DREISER THEODORE

THE "GENIUS"

Теодор Драйзер

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Драйзер Т.

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Содержание

BOOK I 5
CHAPTER I 5
CHAPTER II 12
CHAPTER III 19
CHAPTER IV 23
CHAPTER V 29
CHAPTER VI 31
CHAPTER VII 35
CHAPTER VIII 39
CHAPTER IX 42
CHAPTER X 46
CHAPTER XI 49
CHAPTER XII 53
CHAPTER XIII 56
CHAPTER XIV 60
CHAPTER XV 63
CHAPTER XVI 66
CHAPTER XVII 69
CHAPTER XVIII 74
CHAPTER XIX 79
CHAPTER XX 82
CHAPTER XXI 87
CHAPTER XXII 91
CHAPTER XXIII 94
CHAPTER XXIV 98
CHAPTER XXV 102
CHAPTER XXVI 107
CHAPTER XXVII 112
CHAPTER XXVIII 116
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 118

Theodore Dreiser
The «Genius»

BOOK I
YOUTH

CHAPTER I

This story has its beginnings in the town of Alexandria, Illinois, between 1884 and 1889, at the time when the place had a population of somewhere near ten thousand. There was about it just enough of the air of a city to relieve it of the sense of rural life. It had one street-car line, a theatre, – or rather, an opera house, so-called (why no one might say, for no opera was ever performed there) – two railroads, with their stations, and a business district, composed of four brisk sides to a public square. In the square were the county court-house and four newspapers. These two morning and two evening papers made the population fairly aware of the fact that life was full of issues, local and national, and that there were many interesting and varied things to do. On the edge of town, several lakes and a pretty stream – perhaps Alexandria's most pleasant feature – gave it an atmosphere not unakin to that of a moderate-priced summer resort. Architecturally the town was not new. It was mostly built of wood, as all American towns were at this time, but laid out prettily in some sections, with houses that sat back in great yards, far from the streets, with flower beds, brick walks, and green trees as concomitants of a comfortable home life. Alexandria was a city of young Americans. Its spirit was young. Life was all before almost everybody. It was really good to be alive.

In one part of this city there lived a family which in its character and composition might well have been considered typically American and middle western. It was not by any means poor – or, at least, did not consider itself so; it was in no sense rich. Thomas Jefferson Witla, the father, was a sewing machine agent with the general agency in that county of one of the best known and best selling machines made. From each twenty, thirty-five or sixty-dollar machine which he sold, he took a profit of thirty-five per cent. The sale of machines was not great, but it was enough to yield him nearly two thousand dollars a year; and on that he had managed to buy a house and lot, to furnish it comfortably, to send his children to school, and to maintain a local store on the public square where the latest styles of machines were displayed. He also took old machines of other makes in exchange, allowing ten to fifteen dollars on the purchase price of a new machine. He also repaired machines, – and with that peculiar energy of the American mind, he tried to do a little insurance business in addition. His first idea was that his son, Eugene Tennyson Witla, might take charge of this latter work, once he became old enough and the insurance trade had developed sufficiently. He did not know what his son might turn out to be, but it was always well to have an anchor to windward.

He was a quick, wiry, active man of no great stature, sandy-haired, with blue eyes with noticeable eye-brows, an eagle nose, and a rather radiant and ingratiating smile. Service as a canvassing salesman, endeavoring to persuade recalcitrant wives and indifferent or conservative husbands to realize that they really needed a new machine in their home, had taught him caution, tact, savoir faire. He knew how to approach people pleasantly. His wife thought too much so.

Certainly he was honest, hard working, and thrifty. They had been waiting a long time for the day when they could say they owned their own home and had a little something laid away for emergencies. That day had come, and life was not half bad. Their house was neat, – white with green shutters, surrounded by a yard with well kept flower beds, a smooth lawn, and some few shapely and

broad spreading trees. There was a front porch with rockers, a swing under one tree, a hammock under another, a buggy and several canvassing wagons in a nearby stable. Witla liked dogs, so there were two collies. Mrs. Witla liked live things, so there were a canary bird, a cat, some chickens, and a bird house set aloft on a pole where a few blue-birds made their home. It was a nice little place, and Mr. and Mrs. Witla were rather proud of it.

Miriam Witla was a good wife to her husband. A daughter of a hay and grain dealer in Wooster, a small town near Alexandria in McLean County, she had never been farther out into the world than Springfield and Chicago. She had gone to Springfield as a very young girl, to see Lincoln buried, and once with her husband she had gone to the state fair or exposition which was held annually in those days on the lake front in Chicago. She was well preserved, good looking, poetic under a marked outward reserve. It was she who had insisted upon naming her only son Eugene Tennyson, a tribute at once to a brother Eugene, and to the celebrated romanticist of verse, because she had been so impressed with his "Idylls of the King."

