of it?"

"What an extraordinary young man!" said Mrs. Pendleton's eyes; and Virginia found herself blushing again because she felt that her mother had not understood him. A delicious embarrassment – something different and more vivid than any sensation she had ever known – held her speechless while he looked at her. Had her life depended on it, she could not have uttered a sentence – could hardly even have lifted her lashes, which seemed suddenly to have become so heavy that she felt the burden of them weighing over her eyes. All the picturesque phrases she had planned to speak at their first meeting had taken wings with perfidious romance, yet she would have given her dearest possession to have been able to say something really clever. "He thinks me a simpleton, of course," she thought – perfectly unconscious that Oliver was not thinking of her wits at all, but of the wonderful rose-pink of her flesh. At one and the same instant, she felt that this silence was the most marvellous thing that had ever happened to her and longed to break it with some speech so brilliant that he would never forget it. Little thrills of joy, like tiny flames, ran over her, and the light in her eyes shone on him through the quivering dusk of her lashes. Even when she looked away from him, she could still see his expression of tender gaiety, as though he were trying in vain to laugh himself free from an impulse that was fast growing too strong for him. What she did not know was that the spring was calling to him through her youth and sex as it was calling through the scented winds and the young buds on the trees. She was as ignorant that she offered herself to him through her velvet softness, through the glow in her eyes, through her quivering lips, as the flower is that it allures the bee by its perfume. So subtly did Life use her for its end that the illusion of choice in first love remained unimpaired. Though she was young desire incarnate, he saw in her only the unique and solitary woman of his dreams.

"Do you come here every day?" he asked, and immediately the blue sky and the octagonal market spun round at his voice.

As nothing but commonplace words would come to her, she was obliged at last to utter them. "Oh, no, not every day."

"I've always had a tremendous sympathy for women because they have to market and housekeep. I wonder if they won't revolt some time?"

This was so heretical a point of view that she tried earnestly to comprehend it; but all the time her heart was busy telling her how different he was from every other man – how much more interesting! how immeasurably superior! Her attention, in spite of her efforts at serious thought, would not wander from the charm of his voice, from the peculiar whimsical trick of his smile, which lifted his mouth at one corner and made odd little wrinkles come and go about his eyes. His manner was full of sudden nervous gestures which surprised and enchanted her. All other men were not merely as clay beside him – they were as straw! Seeing that he was waiting for a response, she made a violent endeavour to think of one, and uttered almost inaudibly: "But don't they like it?"

"Ah, that's just it," he answered as seriously as if she hadn't known that her speech bordered on imbecility. "Do they really like it? or have they been throwing dust in our eyes through the centuries?" And he gazed at her as eagerly as if he were hanging upon her answer. Oh, if she could only say something clever! If she could only say the sort of thing that would shock Miss Priscilla! But nothing came of her wish, and she was reduced at last to the pathetic rejoinder, "I don't know. I'm afraid I've never thought about it."

For a moment he stared at her as though he were enraptured by her reply. With such eyes and such hair, she might have been as simple as she appeared and he would never have known it. "Of

course you haven't, or you wouldn't be you!" he responded; and by the time she came to her senses, she was following her mother and the negro urchin out of the market. Though she was in reality walking over cinders, she felt that her feet were treading on golden air.

CHAPTER IV
THE TREADWELLS

Above the Dinwiddie of Virginia's girlhood, rising sharply out of the smoothly blended level of personalities, there towered, as far back as she could remember, the grim and yet strangely living figure of Cyrus Treadwell. From the intimate social life of the town he had remained immovably detached; but from the beginning it had been impossible for that life to ignore him. Among a people knit by a common pulse, yet separated by a multitude of individual differences, he stood aloof and indispensable, like one of the gaunt iron bridges of his great railroad. He was at once the destroyer and the builder – the inexorable foe of the old feudal order and the beneficent source of the new industrialism. Though half of Dinwiddie hated him, the other half (hating him, perhaps none the less) ate its bread from his hands. The town, which had lived, fought, lost, and suffered not as a group of individuals, but as a psychological unit, had surrendered at last, less to the idea of readjustment than to the indomitable purpose of a single mind.

And yet nobody in Dinwiddie, not even Miss Willy Whitlow, who sewed out by the day, and knew the intimate structure of every skeleton in every closet of the town – nobody could tell the precise instant at which Cyrus had ceased to be an ordinary man and become a great one. A phrase, which had started as usual, "The Mr. Treadwell, you know, who married poor Belinda Bolingbroke – " swerved suddenly to "Cyrus Treadwell told me that, and you must admit that *he* knows what he is talking about" – and a reputation was made! His marriage to "poor Belinda," which had at first appeared to be the most conspicuous fact in his career, dwindled to insignificance beside the rebuilding of the tobacco industry and his immediate elevation to the vacant presidency of one of the Machlin railroads.

It was true that in the meantime he had fought irreproachably, but without renown, through a number of battles; and returning to a vanquished and ruined city, had found himself still young enough to go to school again in matters of finance. Whether he had learned from Antrum, the despised carpet-bagger for Machlin & Company, or had taken his instructions at first hand from the great Machlin himself, was in the eighties an open question in Dinwiddie. The choice was probably given him to learn or starve; and aided by the keen understanding and the acute sense of property he had inherited from his Scotch-Irish parentage, he had doubtless decided that to learn was, after all, the easier way. Saving he had always been, and yet with such strange and sudden starts of generosity that he had been known to seek out distant obscure maiden relatives and redeem the mortgaged roof over their heads. His strongest instinct, which was merely an attenuated shoot from his supreme feeling for possessions, was that of race, though he had estranged both his son and his daughter by his stubborn conviction that he was not doing his duty by them except when he was making their lives a burden. For, as with most men who have suffered in their youth under oppression, his ambition was not so much to relieve the oppressed as to become in his turn the oppressor. Owing, perhaps, to his fine Scotch-Irish blood, which ran a little muddy in his veins, he had never lost a certain primitive feeling of superstition, like the decaying root of a religious instinct; and he was as strict in his attendance upon church as he was loose in applying the principles of Christianity to his daily life. Sunday was vaguely associated in his mind with such popular fetiches as a frock coat and a roast of beef; and if the roast had been absent from dinner, he would have felt precisely the same indefinite disquietude that troubled him when the sermon was left out of the service. So completely did his outward life shape itself around the inner structure of his thought, that, except for the two days of the week which he spent with unfailing regularity in Wall Street, he might have been said to live only in his office. Once when his doctor had prescribed exercise for a slight dyspepsia, he had added a few additional blocks to his morning and evening walk, and it was while he was performing this self-inflicted penance that he came upon Gabriel, who was hastening toward him in behalf of John Henry.

For an instant a gleam of light shone on Cyrus's features, and they stood out, palely illuminated, like the features of a bronze statue above which a torch suddenly flares. His shoulders, which stooped until his coat had curved in the back, straightened themselves with a jerk, while he held out his hand, on which an old sabre cut was still visible. This faded scar had always seemed to Gabriel the solitary proof that the great man was created of flesh and blood.

"I've come about a little matter of business," began the rector in an apologetic tone, for in Cyrus's presence he was never without an uneasy feeling that the problems of the spirit were secondary to the problems of finance.

"Well, I'm just going into the office. Come in and sit down. I'm glad to see you. You bring back the four happiest years of my life, Gabriel."

"And of mine, too. It's queer, isn't it, how the savage seems to sleep in the most peaceable of men? We were half starved in those days, half naked, and without the certainty that we'd live until sunset – but, dreadful as it sounds, I was happier then – God help me! – than I've ever been before or since."

Passing through an outer office, where a number of young men were bending over ledgers, they entered Cyrus's private room, and sat down in two plain pine chairs under the coloured lithograph of an engine which ornamented the largest space on the wall. The room was bare of the most ordinary comforts, as though its owner begrudged the few dollars he must spend to improve his surroundings.

"Well, those days are over, and you say it's business that you've come about?" retorted Cyrus, not rudely, but with the manner of a man who seldom wastes words and whose every expenditure either of time or of money must achieve some definite result.

"Yes, it's business." The rector's tone had chilled a little, and he added in spite of his judgment, "I'm afraid it's a favour. Everybody comes begging to you, I suppose?"

"Then, it's the Sunday-school picnic, I reckon. I haven't forgotten it. Smithson!" An alert young man appeared at the door. "Make a note that Mr. Pendleton wants coaches for the Saint James' Church picnic on the twenty-ninth. You said twenty-ninth, didn't you, Gabriel?"