Eugene Tennyson seemed rather strong to Witla père, as the name of a middle-western American boy, but he loved his wife and gave her her way in most things. He rather liked the names of Sylvia and Myrtle with which she had christened the two girls. All three of the children were good looking, – Sylvia, a girl of twenty-one, with black hair, dark eyes, full blown like a rose, healthy, active, smiling. Myrtle was of a less vigorous constitution, small, pale, shy, but intensely sweet – like the flower she was named after, her mother said. She was inclined to be studious and reflective, to read verse and dream. The young bloods of the high school were all crazy to talk to Myrtle and to walk with her, but they could find no words. And she herself did not know what to say to them.

Eugene Witla was the apple of his family's eye, younger than either of his two sisters by two years. He had straight smooth black hair, dark almond-shaped eyes, a straight nose, a shapely but not aggressive chin; his teeth were even and white, showing with a curious delicacy when he smiled, as if he were proud of them. He was not very strong to begin with, moody, and to a notable extent artistic. Because of a weak stomach and a semi-anæmic condition, he did not really appear as strong as he was. He had emotion, fire, longings, that were concealed behind a wall of reserve. He was shy, proud, sensitive, and very uncertain of himself.

When at home he lounged about the house, reading Dickens, Thackeray, Scott and Poe. He browsed idly through one book after another, wondering about life. The great cities appealed to him. He thought of travel as a wonderful thing. In school he read Taine and Gibbon between recitation hours, wondering at the luxury and beauty of the great courts of the world. He cared nothing for grammar, nothing for mathematics, nothing for botany or physics, except odd bits here and there. Curious facts would strike him – the composition of clouds, the composition of water, the chemical elements of the earth. He liked to lie in the hammock at home, spring, summer or fall, and look at the blue sky showing through the trees. A soaring buzzard poised in speculative flight held his attention fixedly. The wonder of a snowy cloud, high piled like wool, and drifting as an island, was like a song to him. He had wit, a keen sense of humor, a sense of pathos. Sometimes he thought he would draw; sometimes write. He had a little talent for both, he thought, but did practically nothing with either. He would sketch now and then, but only fragments – a small roof-top, with smoke curling from a chimney and birds flying; a bit of water with a willow bending over it and perhaps a boat anchored; a mill pond with ducks afloat, and a boy or woman on the bank. He really had no great talent for interpretation at this time, only an intense sense of beauty. The beauty of a bird in flight, a rose in bloom, a tree swaying in the wind – these held him. He would walk the streets of his native town at night, admiring the brightness of the store windows, the sense of youth and enthusiasm that went with a crowd; the sense of love and comfort and home that spoke through the glowing windows of houses set back among trees.

He admired girls, – was mad about them, – but only about those who were truly beautiful. There were two or three in his school who reminded him of poetic phrases he had come across –

"beauty like a tightened bow," "thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face," "a dancing shape, an image gay" – but he could not talk to them with ease. They were beautiful but so distant. He invested them with more beauty than they had; the beauty was in his own soul. But he did not know that. One girl whose yellow hair lay upon her neck in great yellow braids like ripe corn, was constantly in his thoughts. He worshiped her from afar but she never knew. She never knew what solemn black eyes burned at her when she was not looking. She left Alexandria, her family moving to another town, and in time he recovered, for there is much of beauty. But the color of her hair and the wonder of her neck stayed with him always.

There was some plan on the part of Witla to send these children to college, but none of them showed any great desire for education. They were perhaps wiser than books, for they were living in the realm of imagination and feeling. Sylvia longed to be a mother, and was married at twenty-one to Henry Burgess, the son of Benjamin C. Burgess, editor of the *Morning Appeal*. There was a baby the first year. Myrtle was dreaming through algebra and trigonometry, wondering whether she would teach or get married, for the moderate prosperity of the family demanded that she do something. Eugene mooned through his studies, learning nothing practical. He wrote a little, but his efforts at sixteen were puerile. He drew, but there was no one to tell him whether there was any merit in the things he did or not. Practical matters were generally without significance to him. But he was overawed by the fact that the world demanded practical service – buying and selling like his father, clerking in stores, running big business. It was a confusing maze, and he wondered, even at this age, what was to become of him. He did not object to the kind of work his father was doing, but it did not interest him. For himself he knew it would be a pointless, dreary way of making a living, and as for insurance, that was equally bad. He could hardly bring himself to read through the long rigamarole of specifications which each insurance paper itemized. There were times – evenings and Saturdays – when he clerked in his father's store, but it was painful work. His mind was not in it.

As early as his twelfth year his father had begun to see that Eugene was not cut out for business, and by the time he was sixteen he was convinced of it. From the trend of his reading and his percentage marks at school, he was equally convinced that the boy was not interested in his studies. Myrtle, who was two classes ahead of him but sometimes in the same room, reported that he dreamed too much. He was always looking out of the window.