"If the weather's good," replied Gabriel meekly, and then as Smithson withdrew, he glanced nervously at the lithograph of the engine. "But it wasn't about the picnic that I came," he said. "The fact is, I wanted to ask you to use your influence in the matter of getting John Henry a place in the bank. He has done very well at the night school, and I believe that you would find him entirely satisfactory."

At the first mention of the bank, a look of distrust crept into Cyrus's face – a look cautious, alert, suspicious, such as he wore at directors' meetings when there was a chance that something might be got out of him if for a minute he were to go off his guard.

"I feel a great responsibility for him," resumed Gabriel almost sternly, though he was painfully aware that his assurance had deserted him.

"Why don't you go to James? James is the one to see about such a matter."

If the rector had spoken the thought in his mind, he would have answered, "Because James reminds me of a fish and I can't abide him"; but instead, he replied simply, "I know James so slightly that I don't feel in a position to ask a favour of him."

The expression of suspicion left Cyrus's face, and he relaxed from the strained attitude in which he had sat ever since the Sunday-school picnic had been dismissed from the conversation. Leaning back in his chair, he drew two cigars from the pocket of his coat, and after glancing a little reluctantly at them both, offered one to the rector. "I believe he really wanted me to refuse it!" flashed through Gabriel's mind like an arrow – though the other's hesitation had been, in fact, only an unconscious trick of manner which he had acquired during the long lean years when he had fattened chiefly by not giving away. The gift of a cigar could mean nothing to a man who willingly contributed to every charity in town, but the trivial gestures that accompany one's early habits occasionally outlast the peculiar circumstances from which they spring.

For a few minutes they smoked in silence. Then Cyrus remarked in his precise voice: "James is a clever fellow – a clever fellow."

"I've heard that he is as good as right hand to you. That's a fine thing to say of a son."

"Yes, I don't know what I should do without James. He's a saving hand, and, I tell you, there are more fortunes made by saving than by gambling."

"Well, I don't think James need ever give you any concern on that account," replied Gabriel, not without gentle satire, for he recalled several unpleasant encounters with the younger Treadwell on the subject of charity. "But I've heard different tales of that nephew of yours who has just come back from God knows what country."

"He's Henry's son," replied Cyrus with a frown. "You haven't forgotten Henry?"

"Yes, I remember. Henry and George both went out to Australia to open the tobacco market, and Henry died poor while George lived and got rich, I believe?"

"George kept free of women and attended to his affairs," returned Cyrus, who was as frank about his family as he was secretive about his business.

"But what about Henry's son? He's a promising chap, isn't he?"

"It depends upon what you call promising, I reckon. Before he came I thought of putting him into the bank, but since I've seen him, I can't, for the life of me, think of anything to do with him. Unless, of course, you could see your way toward taking him into the ministry," he concluded with sardonic humour.

"His views on theology would prevent that, I fear," replied the rector, while all the kindly little wrinkles leaped out around his eyes.

"Views? What do anybody's views matter who can't make a living? But to tell the truth, there's something about him that I don't trust. He isn't like Henry, so he must take after that pretty fool Henry married. Now, if he had James's temper, I could make something out of him, but he's different – he's fly-up-the-creek – he's as flighty as a woman."

Gabriel, who had been a little cheered to learn that the young man, with all his faults, did not resemble James, hastened to assure Cyrus that there might be some good in the boy, after all – that he was only twenty-two, and that, in any case, it was too soon to pass judgment.

"I can't stand his talk," returned the other grimly. "I've never heard anybody but a preacher – I beg your pardon, Gabriel, nothing personal! – who could keep going so long when nobody was listening. A mere wind-bag, that's what he is, with a lot of nonsensical ideas about his own importance. If there wasn't a girl in the house, it would be no great matter, but that Susan of mine is so headstrong that I'm half afraid she'll get crazy and imagine she's fallen in love with him."

This proof of parental anxiety touched Gabriel in his tenderest spot. After all, though Cyrus had a harsh surface, there was much good at the bottom of him. "I can enter into your feelings about that," he answered sympathetically, "though my Jinny, I am sure, would never allow herself to think seriously about a man without first asking my opinion of him."

"Then you're fortunate," commented Cyrus dryly, "for I don't believe Susan would give a red cent for what I'd think if she once took a fancy. She'd as soon elope with that wild-eyed scamp as eat her dinner, if it once entered her head."

A knock came at the door, and Smithson entered and conferred with his employer over a telegram, while Gabriel rose to his feet.

"By the way," said Cyrus, turning abruptly from his secretary and stopping the rector as he was about to pass out of the door, "I was just wondering if you remembered the morning after Lee's surrender, when we started home on the road together?"

"Why, yes." There was a note of surprise in Gabriel's answer, for he remembered, also, that he had sold his watch a little later in the day to a Union soldier, and had divided the eighty dollars with Cyrus. For an instant, he almost believed that the other was going to allude for the first time to that incident.

"Well, I've never forgotten that green persimmon tree by the roadside," pursued the great man, "and the way you stopped under it and said, 'O Lord, wilt Thou not work a miracle and make persimmons ripen in the spring?'"

"No, I'd forgotten it," rejoined Gabriel coolly, for he was hurt by the piece of flippancy and was thinking the worst of Cyrus again.

"You'd forgotten it? Well, I've a long memory, and I never forget. That's one thing you may count on me for," he added, "a good memory. As for John Henry – I'll see James about it. I'll see what James has to say."

When Gabriel had gone, accompanied as far as the outer door by the secretary, Cyrus turned back to the window, and stood gazing over a steep street or two, and past the gabled roof of an old stone house, to where in the distance the walls of the new building of the Treadwell Tobacco Company were rising. Around the skeleton structure he could see the workmen moving like ants, while in a widening circle of air the smoke of other factories floated slowly upward under a brazen sky. "There are too many of them," he thought bitterly. "It's competition that kills. There are too many of them."

So rapt was his look while he stood there that there came into his face an expression of yearning sentiment that made it almost human. Then his gaze wandered to the gleaming tracks of the two great railroads which ran out of Dinwiddie toward the north, uncoiling their length like serpents between the broad fields sprinkled with the tender green of young crops. Beside them trailed the ashen country roads over which farmers were crawling with their covered wagons; but, while Cyrus watched from his height, there was as little thought in his mind for the men who drove those wagons through the parching dust as for the beasts that drew them. It is possible even that he did not see them, for just as Mrs. Pendleton's vision eliminated the sight of suffering because her heart was too tender to bear it, so he overlooked all facts except those which were a part of the dominant motive of his life. Nearer still, within the narrow board fences which surrounded the backyards of negro hovels, under the moving shadows of broad-leaved mulberry or sycamore trees, he gazed down on the swarms of mulatto children; though to his mind that problem, like the problem of labour, loomed vague, detached, and unreal – a thing that existed merely in the air, not in the concrete images that he could understand.

"Well, it's a pity Gabriel never made more of himself," he thought kindly. "Yes, it's a pity. I'll see what I can do for him."

At six o'clock that evening, when the end of his business day had come, he joined James at the door for his walk back to Bolingbroke Street.

"Have you done anything about Jones's place in the bank?" was the first question he asked after his abrupt nod of greeting.

"No, sir. I thought you were waiting to find out about Oliver."

"Then you thought wrong. The fellow's a fool. Look up that nephew of Gabriel Pendleton, and see if he is fit for the job. I am sorry Jones is dead," he added with a touch of feeling. "I remember I got him that place the year after the war, and I never knew him to be ten minutes late during all the time that I worked with him."

"But what are we to do with Oliver?" inquired James after a pause. "Of course he wouldn't be much good in the bank, but – "

And without finishing his sentence, he glanced up in a tentative, non-committal manner into Cyrus's face. He was a smaller and somewhat imperfect copy of his father, naturally timid, and possessed of a superstitious feeling that he should die in an accident. His thin anæmic features lacked the strength of the Treadwells, though in his cautious and taciturn way he was very far indeed from being the fool people generally thought him. Since he had never loved anything with passion except money, he was regarded by his neighbours as a man of unimpeachable morality.

At the end of the block, while the long pointed shadows of their feet kept even pace on the stone crossing, Cyrus answered abruptly: "Put him anywhere out of my sight. I can't bear the look of him."

"How would you like to give him something to do on the road? Put him under Borrows, for instance, and let him learn a bit about freight?"

"Well, I don't care. Only don't let me see him – he turns my stomach."

"Then as long as we've got to support him, I'll tell him he may try his hand at the job of assistant freight agent, if he wants to earn his keep."

"He'll never do that – just as well put him down under 'waste,' and have done with him," replied Cyrus, chuckling.