Eugene's experience with girls had not been very wide. There were those very minor things that occur in early youth – girls whom we furtively kiss, or who furtively kiss us – the latter had been the case with Eugene. He had no particular interest in any one girl. At fourteen he had been picked by a little girl at a party as an affinity, for the evening at least, and in a game of "post-office" had enjoyed the wonder of a girl's arms around him in a dark room and a girl's lips against his; but since then there had been no re-encounter of any kind. He had dreamed of love, with this one experience as a basis, but always in a shy, distant way. He was afraid of girls, and they, to tell the truth, were afraid of him. They could not make him out.

But in the fall of his seventeenth year Eugene came into contact with one girl who made a profound impression on him. Stella Appleton was a notably beautiful creature. She was very fair, Eugene's own age, with very blue eyes and a slender sylph-like body. She was gay and debonair in an enticing way, without really realizing how dangerous she was to the average, susceptible male heart. She liked to flirt with the boys because it amused her, and not because she cared for anyone in particular. There was no petty meanness about it, however, for she thought they were all rather nice, the less clever appealing to her almost more than the sophisticated. She may have liked Eugene originally because of his shyness.

He saw her first at the beginning of his last school year when she came to the city and entered the second high school class. Her father had come from Moline, Illinois, to take a position as manager of a new pulley manufactory which was just starting. She had quickly become friends with his sister Myrtle, being perhaps attracted by her quiet ways, as Myrtle was by Stella's gaiety.

One afternoon, as Myrtle and Stella were on Main Street, walking home from the post office, they met Eugene, who was on his way to visit a boy friend. He was really bashful; and when he saw them approaching he wanted to escape, but there was no way. They saw him, and Stella approached confidently enough. Myrtle was anxious to intercept him, because she had her pretty companion with her.

"You haven't been home, have you?" she asked, stopping. This was her chance to introduce Stella; Eugene couldn't escape. "Miss Appleton, this is my brother Eugene."

Stella gave him a sunny encouraging smile, and her hand, which he took gingerly. He was plainly nervous.

"I'm not very clean," he said apologetically. "I've been helping father fix a buggy."

"Oh, we don't mind," said Myrtle. "Where are you going?"

"Over to Harry Morris's," he explained.

"What for?"

"We're going for hickory nuts."

"Oh, I wish I had some," said Stella.

"I'll bring you some," he volunteered gallantly.

She smiled again. "I wish you would."

She almost proposed that they should be taken along, but inexperience hindered her.

Eugene was struck with all her charm at once. She seemed like one of those unattainable creatures who had swum into his ken a little earlier and disappeared. There was something of the girl with the corn-colored hair about her, only she had been more human, less like a dream. This girl was fine, delicate, pink, like porcelain. She was fragile and yet virile. He caught his breath, but he was more or less afraid of her. He did not know what she might be thinking of him.

"Well, we're going on to the house," said Myrtle.

"I'd go along if I hadn't promised Harry I'd come over."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Myrtle. "We don't mind."

He withdrew, feeling that he had made a very poor impression. Stella's eyes had been on him in a very inquiring way. She looked after him when he had gone.

"Isn't he nice?" she said to Myrtle frankly.

"I think so," replied Myrtle; "kind o'. He's too moody, though."

"What makes him?"

"He isn't very strong."

"I think he has a nice smile."

"I'll tell him!"

"No, please don't! You won't, will you?"

"No."

"But he *has* a nice smile."

"I'll ask you round to the house some evening and you can meet him again."

"I'd like to," said Stella. "It would be a lot of fun."

"Come out Saturday evening and stay all night. He's home then."

"I will," said Stella. "Won't that be fine!"

"I believe you like him!" laughed Myrtle.

"I think he's awfully nice," said Stella, simply.

The second meeting happened on Saturday evening as arranged, when he came home from his odd day at his father's insurance office. Stella had come to supper. Eugene saw her through the open sitting room door, as he bounded upstairs to change his clothes, for he had a fire of youth which no sickness of stomach or weakness of lungs could overcome at this age. A thrill of anticipation ran over his body. He took especial pains with his toilet, adjusting a red tie to a nicety, and parting his hair carefully in the middle. He came down after a while, conscious that he had to say something smart,

worthy of himself, or she would not see how attractive he was; and yet he was fearful as to the result. When he entered the sitting room she was sitting with his sister before an open fire-place, the glow of a lamp with a red-flowered shade warmly illuminating the room. It was a commonplace room, with its blue cloth-covered center table, its chairs of stereotyped factory design, and its bookcase of novels and histories, but it was homey, and the sense of hominess was strong.

Mrs. Witla was in and out occasionally, looking for things which appertained to her functions as house-mother. The father was not home yet; he would get there by supper-time, having been to some outlying town of the county trying to sell a machine. Eugene was indifferent to his presence or absence. Mr. Witla had a fund of humor which extended to joking with his son and daughters, when he was feeling good, to noting their budding interest in the opposite sex; to predicting some commonplace climax to their one grand passion when it should come. He was fond of telling Myrtle that she would one day marry a horse-doctor. As for Eugene, he predicted a certain Elsa Brown, who, his wife said, had greasy curls. This did not irritate either Myrtle or Eugene. It even brought a wry smile to Eugene's face for he was fond of a jest; but he saw his father pretty clearly even at this age. He saw the smallness of his business, the ridiculousness of any such profession having any claim on him. He never wanted to say anything, but there was in him a burning opposition to the commonplace, a molten pit in a crater of reserve, which smoked ominously now and then for anyone who could have read. Neither his father nor his mother understood him. To them he was a peculiar boy, dreamy, sickly, unwitting, as yet, of what he really wanted.