A little girl, rolling a hoop, tripped and fell at his feet, and he nodded at her kindly, for he had a strong physical liking for children, though he had never stopped to think about them in a human or personal way. He had, indeed, never stopped to think about anything except the absorbing problem of how to make something out of nothing. Everything else, even his marriage, had made merely a superficial impression upon him. What people called his "luck" was only the relentless pursuit of an idea; and in this pursuit all other sides of his nature had been sapped of energy. From the days when he had humbly accepted small commissions from the firm of Machlin & Company, to the last few years, when he had come to be regarded almost superstitiously as the saviour of sinking properties, he had moved quietly, cautiously, and unswervingly in one direction. The blighting panic of ten years before had hardly touched him, so softly had he ventured, and so easy was it for him to return to his little deals and his diet of crumbs. They were bad times, those years, alike for rich and poor, for Northerner and Southerner; but in the midst of crashing firms and noiseless factories, he had cut down his household expenses to a pittance and had gone on as secretively as ever – waiting, watching, hoping, until the worst was over and Machlin & Company had found their man. Then, a little later, with the invasion of the cigarette, there went up the new Treadwell factory which the subtle minded still attributed to the genius of Cyrus. Even before George and Henry had sailed for Australia, the success of the house in Dinwiddie was assured. There was hardly a drug store in America in those days that did not offer as its favourite James's crowning triumph, the Magnolia cigarette. A few years later, competition came like a whirlwind, but in the beginning the Treadwell brand held the market alone, and in those few years Cyrus's fortune was made.

"Heard from George lately?" he inquired, when they had traversed, accompanied by their long and narrow shadows, another couple of blocks. The tobacco trade had always been for him merely a single pawn in the splendid game he was playing, but he had suspected recently that James felt something approaching a sentiment for the Magnolia cigarette, and true to the Treadwell scorn of romance, he was forever trying to trick him into an admission of guilt.

"Not since that letter I showed you a month ago," answered James. "Too much competition, that's the story everywhere. They are flooding the market with cigarettes, and if it wasn't for the way the Magnolia holds on, we'd be swamped in little or no time."

"Well, I reckon the Claypole would pull us through," commented Cyrus. The Claypole was an old brand of plug tobacco with which the first Treadwell factory had started. "But you're right about competition. It's got to stop or we'll be driven clean out of the business."

He drew out his latchkey as he spoke, for they had reached the corner of Bolingbroke Street, and the small dingy house in which they lived was only a few doors away. As they passed between the two blossoming oleanders in green tubs on the sidewalk, James glanced up at the flat square roof, and observed doubtfully, "You'll be getting out of this old place before long now, I reckon."

"Oh, someday, someday," answered Cyrus. "There'll be time enough when the market settles and we can see where the money is coming from."

Once every year, in the spring, James asked his father this question, and once every year he received exactly the same answer. In his mind, Cyrus was always putting off the day when he should move into a larger house, for though he got richer every week, he never seemed to get quite rich enough to commit himself to any definite change in his circumstances. Of course, in the nature of things, he knew that he ought to have left Bolingbroke Street long ago; there was hardly a family still

living there with whom his daughter associated, and she complained daily of having to pass saloons and barber shops whenever she went out of doors. But the truth was that in spite of his answer to James's annual question, neither of them wanted to move away from the old home, and each hoped in his heart that he should never be forced into doing so. Cyrus had become wedded to the house as a man becomes wedded to a habit, and since the clinging to a habit was the only form of sentiment of which he was capable, he shrank more and more from what he felt to be the almost unbearable wrench of moving. A certain fidelity of purpose, the quality which had lifted him above the petty provincialism that crippled James, made the display of wealth as obnoxious to him as the possession of it was agreeable. As long as he was conscious that he controlled the industrial future of Dinwiddie, it was a matter of indifference to him whether people supposed him to be a millionaire or a pauper. In time he would probably have to change his way of living and put an end to his life-long practice of saving; but, meanwhile, he was quite content to go on year after year mending the roof and the chimneys of the old house into which he had moved the week after his marriage.

Entering the hall, he hung his hat on the walnut hat-rack in the dark corner behind the door, and followed the worn strip of blue and red oilcloth which ran up the narrow staircase to the floor above. Where the staircase bent sharply in the middle, the old-fashioned mahogany balustrade shone richly in the light of a gas-jet which jutted out on a brass stem from the wall. Although a window on the upper floor was opened wide to the sunset, the interior of the house had a close musty smell, as if it had been shut up, uninhabited, for months. Cyrus had never noticed the smell, for his senses, which were never acute, had been rendered even duller than usual by custom.

At the top of the stairs, a coloured washerwoman, accompanied by a bright mulatto boy, who carried an empty clothes basket on his head, waited humbly in the shadow for the two men to pass. She was a dark glistening creature, with ox-like eyes, and the remains of a handsome figure, now running to fat.

"Howdy, Marster," she murmured under her breath as Cyrus reached her, to which he responded brusquely, "Howdy, Mandy," while he glanced with unseeing eyes at the mulatto boy at her side. Then, as he walked rapidly down the hall, with James at his heels, the woman turned back for a minute and gazed after him with an expression of animal submission and acquiescence. So little personal to Cyrus and so free from individual consciousness was this look, that it seemed less the casual glance from a servant to a master than the intimate aspect of a primitive racial attitude toward life.

At the end of the hall, beyond the open door of the bedroom (which he still occupied with his wife from an ineradicable conviction that all respectable married persons slept together no matter how uncomfortable they might be), Cyrus discerned the untidy figure of Mrs. Treadwell reflected in a mirror before which she stood brushing her back hair straight up from her neck to a small round knot on the top of her head. She was a slender, flat-chested woman, whose clothes, following some natural bent of mind, appeared never to be put on quite straight or properly hooked and buttoned. It was as if she perpetually dressed in a panic, forgetting to fasten her placket, to put on her collar or to mend the frayed edges of her skirt. When she went out, she still made some spasmodic attempts at neatness; but Susan's untiring efforts and remonstrances had never convinced her that it mattered how one looked in the house – except indeed when a formal caller arrived, for whom she hastily tied a scarf at the neck of her dirty basque and flung a purple wool shawl over her shoulders. Her spirit had been too long broken for her to rebel consciously against her daughter's authority; but her mind was so constituted that the sense of order was missing, and the pretty coquetry of youth, which had masqueraded once as the more enduring quality of self-respect, was extinguished in the five and thirty penitential years of her marriage. She had a small vacant face, where the pink and white had run into muddiness, a mouth that sagged at the corners like the mouth of a frightened child, and eyes of a sickly purple, which had been compared by Cyrus to "sweet violets," in the only compliment he ever paid her. Thirty-five years ago, in one of those attacks of indiscretion which overtake the most careful man in the spring, Cyrus

had proposed to her; and when she declined him, he had immediately repeated his offer, animated less by any active desire to possess her, than by the dogged male determination to over-ride all obstacles, whether feminine or financial. And pretty Belinda Bolingbroke, being alone and unsupported by other suitors at the instant, had entwined herself instinctively around the nearest male prop that offered. It had been one of those marriages of opposites which people (ignoring the salient fact that love has about as much part in it as it has in the pursuit of a spring chicken by a hawk) speak of with sentiment as "a triumph of love over differences." Even in the first days of their engagement, there could be found no better reason for their marriage than the meeting of Cyrus's stubborn propensity to have his way with the terror of imaginary spinsterhood which had seized Belinda in a temporary lapse of suitors. Having married, they immediately proceeded, as if by mutual consent, to make the worst of it. She, poor fluttering dove-like creature, had lost hope at the first rebuff, and had let go all the harmless little sentiments that had sweetened her life; while he, having married a dove by choice and because of her doveliness, had never forgiven her that she did not develop into a brisk, cackling hen of the barnyard. As usually happens in the cases where "love triumphs over differences," he had come at last to hate her for the very qualities which had first caught his fancy. His ideal woman (though he was perfectly unconscious that she existed) was a managing thrifty soul, in a starched calico dress, with a natural capacity for driving a bargain; and Life, with grim humour, had rewarded this respectable preference by bestowing upon him feeble and insipid Belinda, who spent sleepless nights trying to add three and five together, but who could never, to save her soul, remember to put down the household expenses in the petty cash book. It was a case, he sometimes told himself, of a man, who had resisted temptation all his life, being punished for one instant's folly more harshly than if he were a practised libertine. No libertine, indeed, could have got himself into such a scrape, for none would have surrendered so completely to a single manifestation of the primal force. To play the fool once, he reflected bitterly, when his brief intoxication was over, is after all more costly than to play it habitually. Had he pursued a different pair of violet eyes every evening, he would never have ended by embracing the phantom that was Belinda.