"Oh, here you are!" said Myrtle, when he came in. "Come and sit down."

Stella gave him an enticing smile.

He walked to the mantel-piece and stood there, posing. He wanted to impress this girl, and he did not quite know how. He was almost lost for anything to say.

"You can't guess what we've been doing!" his sister chirped helpfully.

"Well – what?" he replied blankly.

"You ought to guess. Can't you be nice and guess?"

"One guess, anyhow," put in Stella.

"Toasting pop-corn," he ventured with a half smile.

"You're warm." It was Myrtle speaking.

Stella looked at him with round blue eyes. "One more guess," she suggested.

"Chestnuts!" he guessed.

She nodded her head gaily. "What hair!" he thought. Then – "Where are they?"

"Here's one," laughed his new acquaintance, holding out a tiny hand.

Under her laughing encouragement he was finding his voice. "Stingy!" he said.

"Now isn't that mean," she exclaimed. "I gave him the only one I had. Don't you give him any of yours, Myrtle."

"I take it back," he pleaded. "I didn't know."

"I won't!" exclaimed Myrtle. "Here, Stella," and she held out the few nuts she had left, "take these, and don't you give him any!" She put them in Stella's eager hands.

He saw her meaning. It was an invitation to a contest. She wanted him to try to make her give him some. He fell in with her plan.

"Here!" He stretched out his palm. "That's not right!"

She shook her head.

"One, anyhow," he insisted.

Her head moved negatively from side to side slowly.

"One," he pleaded, drawing near.

Again the golden negative. But her hand was at the side nearest him, where he could seize it. She started to pass its contents behind her to the other hand but he jumped and caught it.

"Myrtle! Quick!" she called.

Myrtle came. It was a three-handed struggle. In the midst of the contest Stella twisted and rose to her feet. Her hair brushed his face. He held her tiny hand firmly. For a moment he looked into her eyes. What was it? He could not say. Only he half let go and gave her the victory.

"There," she smiled. "Now I'll give you one."

He took it, laughing. What he wanted was to take her in his arms.

A little while before supper his father came in and sat down, but presently took a Chicago paper and went into the dining room to read. Then his mother called them to the table, and he sat by Stella. He was intensely interested in what she did and said. If her lips moved he noted just how. When her teeth showed he thought they were lovely. A little ringlet on her forehead beckoned him like a golden finger. He felt the wonder of the poetic phrase, "the shining strands of her hair."

After dinner he and Myrtle and Stella went back to the sitting room. His father stayed behind to read, his mother to wash dishes. Myrtle left the room after a bit to help her mother, and then these two were left alone. He hadn't much to say, now that they were together – he couldn't talk. Something about her beauty kept him silent.

"Do you like school?" she asked after a time. She felt as if they must talk.

"Only fairly well," he replied. "I'm not much interested. I think I'll quit one of these days and go to work."

"What do you expect to do?"

"I don't know yet – I'd like to be an artist." He confessed his ambition for the first time in his life – why, he could not have said.

Stella took no note of it.

"I was afraid they wouldn't let me enter second year high school, but they did," she remarked. "The superintendent at Moline had to write the superintendent here."

"They're mean about those things," he cogitated.

She got up and went to the bookcase to look at the books. He followed after a little.

"Do you like Dickens?" she asked.

He nodded his head solemnly in approval. "Pretty much," he said.

"I can't like him. He's too long drawn out. I like Scott better."

"I like Scott," he said.

"I'll tell you a lovely book that I like." She paused, her lips parted trying to remember the name. She lifted her hand as though to pick the title out of the air. "The Fair God," she exclaimed at last.

"Yes – it's fine," he approved. "I thought the scene in the old Aztec temple where they were going to sacrifice Ahwahee was so wonderful!"

"Oh, yes, I liked that," she added. She pulled out "Ben Hur" and turned its leaves idly. "And this was so good."

"Wonderful!"

They paused and she went to the window, standing under the cheap lace curtains. It was a moonlight night. The rows of trees that lined the street on either side were leafless; the grass brown and dead. Through the thin, interlaced twigs that were like silver filigree they could see the lamps of other houses shining through half-drawn blinds. A man went by, a black shadow in the half-light.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said.

Eugene came near. "It's fine," he answered.

"I wish it were cold enough to skate. Do you skate?" She turned to him.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

"My, it's so nice on a moonlit night. I used to skate a lot at Moline."

"We skate a lot here. There're two lakes, you know."