But it was more than thirty years since Cyrus had taken the trouble to turn his unhappiness into philosophy – for, aided by time, he had become reconciled to his wife as a man becomes reconciled to a physical infirmity. Except for that one eventful hour in April, women had stood for so little in his existence, that he had never stopped to wonder if his domestic relations might have been pleasanter had he gone about the business of selection as carefully as he picked and chose the tobacco for his factory. Even the streak of sensuality in his nature did not run warm as in the body of an ordinary mortal, and his vices, like his virtues, had become so rarefied in the frozen air of his intelligence that they were no longer recognizable as belonging to the common frailties of men.

"Ain't you dressed yet?" he inquired without looking at his wife as he entered – for having long ago lost his pride of possession in her, he had ceased to regard her as of sufficient importance to merit the ordinary civilities.

"I was helping Miss Willy whip one of Susan's flounces," she answered, turning from the mirror, with the hairbrush held out like a peace offering before her. "We wanted to get through to-day," she added nervously, "so Miss Willy can start on Jinny Pendleton's dress the first thing in the morning."

If Cyrus had ever permitted himself the consolation of doubtful language, he would probably have exclaimed with earnestness, "Confound Miss Willy!" but he came of a stock which condemned an oath, or even an expletive, on its face value, so this natural outlet for his irritation was denied him. Instead, therefore, of replying in words, he merely glanced sourly at the half-open door, through which issued the whirring noise of the little dressmaker at her sewing. Now and then, in the intervals when her feet left the pedal, she could be heard humming softly to herself with her mouth full of pins.

"Isn't she going?" asked Cyrus presently, while he washed his hands at the washstand in one corner and dried them on a towel which Belinda had elaborately embroidered in red. Peering through the crack of the door as he put the question, he saw Miss Willy hurriedly pulling basting threads

out of a muslin skirt, and the fluttering bird-like motions of her hands increased the singular feeling of repulsion with which she inspired him. Though he was aware that she was an entirely harmless person, and, more-over, that her "days" supplied the only companionship his wife really enjoyed, he resented angrily the weeks of work and gossip which the little seamstress spent under his roof. Put two gabbling women like that together and you could never tell what stories would be set going about you before evening! A suspicion, unfortunately too well founded, that his wife had whimpered out her heart to the whirring accompaniment of Miss Willy's machine, had caused him once or twice to rise in his authority and forbid the dressmaker the house; but, in doing so, he had reckoned without the strength which may lie in an unscrupulous weakness. Belinda, who had never fought for anything else in her life, refused absolutely to give up her dressmaker. "If I can't see her here, I'll go to her house," she had said, and Cyrus had yielded at last as the bully always yields before the frenzied violence of his victim.

After a hasty touch to the four round flat curls on her forehead, Mrs. Treadwell turned from the bureau with her habitually hopeless air, and slipped her thin arms into the tight sleeves of a black silk basque which she took up from the bed.

"Did you see Oliver when you came in?" she asked. "He was in here looking for you a few minutes ago."

"No, I didn't see him, but I'm going to. He's got to give up this highfaluting nonsense of his if he expects me to support him. There's one thing the fellow's got to understand, and that is that he can choose between his precious stuff and his bread and meat. Before I give him a job, he'll have to let me see that he is done with all this business of play-writing."

A frightened look came into his wife's face, and indifferently glancing at her as he finished, he was arrested by something enigmatical and yet familiar in her features. A dim vision of the way she had looked at him in the early days of their marriage floated an instant before him.

"Do you think he wants to do that?" she asked, with a little sound as if she had drawn her breath so sharply that it whistled. What in thunder was the matter with the woman? he wondered irritably. Of course she was a fool about the scamp – all the women, even Susan, lost their heads over him – but, after all, why should it make any difference to her whether he wrote plays or took freight orders, as long as he managed to feed himself?

"Well, I don't reckon it has come to a question of what he wants," he rejoined shortly.

"But the boy's heart is bound up in his ambition," urged Belinda, with an energy he had witnessed in her only once before in her life, and that was on the occasion of her historic defence of the seamstress.

For a moment Cyrus stared at her with attention, almost with curiosity. Then he opened his lips for a crushing rejoinder, but thinking better of his impulse, merely repeated dryly, "His heart?" before he turned toward the door. On the threshold he looked back and added, "The next time you see him, tell him I'd like a word with him."

Left alone in her room, Mrs. Treadwell sat down in a rocking-chair by the window, and clasped her hands tightly in her lap with a nervous gesture which she had acquired in long periods of silent waiting on destiny. Her mental attitude, which was one of secret, and usually passive, antagonism to her husband, had stamped its likeness so indelibly upon her features, that, sitting there in the wan light, she resembled a woman who suffers from the effects of some slow yet deadly sickness. Lacking the courage to put her revolt into words, she had allowed it to turn inward and embitter the hidden sources of her being. In the beginning she had asked so little of life that the denial of that little by Fate had appeared niggardly rather than tragic. A man – any man who would have lent himself gracefully as an object of worship – would have been sufficient material for the building of her happiness. Marriage, indeed, had always appeared to her so desirable as an end in itself, entirely apart from the personal peculiarities or possibilities of a husband, that she had awakened almost with surprise one morning to the knowledge that she was miserable. It was not so much that her romance had met with

open disaster as that it had simply faded away. This gradual fading away of sentiment, which she had accepted at the time as only one of the inevitable stages in the slow process of emotional adjustment, would perhaps have made but a passing impression on a soul to whom every other outlet into the world had not been closed by either temperament or tradition. But love had been the one window through which light could enter her house of Life; and when this darkened, her whole nature had sickened and grown morbid. Then at last all the corroding bitterness in her heart had gathered to a canker which ached ceaselessly, like a physical sore, in her breast.

"He saw I'd taken to Oliver – that's why he's anxious to spite him," she thought resentfully as she stared with unseeing eyes out into the gray twilight. "It's all just to worry me, that's why he is doing it. He knows I couldn't be any fonder of the boy if he had come of my own blood." And she who had been a Bolingbroke set her thin lips together with the only consciousness of superiority to her husband that she had ever known – the secret consciousness that she was better born. Out of the wreck of her entire life, this was the floating spar to which she still clung with a sense of security, and her imagination, by long concentration upon the support that it offered, had exaggerated its importance out of all proportion to the other props among which it had its place. Like its imposing symbol, the Saint Memin portrait of the great Archibald Bolingbroke, which lent distinction, by its very inappropriateness, to the wall on which it hung, this hidden triumph imparted a certain pathetic dignity to her manner.

"That's all on earth it is," she repeated with a kind of smothered fierceness. But, even while the words were on her lips, her face changed and softened, for in the adjoining room a voice, full of charm, could be heard saying: "Sewing still, Miss Willy? Don't you know that you are guilty of an immoral act when you work overtime?"

"I'm just this minute through, Mr. Oliver," answered the seamstress in fluttering tones. "As soon as I fold this skirt, I'm going to quit and put on my bonnet."

A few more words followed, and then the door opened wider and Oliver entered – with his ardent eyes, his irresolute mouth, and his physical charm which brought an air of vital well-being into the depressing sultriness of the room.

"I missed you downstairs, Aunt Belinda. You haven't a headache, I hope," he said, and there was the same caressing kindness in his tone which he had used to the dressmaker. It was as if his sympathy, like his charm, which cost him so little because it was the gift of Nature, overflowed in every casual expression of his temperament.

"No, I haven't a headache, dear," replied Mrs. Treadwell, putting up her hand to his cheek as he leaned over her. "Your uncle is waiting for you in the library, so you'd better go down at once," she added, catching her breath as she had done when Cyrus first spoke to her about Oliver.

"Have you any idea what it means? Did he tell you?"

"Yes, he wants to talk to you about business."

"The deuce he does! Well, if that's it, I'd be precious glad to get out of it. You don't suppose I could cut it, do you? Susan is going to take me to the Pendletons' after supper, and I'd like to run upstairs now and make a change."

"No, you'd better go down to him. He doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"All right, then – since you say so."

Meeting the dressmaker on the threshold, he forgot to answer her deprecating bow in his eagerness to have the conversation with Cyrus over and done with.

"I declare, he does startle a body when you ain't used to him," observed Miss Willy, with a bashful giggle. She was a diminutive, sparrow-like creature, with a natural taste for sick-rooms and death-beds, and an inexhaustible fund of gossip. As Mrs. Treadwell, for once, did not respond to her unspoken invitation to chat, she tied her bonnet strings under her sharp little chin, and taking up her satchel went out again, after repeating several times that she would be "back the very minute Mrs. Pendleton was through with her." A few minutes later, Belinda, still seated by the window, saw

the shrunken figure ascend the area steps and cross the dusty street with a rapid and buoyant step, as though she, also, plain, overworked and penniless, was feeling the delicious restlessness of the spring in her blood. "I wonder what on earth she's got to make her skip like that," thought Belinda not without bitterness. "I reckon she thinks she's just as important as anybody," she added after an instant, touching, though she was unaware of it, the profoundest truth of philosophy. "She's got nothing in the world but herself, yet I reckon to her that is everything, even if it doesn't make a particle of difference to anybody else whether she is living or dead."

Her eyes were still on Miss Willy, who stepped on briskly, swinging her bag joyously before her, when the sound of Cyrus's voice, raised high in anger, came up to her from the library. A short silence followed; then a door opened and shut quickly, and rapid footsteps passed up the staircase and along the hall outside of her room. While she waited, overcome by the nervous indecision which attacked her like palsy whenever she was forced to take a definite action, Susan ran up the stairs and called her name in a startled and shaking voice.

"Oh, mother, father has quarrelled dreadfully with Oliver and ordered him out of the house!"

CHAPTER V
OLIVER, THE ROMANTIC

An hour later Oliver stood before the book-shelves in his room, wrapping each separate volume in newspapers. Downstairs in the basement, he knew, the family were at supper, but he had vowed, in his splendid scorn of material things, that he would never eat another morsel under Cyrus's roof. Even when his aunt, trembling in every limb, had brought him secretly from the kitchen a cup of coffee and a plate of waffles, he had refused to unlock his door and permit her to enter. "I'll come out when I am ready to leave," he had replied to her whispered entreaties.

It was a small room, furnished chiefly by book-shelves, which were still unfinished, and with a depressing view from a single window of red tin roofs and blackened chimneys. Above the chimneys a narrow band of sky, spangled with a few stars, was visible from where Oliver stood, and now and then he stopped in his work and gazed up at it with an exalted and resolute look. Sometimes a thin shred of smoke floated in from the kitchen chimney, and hung, as if drawn and held there by some magnetic attraction, around the kerosene lamp on a corner of the washstand. The sultriness of the night, which was oppressive even in the street, was almost stifling in the little room with its scant western exposure.

But the flame burning in Oliver's breast had purged away such petty considerations as those for material comforts. He had risen above the heat, above the emptiness of his pockets, above the demands of his stomach. It was a matter of complete indifference to him whether he slept in a house or out of doors, whether he ate or went hungry. His exaltation was so magnificent that while it lasted he felt that he had conquered the physical universe. He was strong! He was free! And it was characteristic of his sanguine intellect that the future should appear to him at the instant as something which existed not beyond him, but actually within his grasp. Anger had liberated his spirit as even art had not done; and he felt that all the blood in his body had rushed to his brain and given him the mastery over circumstances. He forgot yesterday as easily as he evaded to-day and subjugated to-morrow. The past, with its starved ambitions, its tragic failures, its blighting despondencies, melted away from him into obscurity; and he remembered only the brief alternating hours of ecstasy and of accomplishment. With his wind-blown, flame-like temperament, oscillating in the heat of youth between the inclinations he miscalled convictions, he was still, though Cyrus had disowned him, only a romantic variation from the Treadwell stock. Somewhere, in the depths of his being, the essential Treadwell persisted. He hated Cyrus as a man hates his own weakness; he revolted from materialism as only a materialist in youth revolts.

A knock came at his door, and pausing, with a volume of Heine still unwrapped in his hand, he waited in silence until his visitor should retire down the stairs. But instead of Mrs. Treadwell's trembling tones, he heard, after a moment, the firm and energetic voice of Susan.

"Oliver, I must speak to you. If you won't unlock your door, I'll sit down on the steps and wait until you come out."

"I'm packing my books. I wish you'd go away, Susan."

"I haven't the slightest intention of going away until I've talked with you – " and, then, being one of those persons who are born with the natural gift of their own way, she laid her hand on the door-knob while Oliver impatiently turned the key in the lock.

"Since you are here, you might as well come in and help," he remarked none too graciously, as he made way for her to enter.

"Of course I'll help you – but, oh, Oliver, what in the world are you going to do?"

"I haven't thought. I'm too busy, but I'll manage somehow."

"Father was terrible. I heard him all the way upstairs in my room. But," she looked at him a little doubtfully, "don't you think he will get over it?"

"He may, but I shan't. I'd rather starve than live under a petty tyranny like that?"

"I know," she nodded, and he saw that she understood him. It was wonderful how perfectly, from the very first instant, she had understood him. She grasped things, too, by intelligence, not by intuition, and he found this refreshing in an age when the purely feminine was in fashion. Never had he seen a finer example of young, buoyant, conquering womanhood – of womanhood freed from the consciousness and the disabilities of sex. "She's not the sort of girl a man would lose his head over," he reflected; "there's too little of the female about her – she's as free from coquetry as she is from the folderol of sentimentality. She's a free spirit, and God knows how she ever came out of the Treadwells." Her beauty even wasn't of the kind that usually goes by the name. He didn't suppose there were ten men in Dinwiddie who would turn to look back at her – but, by Jove, if she hadn't beauty, she had the character that lends an even greater distinction. She looked as if she could ride Life like a horse – could master it and tame it and break it to the bridle.

"It's amazing how you know things, Susan," he said, "and you've never been outside of Dinwiddie."

"But I've wanted to, and I sometimes think the wanting teaches one more than the going."

He thought over this for an instant, and then, as if the inner flame which consumed him had leaped suddenly to the surface, he burst out joyously: "I've come to the greatest decision of my life in this last hour, Susan."

Her eyes shone. "You mean you've decided not to do what father asks no matter what happens?"

"I've decided not to accept his conditions – no matter what happens," he answered.

"He was in earnest, then, about wanting you to give up writing?"

"So much in earnest that he would give me a job only on those terms."

"And you declined absolutely?"

"Of course I declined absolutely."

"But how will you live, Oliver?"

"Oh, I can easily make thirty dollars a month by reviewing German books for New York papers, and I dare say I can manage to pull through on that. I'll have to stay in Dinwiddie, of course, because I couldn't live anywhere else on nearly so little, and, besides, I shouldn't be able to buy a ticket away."

"That will be twenty dollars for your board," said the practical Susan, "and you will have to make ten dollars a month cover all your other expenses. Do you think you can do it?"

"I've got to. Better men have done worse things, haven't they? Better men have done worse things and written great plays while they were about them."

"I believe Mrs. Peachey would let you have a back room and board for that," pursued Susan. "But it will cost you something to get your books moved and the shelves put up there."

"As soon as I get through this I'll go over and see her. Oh, I'm free, Susan, I'm happy! Did you ever see an absolutely happy man before? I feel as if a weight had rolled off my shoulders. I'm tired – dog-tired of compromise and commercialism and all the rest of it. I've got something to say to the world, and I'll go out and make my bed in the gutter before I'll forfeit the opportunity of saying it. Do you know what that means, Susan? Do you know what it is to be willing to give your life if only you can speak out the thing that is inside of you?" The colour in his face mounted to his forehead, while his eyes grew black with emotion. In the smoky little room, Youth, with its fierce revolts, its impassioned egoism, its inextinguishable faith in itself, delivered its ultimatum to Life. "I've got to be true to myself, Susan! A man who won't starve for his ambition isn't worth his salt, is he? And, besides, the best work is all done not in plenty, but in poverty – the most perfect art has grown from the poorest soil. If I were to accept Uncle Cyrus's offer, I'd grow soft to the core in a month and be of no more use than a rotten apple."

His conviction lent a golden ring to his voice, and so winning to Susan was the impetuous flow of his words, that she felt herself swept away from all the basic common sense of her character. She

saw his ambition as clearly as he saw it; she weighed his purpose, as he weighed it, in the imaginary scales of his judgment; she accepted his estimate of his powers as passionately as he accepted it.

"Of course you mustn't give up, Oliver; you couldn't," she said.

"You're right, I couldn't."

"If you can get steady reviewing, I believe you can manage," she resumed. "Living in Dinwiddie costs really so very little." Her voice thrilled suddenly. "It must be beautiful to have something that you feel about like this. Oh, I wish I were you, Oliver! I wish a thousand times I were you!"

Withdrawing his eyes from the sky at which he had been gazing, he turned to look at her as if her words had arrested him. "You're a dear girl," he answered kindly, "and I think all the world of you." As he spoke he thought again what a fine thing it would be for the man who could fall in love with her. "It would be the best thing that could happen to any man to marry a woman like that," he reflected; "she'd keep him up to the mark and never let him grow soft. Yes, it would be all right if only one could manage to fall in love with her – but I couldn't. She might as well be a rose-bush for all the passion she'd ever arouse in me." Then his charming egoism asserted itself, and he said caressingly: "I don't believe I could stand Dinwiddie but for you, Susan."