He thought of the clear crystal nights when the ice of Green Lake had split every so often with a great resounding rumble. He thought of the crowds of boys and girls shouting, the distant shadows, the stars. Up to now he had never found any girl to skate with successfully. He had never felt just easy

with anyone. He had tried it, but once he had fallen with a girl, and it had almost cured him of skating forever. He felt as though he could skate with Stella. He felt that she might like to skate with him.

"When it gets colder we might go," he ventured. "Myrtle skates."

"Oh, that'll be fine!" she applauded.

Still she looked out into the street.

After a bit she came back to the fire and stood before him, pensively looking down.

"Do you think your father will stay here?" he asked.

"He says so. He likes it very much."

"Do you?"

"Yes – now."

"Why *now*?"

"Oh, I didn't like it at first."

"Why?"

"Oh, I guess it was because I didn't know anybody. I like it though, now." She lifted her eyes.

He drew a little nearer.

"It's a nice place," he said, "but there isn't much for me here. I think I'll leave next year."

"Where do you think you'll go?"

"To Chicago. I don't want to stay here."

She turned her body toward the fire and he moved to a chair behind her, leaning on its back. She felt him there rather close, but did not move. He was surprising himself.

"Aren't you ever coming back?" she asked.

"Maybe. It all depends. I suppose so."

"I shouldn't think you'd want to leave yet."

"Why?"

"You say it's so nice."

He made no answer and she looked over her shoulder. He was leaning very much toward her.

"Will you skate with me this winter?" he asked meaningly.

She nodded her head.

Myrtle came in.

"What are you two talking about?" she asked.

"The fine skating we have here," he said.

"I love to skate," she exclaimed.

"So do I," added Stella. "It's heavenly."

CHAPTER II

Some of the incidents of this courtship that followed, ephemeral as it was, left a profound impression on Eugene's mind. They met to skate not long after, for the snow came and the ice and there was wonderful skating on Green Lake. The frost was so prolonged that men with horses and ice-saws were cutting blocks a foot thick over at Miller's Point, where the ice houses were. Almost every day after Thanksgiving there were crowds of boys and girls from the schools scooting about like water skippers. Eugene could not always go on week evenings and Saturdays because he had to assist his father at the store. But at regular intervals he could ask Myrtle to get Stella and let them all go together at night. And at other times he would ask her to go alone. Not infrequently she did.

On one particular occasion they were below a group of houses which crept near the lake on high ground. The moon was up, its wooing rays reflected in the polished surfaces of the ice. Through the black masses of trees that lined the shore could be seen the glow of windows, yellow and homey. Eugene and Stella had slowed up to turn about, having left the crowd of skaters some distance back. Stella's golden curls were covered, except for a few ringlets, with a French cap; her body, to below the hips, encased in a white wool Jersey, close-fitting and shapely. The skirt below was a grey mixture of thick wool and the stockings were covered by white woolen leggings. She looked tempting and knew it.

Suddenly, as they turned, one of her skates came loose and she hobbled and exclaimed about it. "Wait," said Eugene, "I'll fix it."

She stood before him and he fell to his knees, undoing the twisted strap. When he had the skate off and ready for her foot he looked up, and she looked down on him, smiling. He dropped the skate and flung his arms around her hips, laying his head against her waist.

"You're a bad boy," she said.

For a few minutes she kept silent, for as the center of this lovely scene she was divine. While he held her she pulled off his wool cap and laid her hand on his hair. It almost brought tears to his eyes, he was so happy. At the same time it awakened a tremendous passion. He clutched her significantly.

"Fix my skate, now," she said wisely.

He got up to hug her but she would not let him.

"No, no," she protested. "You mustn't do like that. I won't come with you if you do."

"Oh, Stella!" he pleaded.

"I mean it," she insisted. "You mustn't do like that."

He subsided, hurt, half angry. But he feared her will. She was really not as ready for caresses as he had thought.

Another time a sleighing party was given by some school girls, and Stella, Eugene and Myrtle were invited. It was a night of snow and stars, not too cold but bracing. A great box-wagon had been dismantled of its body and the latter put on runners and filled with straw and warm robes. Eugene and Myrtle, like the others, had been picked up at their door after the sleigh had gone the rounds of some ten peaceful little homes. Stella was not in yet, but in a little while her house was reached.

"Get in here," called Myrtle, though she was half the length of the box away from Eugene. Her request made him angry. "Sit by me," he called, fearful that she would not. She climbed in by Myrtle but finding the space not to her liking moved farther down. Eugene made a special effort to have room by him, and she came there as though by accident. He drew a buffalo robe around her and thrilled to think that she was really there. The sleigh went jingling around the town for others, and finally struck out into the country. It passed great patches of dark woods silent in the snow, little white frame farmhouses snuggled close to the ground, and with windows that gleamed in a vague romantic way. The stars were countless and keen. The whole scene made a tremendous impression

on him, for he was in love, and here beside him, in the shadow, her face palely outlined, was this girl. He could make out the sweetness of her cheek, her eyes, the softness of her hair.