She smiled back at him, but there was a limpid clearness in her look which made him feel that she had seen through him while he was thinking. This clearness, with its utter freedom from affectation or sentimentality, embarrassed him by its unlikeness to all the attributes he mentally classified as feminine. To look straight seemed to him almost as unwomanly as to throw straight, and Susan would, doubtless, be quite capable of performing either of these difficult feats. He liked her fine brow under the short fringe, which he hated, and he liked the arched bridge of her nose and the generous curve of her mouth. Yet had he stopped to analyze her, he would probably have said that the woman spirit in her was expressed through character rather than through emotion – a manifestation disconcerting to one whose vision of her sex was chiefly as the irresponsible creature of drama. The old shackles – even the shackles of that drama whose mistress and slave woman had been – were out of place on the spirit which was incarnated in Susan. Amid the cramping customs of the period, she moved large, free, and simple, as though she walked already in the purer and more bracing air of the future.

"I wish I could help you," she said, stooping to pick up a newspaper from a pile on the floor. "Here, let me wrap that Spinoza. I'm afraid the back will come off if you aren't careful."

"Of course a man has to work out his own career," he replied, as he handed over the volume. "I doubt, when it comes to that, if anybody can be of much help to another where his life's work is concerned. The main thing, after all, is not to get in one's way, not to cripple one's energy. I've got to be free – that's all there is about it. I've got to belong to myself every instant."

"And you know already just what you are going to do? About your writing, I mean."

"Absolutely. I've ideas enough to fill fifty ordinary lifetimes. I'm simply seething with them. Why, that box over there in the corner is full of plays that would start a national drama if the fool public had sense enough to see what they are about. The trouble is that they don't want life on the stage; they want a kind of theatrical wedding-cake. And, by Jove, they get it! Any dramatist who tries to force people to eat bread and meat when they are crying for sugar plums may as well prepare to starve until the public begins to suffer from acute indigestion. Then, if he isn't dead – or, perhaps, if he is – his hour will come, and he will get his reward either here or in heaven."

"So you'll go on just the same and wait until they're ready for you?" asked Susan, laughing from sheer pride in him. "You'll never, never cheapen yourself, Oliver?" For the first time in her life she was face to face with an intellectual passion, and she felt almost as if she herself were inspired.

"Never. I've made my choice. I'll wait half a century if need be, but I'll wait. I know, too, what I am talking about, for I could do the other thing as easily as I could eat my dinner. I've got the trick of it. I could make a fortune to-morrow if I were to lose my intellectual honesty and go in simply for the making of money. Why, I am a Treadwell, after all, just as you are, my dear cousin, and I

could commercialize the stage, I haven't a doubt, as successfully as your father has commercialized the railroad. It's in the blood – the instinct, you know – and the only thing that has kept it down in me is that I sincerely – yes, I sincerely and enthusiastically believe that I am a genius. If I didn't, do you think I'd stick at this starvation business another fortnight? That's the whole story, every blessed word of it, and I'm telling you because I feel expansive to-night – I'm such a tremendous egoist, you know, and because – well, because you are Susan."

"I think I understand a little bit how you feel," replied Susan. "Of course, I'm not a genius, but I've thought sometimes that I should almost be willing to starve if only I might go to college."

Checking the words on his lips, he looked at her with sympathy. "It's a shame you can't, but I suppose Uncle Cyrus won't hear of it."

"I haven't asked him, but I am going to do it. I am so afraid of a refusal – and, of course, he'll refuse – that I've lacked the courage to speak of it."

"Good God! Why is one generation left so absolutely at the mercy of the other?" he demanded, turning back to the strip of sky over the roof. "It makes a man rage to think of the lives that are spoiled for a whim. Money, money – curse it! – it all comes to that in the end. Money makes us and destroys us."

"Do you remember what father said to you the other night – that you would come at last to what you called the property idea and be exactly like James and himself?"

"If I thought that, I'd go out and hang myself. I can understand a man selling his soul for drink, though I rarely touch a drop, or for women, though I've never bothered about them, but never, not even in the last extremity, for money."

A door creaked somewhere on the second floor and a minute afterwards the slow and hesitating feet of Mrs. Treadwell were heard ascending the stairs.

"Let her come in just a moment, Oliver," begged Susan, and her tone was full of the impatient, slightly arrogant affection with which she regarded her mother. There was little sympathy and less understanding between them, but on Susan's side there was a feeling of protective tenderness which was almost maternal. This tenderness was all her own, while the touch of arrogance in her manner belonged to the universal inability of youth to make allowances for age.

"Oh, well," said Oliver indifferently; and going to the door, he opened it and stood waiting for Mrs. Treadwell to enter.

"I came up to ask if you wouldn't eat something, dear?" she asked. "But I suppose Susan has brought you your supper?"

"He won't touch a morsel, mother; it is useless to ask him. He is going away just as soon as we have finished packing."

"But where is he going? I didn't know that he had any place to go to."

"Oh, a man can always find a place somewhere."

"How can you take it so lightly, Susan," protested Mrs. Treadwell, beginning to cry.

"That's the only sensible way to take it, isn't it, Oliver?" asked Susan, gaily.

"Don't get into a fidget about me, Aunt Belinda," said Oliver, pushing the pile of newspapers out of her way, while she sat down nervously on the end of a packing-case and wiped her eyes on the fringe of her purple shawl. The impulsive kindness with which he had spoken to her a few hours before had vanished from his tone, and left in its place an accent of irritation. His sympathy, which was never assumed, resulted so entirely from his mood that it was practically independent of the person or situation which appeared to inspire it. There were moments when, because of a sensation of mental or physical well-being, he overflowed with a feeling of tenderness for the beggar at the crossing; and there were longer periods, following a sudden despondency, when the suffering of his closest friend aroused in him merely a sense of personal outrage. So complete, indeed, was his absorption in himself, that even his philosophy was founded less upon an intellectual conception of the universe than it was upon an intense preoccupation with his own personality.

"But you don't mean that you are going for good? – that you'll never come back to see Susan and me again?" whimpered his aunt, while her sagging mouth trembled.

"You can't expect me to come back after the things Uncle Cyrus has said to me."

A look so bitter that it was almost venomous crept into Mrs. Treadwell's face. "He just did it to worry me, Oliver. He has done everything he could think of to worry me ever since he persuaded me to marry him. I sometimes believe," she added, gloating over the idea like a decayed remnant of the aristocratic spirit, "that he has always been jealous of me because I was born a Bolingbroke."

To Oliver, who had not like Susan grown accustomed through constant repetition to Mrs. Treadwell's delusion, this appeared so fresh a view of Cyrus's character, that it caught his interest even in the midst of his own absorbing perplexities. Until he saw Susan's head shake ominously over her mother's shoulder, it did not occur to him that his aunt, whom he supposed to be without imagination, had created this consoling belief out of her own mental vacancy.

"Oh, he wanted to worry me all right, there's no doubt about that," he replied.

"He hasn't spoken to me when he could help it for twenty years," pursued his aunt, who was so possessed by the idea of her own relation to her husband that she was incapable of dwelling upon any other.

"I wouldn't talk about it, mother, if I were you," said Susan with resolute cheerfulness.

"I don't know why I shouldn't talk about it. It's all I've got to talk about," returned Mrs. Treadwell peevishly; and she added with smothered resentment, "Even my children haven't been any comfort to me since they were little. They've both turned against me because of the way their father treats me. James hardly ever has so much as a word to say to me."

"But I do, mother. How can you say such an unkind thing to me?"

"You never do the things that I want you to. You know I'd like you to go out and enjoy yourself and have attention as other girls do."

"You are disappointed because I'm not a belle like Abby Goode or Jinny Pendleton," said Susan with the patience that is born of a basic sense of humour. "But I couldn't help that, could I?"

"Any girl in my day would have felt badly if she wasn't admired," pursued Mrs. Treadwell with the venom of the embittered weak, "but I don't believe you'd care a particle if a man never looked at you twice."

"If one never looked at me once, I don't see why you should want me to be miserable about it," was Susan's smiling rejoinder; "and if the girls in your day couldn't be happy without admiration, they must have been silly creatures. I've a life of my own to live, and I'm not going to let my happiness depend on how many times a man looks at me." In the clear light of her ridicule, the spectre of spinsterhood, which was still an object of dread in the Dinwiddie of the eighties, dissolved into a shadow.

"Well, we've about finished, I believe," remarked Oliver, closing the case over which he was stooping, and devoutly thanking whatever beneficent Powers had not created him a woman. "I'll send for these sometime to-morrow, Aunt Belinda."