There was a good deal of chatter and singing, and in the midst of these distractions he managed to slip an arm about her waist, to get her hand in his, to look close into her eyes, trying to divine their expression. She was always coy with him, not wholly yielding. Three or four times he kissed her cheek furtively and once her mouth. In a dark place he pulled her vigorously to him, putting a long, sensuous kiss on her lips that frightened her.

"No," she protested, nervously. "You mustn't."

He ceased for a time, feeling that he had pressed his advantage too closely. But the night in all its beauty, and she in hers made a lasting impression.

"I think we ought to get Eugene into newspaper work or something like that," Witla senior suggested to his wife.

"It looks as though that's all he would be good for, at least now," replied Mrs. Witla, who was satisfied that her boy had not yet found himself. "I think he'll do something better later on. His health isn't very good, you know."

Witla half suspected that his boy was naturally lazy, but he wasn't sure. He suggested that Benjamin C. Burgess, the prospective father-in-law of Sylvia and the editor and proprietor of the *Morning Appeal*, might give him a place as a reporter or type-setter in order that he might learn the business from the ground up. The *Appeal* carried few employees, but Mr. Burgess might have no objections to starting Eugene as a reporter if he could write, or as a student of type-setting, or both. He appealed to Burgess one day on the street.

"Say, Burgess," he said, "you wouldn't have a place over in your shop for that boy of mine, would you? He likes to scribble a little, I notice. I think he pretends to draw a little, too, though I guess it doesn't amount to much. He ought to get into something. He isn't doing anything at school. Maybe he could learn type-setting. It wouldn't hurt him to begin at the bottom if he's going to follow that line. It wouldn't matter what you paid him to begin with."

Burgess thought. He had seen Eugene around town, knew no harm of him except that he was lackadaisical and rather moody.

"Send him in to see me some day," he replied noncommittally. "I might do something for him."

"I'd certainly be much obliged to you if you would," said Witla. "He is not doing much good as it is now," and the two men parted.

He went home and told Eugene. "Burgess says he might give you a position as a type-setter or a reporter on the *Appeal* if you'd come in and see him some day," he explained, looking over to where his son was reading by the lamp.

"Does he?" replied Eugene calmly. "Well, I can't write. I might set type. Did you ask him?"

"Yes," said Witla. "You'd better go to him some day."

Eugene bit his lip. He realized this was a commentary on his loafing propensities. He wasn't doing very well, that was certain. Still type-setting was no bright field for a person of his temperament. "I will," he concluded, "when school's over."

"Better speak before school ends. Some of the other fellows might ask for it around that time. It wouldn't hurt you to try your hand at it."

"I will," said Eugene obediently.

He stopped in one sunny April afternoon at Mr. Burgess' office. It was on the ground floor of the three-story *Appeal* building in the public square. Mr. Burgess, a fat man, slightly bald, looked at him quizzically over his steel rimmed spectacles. What little hair he had was gray.

"So you think you would like to go into the newspaper business, do you?" queried Burgess.

"I'd like to try my hand at it," replied the boy. "I'd like to see whether I like it."

"I can tell you right now there's very little in it. Your father says you like to write."

"I'd like to well enough, but I don't think I can. I wouldn't mind learning type-setting. If I ever could write I'd be perfectly willing to."

"When do you think you'd like to start?"

"At the end of school, if it's all the same to you."

"It doesn't make much difference. I'm not really in need of anybody, but I could use you. Would you be satisfied with five a week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come in when you are ready. I'll see what I can do."

He waved the prospective type-setter away with a movement of his fat hand, and turned to his black walnut desk, dingy, covered with newspapers, and lit by a green shaded electric light. Eugene went out, the smell of fresh printing ink in his nose, and the equally aggressive smell of damp newspapers. It was going to be an interesting experience, he thought, but perhaps a waste of time. He did not think so much of Alexandria. Some time he was going to get out of it.

The office of the *Appeal* was not different from that of any other country newspaper office within the confines of our two hemispheres. On the ground floor in front was the business office, and in the rear the one large flat bed press and the job presses. On the second floor was the composing room with its rows of type cases on their high racks – for this newspaper was, like most other country newspapers, still set by hand; and in front was the one dingy office of the so-called editor, or managing editor, or city editor – for all three were the same person, a Mr. Caleb Williams whom Burgess had picked up in times past from heaven knows where. Williams was a small, lean, wiry man, with a black pointed beard and a glass eye which fixed you oddly with its black pupil. He was talkative, skipped about from duty to duty, wore most of the time a green shade pulled low over his forehead, and smoked a brown briar pipe. He had a fund of knowledge, piled up in metropolitan journalistic experience, but he was anchored here with a wife and three children, after sailing, no doubt, a chartless sea of troubles, and was glad to talk life and experiences after office hours with almost anybody. It took him from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon to gather what local news there was, and either write it or edit it. He seemed to have a number of correspondents who sent him weekly batches of news from surrounding points. The Associated Press furnished him with a few minor items by telegraph, and there was a "patent insides," two pages of fiction, household hints, medicine ads. and what not, which saved him considerable time and stress. Most of the news which came to him received short shrift in the matter of editing. "In Chicago we used to give a lot of attention to this sort of thing," Williams was wont to declare to anyone who was near, "but you can't do it down here. The readers really don't expect it. They're looking for local items. I always look after the local items pretty sharp."