"You'd just as well spend the night," urged Mrs. Treadwell stubbornly. "He need never know of it."

"But I'd know of it – that's the great thing – and I'd never forget it."

Rising unsteadily from the box, she stood with the ends of her purple shawl clutched tightly over her flat bosom. "Then you'll wait just a minute. I've got something downstairs I'd like to give you," she said.

"Why, of course, but won't you let me fetch it?"

"You'd never find it," she answered mysteriously, and hurried out while he held the door open to light her down the dark staircase.

When her tread was heard at last on the landing below, Susan glanced at the books that were still left on the shelves. "I'll pack the rest for you to-morrow, Oliver, and your clothes, too. Have you any money?"

"A little left from selling my watch in New York. My clothes don't amount to much. I've got them all in that bag, but I'll leave my books in your charge until I can find a place for them."

"I'll take good care of them. O Oliver!" her face grew disturbed. "I forgot all about my promise to Virginia that I'd bring you to see her to-night."

"Well, I've no time to meet girls now, of course, but that doesn't mean that I'm not awfully knocked up about it."

"I hate so to disappoint her."

"She won't think of it twice, the beauty!"

"But she will. I'm sure she will. Hush! Mother is coming."

As he turned to the door, it opened slowly to admit the figure of his aunt, who was panting heavily from her hurried ascent of the stairs. Her ill-humour toward Susan had entirely disappeared, for the only resentment she had ever harboured for more than a few minutes was the life-long one which she had borne her husband.

"It was not in the place where I had put it, so I thought one of the servants had taken it," she explained. "Mandy was alone in my room to-day while I was at dinner."

In her hand she held a small pasteboard box bearing a jeweller's imprint, and opening this, she took out a roll of money and counted out fifty dollars on the top of a packing-case. "I've saved this up for six months," she said. "It came from selling some silver forks that belonged to the Bolingbrokes, and I always felt easier to think that I had a little laid away that he had nothing to do with. From the very day that I married him, he was always close about money," she added.

The sordid tragedy – not of poverty, but of meanness – was in the gesture with which she gathered up the notes and pressed them into his shrinking hands. And yet Cyrus Treadwell was a rich man – the richest man living in Dinwiddie! Oliver understood now why she was crushed – why she had become the hopeless victim of the little troubles of life. "From the very day of our marriage, he was always close about money."

"I had three dozen forks and spoons in the beginning," she resumed as if there were no piercing significance in the fact she stated so simply, "but I've sold them all now, one or two at a time, when I needed a little money of my own. He has always paid the bills, but he never gave me a cent in my life to do as I pleased with."

"I can't take it from you, Aunt Belinda. It would burn my fingers."

"It's mine. I've got a right to do as I choose with it," she persisted almost passionately, "and I'd rather give it to you than buy anything in the world." Something in her face – the look of one who has risen to a generous impulse and finds happiness in the sacrifice – checked the hand with which he was thrusting the money away from him. He was deeply touched by her act; it was useless for him to pretend either to her or to himself that she had not touched him. The youth in him, unfettered, strong, triumphant, pitied her because she was no longer young; the artist in him pitied her because she was no longer beautiful. Without these two things, or at least one of these two, what was life worth to a woman?

"I'll take it on condition that you'll let me pay it back as soon as I get out of debt to Uncle Cyrus," he said in obedience to Susan's imploring nod.

To this she agreed after an ineffectual protest. "You needn't think about paying it back to me," she insisted; "I haven't anything to spend money on now, so it doesn't make much difference whether I have any or not. I can help you a little more after a while," she finished with enthusiasm. "I'm raising a few squabs out in the back yard, and Meadows is going to buy them as soon as they are big enough to eat."

An embarrassment out of all proportion to the act which produced it held him speechless while he gazed at her. He felt at first merely a sense of physical revolt from the brutality of her self-revelation – from the nakedness to which she had stripped the horror of her marriage under the eyes of her daughter. Nothing, not even the natural impulse to screen one's soul from the gaze of the people with whom one lived, had prevented the appalling indignity of this exposure. The delusion that it is possible for a woman by mere virtue of being a woman to suffer in sweetness and silence, evaporated as he looked at her. He had believed her to be a nonentity, and she was revealing an inner life as intense, as real, as acutely personal as his own. A few words of casual kindness and he had made a slave of her. He regretted it. He was embarrassed. He was sorry. He wished to heaven she hadn't brought him the money – and yet in spite of his regret and his embarrassment, he was profoundly moved. It occurred to him as he took it from her how easy it would have been for Cyrus to have subjugated and satisfied her in the beginning. All it needed was a little kindness, the cheapest virtue, and the tragedy of her ruined soul might have been averted. To make allowances! Ah, that was the philosophy of human relations in a word! If men and women would only stop judging each other and make allowances!

"Well, I shan't starve just yet, thanks to you, Aunt Belinda," he said cheerfully enough as he thrust the notes into his pocket. It was a small thing, after all, to make her happy by the sacrifice of his pride. Pride was not, he remembered, included among the Christian virtues, and, besides, as he told himself the next instant, trifling as the sum was, it would at least tide him over financially until he received the next payment for his reviewing. "I'd better go, it's getting late," he said with a return of his old gaiety, while he bent over to kiss her. He was half ashamed of the kiss – not because he was self-conscious about kissing, since he had long since lost that mark of provincialism – but because of the look of passionate gratitude which glowed in her face. Gratitude always made him uncomfortable. It was one of the things he was forever evading and yet forever receiving. He hated it, he had never in his life done anything to deserve it, but he could never escape it.

"Good-bye, Susan." His lips touched hers, and though he was moving only a few streets away, the caress contained all the solemnity of a last parting. Words wouldn't come when he searched for them, and the bracing sense of power he had felt half an hour ago was curiously mingled now with an enervating tenderness. He was still confident of himself, but he became suddenly conscious that these women were necessary to his happiness and his success, that his nature demanded the constant daily tonic of their love and service. He understood now the primal necessity of woman, not as an individual, but as an incentive and an appendage to the dominant personality of man.

"Send for me if you need me," said Susan, resting her loving eyes upon him; "and, Oliver, please promise me to be very careful about money."

"I'll be careful, never fear!" he replied with a laugh, as he took up his bag and opened the door. A few minutes later, when he was leaving the house, he reflected that the fifty dollars in his pocket would keep life in him for a considerable time in Dinwiddie.

CHAPTER VI
A TREADWELL IN REVOLT

York Street, in which Mrs. Peachey lived and supplied the necessaries of life to a dozen boarders, ran like a frayed seam of gentility between the prosperous and the impoverished quarters of Dinwiddie; and in order to reach it, Oliver was obliged to pass the rectory, where, though he did not see her, Virginia sat in stiffly starched muslin on the old horsehair sofa. The fragrance of honeysuckle floated to his nostrils from the dim garden, but so absorbed was he in the engrossing problems of the moment, that only after he had passed the tower of the church did he remember that the house behind him sheltered the girl who reminded him of one of the adorable young virgins of Perugino. For an instant he permitted himself to dwell longingly on the expression of gentle goodness that looked from her face; but this memory proved so disturbing, that he put it obdurately away from him while he returned to the prudent consideration of the fifty dollars in his pocket. The appeal of first love had been almost as urgent to him as to Virginia; but the emotion which had visited both alike had affected each differently, and this difference was due to the fundamental distinction between woman, for whom love is the supreme preoccupation of being, and man, to whom it is at best a partial manifestation of energy. To the woman nothing else really mattered; to the man at least a dozen other pursuits mattered very nearly as much.

The sultriness of the weather dampened his body, but not his spirits, and as he walked on, carrying his heavy bag, along York Street, his consciousness of the tremendous importance to the world of his decision exhilarated him like a tonic. He had freed himself from Cyrus and from commercialism at a single blow, and it had all been as easy as talking! The joke about starvation he had of course indulged in merely for the exquisite pleasure of arousing Susan. He wasn't going to starve; nobody was going to starve in Dinwiddie on thirty dollars a month, and there was no doubt in the world of his ability to make that much by his reviewing. It was all simple enough. What he intended to do was to write the national drama and to practise economy.

He had, indeed, provided for everything in his future, he was to discover a little later, except for the affable condescension of Mrs. Peachey toward the profession of letters. Cyrus's antagonism he had attributed to the crass stupidity of the commercial mind; but it was a blow to him to encounter the same misconception, more discreetly veiled, in a woman of the charm and the character of Mrs. Peachey. Bland, plump, and pretty, she received the modest avowal of his occupation with the smiling skepticism peculiar to a race whose genius has been chiefly military.

"I understand – it is very interesting," she observed sweetly. "But what do you do besides – what do you do, I mean, for a living?"

Here it was again, this fatuous intolerance! this incomprehensible provincialism! And the terrible part of it was that he had suddenly the sensation of being overwhelmed by the weight of it, of being smothered under a mountain of prejudice. The flame of his anger against Cyrus went out abruptly, leaving him cold. It was the world now against which he rebelled. He felt that the whole world was provincial.

"I shall write reviews for a New York paper," he answered, trying in vain to impress her by a touch of literary hauteur. At the moment it seemed to him that he could cheerfully bear anything if they would only at least pretend to take him seriously. What appalled him was not the opposition, but the utter absence of comprehension. And he could never hope to convince them! Even if he were to write great plays, they would still hold as obstinately by their assumption that the writing of plays did not matter – that what really mattered was to create and then to satisfy an inordinate appetite for tobacco. This was authentic success, and by no illegitimate triumph of genius could he persuade an industrial country that he was as great a man as his uncle. The smiling incredulity in Mrs. Peachey's face ceased to be individual and became a part of the American attitude toward the native-born artist.

This attitude, he admitted, was not confined to Dinwiddie, since it was national. He had encountered it in New York, but never had the destructive force of it impressed him as it did on the ripe and charming lips of the woman before him. In that illuminating instant he understood why the American consciousness in literature was still unawakened, why the creative artist turned manufacturer, why the original thinker bent his knee in the end to the tin gods of convention.

Her eyes – beautiful as the eyes of all happy women are beautiful – dwelt on him kindly while he struggled to explain his mission. All the dread of the unusual, all the inherited belief in the sanctity of fixed opinions, all the passionate distrust of ideas that have not stood the test of centuries – these things which make for the safety and the permanence of the racial life, were in the look of motherly indulgence with which she regarded him. She had just risen from a rocking-chair on the long porch, where honest Tom sat relating ponderous war anecdotes to an attentive group of boarders; and beyond her in the dimly lighted hall he could see the wide old staircase climbing leisurely into the mysterious silence of the upper storeys.

"I have a small room at the back that I might rent to you," she said hesitatingly after a pause. "I am afraid you will find it warm in summer, as it is just under the roof and has a western exposure, but I hardly think I could do better for you at the price you are able to pay. I understood that you intended to live with your uncle," she added in a burst of enthusiasm. "My husband has always been one of his greatest admirers."

The mention of Cyrus was like a spur to Oliver's ambition, and he realized with gratitude that it was merely his sensibility, not his resolution, which had been shaken.

"I'll take the room," he returned, ignoring what she had said as well as what she had implied about Cyrus. Then as she tripped ahead of him, he entered the dismantled hall, filled with broken pieces of fine old furniture, and ascended the stairs as far as the third storey. When she turned a loosened door-knob and passed before him into the little room at the back, he saw first of all the narrow window, with its torn green shade, beyond which clustered a blur of silvery foliage in the midst of red roofs and huddled chimneys. From this hilltop, he could look down unseen on that bit of the universal life which was Dinwiddie. He could watch the town at work and at play; he could see those twenty-one thousand souls either moved as a unit by the secret forces which ignore individuality, or separated and enclosed by that impenetrable wall of personality which surrounded each atom among them. He could follow the divisions of class and the still deeper divisions of race as they were symbolized in the old brick walls, overgrown with young grasses, which girdled the ancient gardens in High Street. From the dazzling glimpses of white muslin under honeysuckle arbours, to the dusky forms that swarmed like spawn in the alleys, the life of Dinwiddie loved, hated, enjoyed, and suffered beneath him. And over this love and this hatred, this enjoyment and this suffering, there presided – an outward and visible sign of the triumph of industrialism – the imposing brick walls of the new Treadwell tobacco factory.

A soft voice spoke in his ear, and turning, he looked into the face of Mrs. Peachey, whom he had almost forgotten.

"You will find the sun warm in the afternoon, I am afraid," she murmured, still with her manner of pleasantly humouring him which he found later to be an unconscious expression of her half maternal, wholly feminine attitude toward his sex.

"Oh, I daresay it will be all right," he responded. "I shall work so hard that I shan't have time to bother about the weather."

Leaving the window, he gazed around the little room with an impulse of curiosity. Who had lived here before him? A clerk? A travelling salesman? Perhaps one of the numerous indigent gentlewomen that formed so large and so important a part of the population of Dinwiddie? The walls were smeared with a sickly blue wash, and in several places there were the marks left from the pictures of the preceding lodger. An old mahogany bureau, black with age and ill usage, stood crosswise in the corner behind the door, and reflected in the dim mirror he saw his own face looking back at

him. A film of dust lay over everything in the room, over the muddy blue of the walls, over the strip of discoloured matting on the floor, over the few fine old pieces of furniture, fallen now into abject degradation. The handsome French bed, placed conveniently between door and window, stood naked to the eyes, with its cheap husk mattress rolled half back, and its bare slats, of which the two middle ones were tied together with rope, revealing conspicuously its descent from elegance into squalor. As he saw it, the room was the epitome of tragedy, yet in the centre of it, on one of the battered and broken-legged Heppelwhite chairs, sat Mrs. Peachey, rosy, plump, and pretty, regarding him with her slightly quizzical smile. "Yes, life, of course, is sad if you stop to think about it," her smile seemed to assure him; "but the main thing, after all, is to be happy in spite of it."

"Do you wish to stay here to-night?" she asked, seeing that he had put down his bag.

"If you will let me. But I am afraid it will be inconvenient."

She shook her head. "Not if you don't mind the dust. The room has been shut up for weeks, and the dust is so dreadful in the spring. The servants have gone out," she added, "but I'll bring you some sheets for your bed, and you can fill your pitcher from the spout at the end of the hall. Only be careful not to stumble over the step there. It is hard to see when the gas is not lit."

"You won't object to my putting shelves around the walls?" he asked, while she pushed the mattress into place with the light and condescending touch of one who preserves the aristocratic manner not only in tragedy, but even in toil. It was, indeed, her peculiar distinction, he came to know afterward, that she worked as gracefully as other women played.

"Couldn't you find room enough without them?" she inquired while her gaze left the mattress and travelled dubiously to the mantelpiece. "It seems a pity for you to go to any expense about shelves, doesn't it?"

"Oh, they won't cost much. I'll do the work myself, and I'll do it in the mornings when it won't disturb anybody. I daresay I'll have to push that bed around a bit in order to make space."

Something in his vibrant voice – so full of the richness and the buoyant energy of youth – made her look at him as she might have looked at one of her children, or at that overgrown child whom she had married. And just as she had managed Tom all his life by pretending to let him have his way, so she proceeded now by instinct to manage Oliver. "You dear boy! Of course you may turn things upside down if you want to. Only wait a few days until you are settled and have seen how you like it."

Then she tripped out with her springy step, which had kept its elasticity through war and famine, while Oliver, gazing after her, wondered whether it was philosophy or merely a love of pleasure that sustained her? Was it thought or the absence of thought that produced her wonderful courage?

He heard her tread on the stairs; then the sound passed to the front hall; and a minute later there floated up the laughter with which the assembled boarders received her. Closing the door, which she had left open, he turned back to the window and stared from his hilltop down on the red roofs of Dinwiddie. White as milk, the moonlight lay on the brick wall at the foot of the garden, and down the gradual hill rows of chimneys were outlined against the faintly dappled sky in the west. In the next yard a hollow tree looked as if it were cut out of silver, and beneath its boughs, which drooped into the alley, he could see the huddled figure of an aged negress who had fallen asleep on a flagstone. So still was the night that the very smoke appeared to hang suspended above the tops of the chimneys, as though it were too heavy to rise and yet too light to float downward toward the motionless trees. Under the pale beams the town lost its look of solidity and grew spectral. Nothing seemed to hold it to the earth except the stillness which held the fallen flowers of the syringa there also. Even the church towers showed like spires of thistledown, and the winding streets, which ran beside clear walls and dark shining gardens, trailed off from the ground into the silvery air. Only the black bulk of the Treadwell factory beside the river defied the magic of the moon's rays and remained a solid reminder of the brevity of all enchantment.

Gradually, while Oliver waited for Mrs. Peachey's return, he ceased to think of the furniture in his room; he ceased to think even of the way in which he should manage to do his work, and

allowed his mind to dwell, almost with a feeling of ecstasy, on the memory of Virginia. He saw the mist of little curls on her temples, her blue eyes, with their good and gentle expression, and the look of radiant happiness which played like light over her features. The beauty of the night acted as a spur to his senses. He wanted companionship. He wanted the smile and the touch of a woman. He wanted to fall in love with a girl who had blue eyes and a mouth like a flower!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.