Mr. Burgess took care of the advertising sections. In fact he solicited advertising personally, saw that it was properly set up as the advertiser wanted it, and properly placed according to the convenience of the day and the rights and demands of others. He was the politician of the concern, the handshaker, the guider of its policy. He wrote editorials now and then, or, with Williams, decided just what their sense must be, met the visitors who came to the office to see the editor, and arbitrated all known forms of difficulties. He was at the beck and call of certain Republican party-leaders in the county; but that seemed natural, for he was a Republican himself by temperament and disposition. He was appointed postmaster once to pay him for some useful services, but he declined because he was really making more out of his paper than his postmastership would have brought. He received whatever city or county advertising it was in the power of the Republican leaders to give him, and so he did very well. The complications of his political relationships Williams knew in part, but they never troubled that industrious soul. He dispensed with moralizing. "I have to make a living for myself, my wife and three children. That's enough to keep me going without bothering my head about other people." So this office was really run very quietly, efficiently, and in most ways pleasantly. It was a sunny place to work.

Witla, who came here at the end of his eleventh school year and when he had just turned seventeen, was impressed with the personality of Mr. Williams. He liked him. He came to like a Jonas Lyle who worked at what might be called the head desk of the composing room, and a certain John Summers who worked at odd times – whenever there was an extra rush of job printing. He learned very quickly that John Summers, who was fifty-five, grey, and comparatively silent, was troubled with weak lungs and drank. Summers would slip out of the office at various times in the day and be gone from five to fifteen minutes. No one ever said anything, for there was no pressure here. What work was to be done was done. Jonas Lyle was of a more interesting nature. He was younger by ten years, stronger, better built, but still a character. He was semi-phlegmatic, philosophic, feebly literary. He had worked, as Eugene found out in the course of time, in nearly every part of the United States – Denver, Portland, St. Paul, St. Louis, where not, and had a fund of recollections of this proprietor and that. Whenever he saw a name of particular distinction in the newspapers he was apt to bring the paper to Williams – and later, when they became familiar, to Eugene – and say, "I knew that fellow out in – . He was postmaster (or what not) at X – . He's come up considerably since I knew him." In most cases he did not know these celebrities personally at all, but he knew of them, and the echo of their fame sounding in this out-of-the-way corner of the world impressed him. He was a careful reader of proof for Williams in a rush, a quick type-setter, a man who stayed by his tasks faithfully. But he hadn't got anywhere in the world, for, after all, he was little more than a machine. Eugene could see that at a glance.

It was Lyle who taught him the art of type-setting. He demonstrated the first day the theory of the squares or pockets in a case, how some letters were placed more conveniently to the hand than others, why some letters were well represented as to quantity, why capitals were used in certain offices for certain purposes, in others not. "Now on the Chicago *Tribune* we used to italicize the names of churches, boats, books, hotels, and things of that sort. That's the only paper I ever knew to do that," he remarked. What slugs, sticks, galleys, turnovers, meant, came rapidly to the surface. That the fingers would come to recognize weights of leads by the touch, that a letter would almost instinctively find its way back to its proper pocket, even though you were not thinking, once you became expert, were facts which he cheerfully communicated. He wanted his knowledge taken seriously, and this serious attention, Eugene, because of his innate respect for learning of any kind, was only too glad to give him. He did not know what he wanted to do, but he knew quite well that he wanted to see everything. This shop was interesting to him for some little time for this reason, for though he soon found that he did not want to be a type-setter or a reporter, or indeed anything much in connection with a country newspaper, he was learning about life. He worked at his desk cheerfully, smiling out upon the world, which indicated its presence to him through an open window, read the curious bits of news or opinion or local advertisements as he set them up, and dreamed of what the world might have in store for him. He was not vastly ambitious as yet, but hopeful and, withal, a little melancholy. He could see boys and girls whom he knew, idling in the streets or on the corner squares; he could see where Ted Martinwood was driving by in his father's buggy, or George Anderson was going up the street with the air of someone who would never need to work. George's father owned the one and only hotel. There were thoughts in his mind of fishing, boating, lolling somewhere with some pretty girl, but alas, girls did not apparently take to him so very readily. He was too shy. He thought it must be nice to be rich. So he dreamed.

Eugene was at that age when he wished to express himself in ardent phrases. He was also at the age when bashfulness held him in reserve, even though he were in love and intensely emotional. He could only say to Stella what seemed trivial things, and look his intensity, whereas it was the trivial things that were most pleasing to her, not the intensity. She was even then beginning to think he was a little strange, a little too tense for her disposition. Yet she liked him. It became generally understood around town that Stella was *his* girl. School day mating usually goes that way in a small city or village. He was seen to go out with her. His father teased him. Her mother and father deemed

this a manifestation of calf love, not so much on her part, for they were aware of her tendency to hold lightly any manifestation of affection on the part of boys, but on his. They thought his sentimentalism would soon be wearisome to Stella. And they were not far wrong about her. On one occasion at a party given by several high school girls, a "country post office" was organized. That was one of those games which mean kissing only. A system of guessing results in a series of forfeits. If you miss you must be postmaster, and call someone for "mail." *Mail* means to be kissed in a dark room (where the postmaster stands) by someone whom you like or who likes you. You, as postmaster, have authority or compulsion – however you feel about it – to call whom you please.

In this particular instance Stella, who was caught before Eugene, was under compulsion to call someone to kiss. Her first thought was of him, but on account of the frankness of the deed, and because there was a lurking fear in her of his eagerness, the name she felt impelled to speak was Harvey Rutter. Harvey was a handsome boy whom Stella had met after her first encounter with Eugene. He was not as yet fascinating to her, but pleasing. She had a coquettish desire to see what he was like. This was her first direct chance.

He stepped gaily in, and Eugene was at once insane with jealousy. He could not understand why she should treat him in that way. When it came to his turn he called for Bertha Shoemaker, whom he admired, and who was sweet in a way, but who was as nothing to Stella in his estimation. The pain of kissing her when he really wanted the other girl was great. When he came out Stella saw moodiness in his eyes, but chose to ignore it. He was obviously half-hearted and downcast in his simulation of joy.

A second chance came to her and this time she called him. He went, but was in a semi-defiant mood. He wanted to punish her. When they met in the dark she expected him to put his arms around her. Her own hands were up to about where his shoulders should be. Instead he only took hold of one of her arms with his hand and planted a chilly kiss on her lips. If he had only asked, "Why did you?" or held her close and pleaded with her not to treat him so badly, the relationship might have lasted longer. Instead he said nothing, and she grew defiant and she went out gaily. There was a strain of reserve running between them until the party broke up and he took her home.

"You must be melancholy tonight," she remarked, after they had walked two blocks in complete silence. The streets were dark, and their feet sounded hollowly on the brick pavement.

"Oh, I'm feeling all right," he replied moodily.

"I think it's awfully nice at the Weimers', we always have so much fun there."

"Yes, lots of fun," he echoed contemptuously.

"Oh, don't be so cross!" she flared. "You haven't any reason for fussing."

"Haven't I?"

"No, you haven't."

"Well if that's the way you feel about it I suppose I haven't. I don't see it that way."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference to me how you see it."

"Oh, doesn't it?"

"No, it doesn't." Her head was up and she was angry.

"Well I'm sure then it doesn't to me."

There was another silence which endured until they were almost home.

"Are you coming to the sociable next Thursday?" he inquired. He was referring to a Methodist evening entertainment which, although he cared very little about it, was a convenience as it enabled him to see her and take her home. He was prompted to ask by the fear that an open rupture was impending.

"No," she said. "I don't think I will."

"Why not?"

"I don't care to."

"I think you're mean," he said reprovingly.

"I don't care," she replied. "I think you're too bossy. I don't think I like you very much anyhow."

His heart contracted ominously.

"You can do as you please," he persisted.

They reached her gate. It was his wont to kiss her in the shadow – to hold her tight for a few minutes in spite of her protests. Tonight, as they approached, he thought of doing it, but she gave him no chance. When they reached the gate she opened it quickly and slipped in. "Good-night," she called.

"Good-night," he said, and then as she reached her door, "Stella!"

It was open, and she slipped in. He stood in the dark, hurt, sore, oppressed. What should he do? He strolled home cudgelling his brain whether never to speak to or look at her again until she came to him, or to hunt her up and fight it all out with her. She was in the wrong, he knew that. When he went to bed he was grieving over it, and when he awoke it was with him all day.

He had been gaining rather rapidly as a student of type-setting, and to a certain extent of the theory of reporting, and he worked diligently and earnestly at his proposed trade. He loved to look out of the window and draw, though of late, after knowing Stella so well and coming to quarrel with her because of her indifference, there was little heart in it. This getting to the office, putting on an apron, and starting in on some local correspondence left over from the day before, or some telegraph copy which had been freshly filed on his hook, had its constructive value. Williams endeavored to use him on some local items of news as a reporter, but he was a slow worker and almost a failure at getting all the facts. He did not appear to know how to interview anybody, and would come back with a story which needed to be filled in from other sources. He really did not understand the theory of news, and Williams could only make it partially clear to him. Mostly he worked at his case, but he did learn some things.

For one thing, the theory of advertising began to dawn on him. These local merchants put in the same ads. day after day, and many of them did not change them noticeably. He saw Lyle and Summers taking the same ads. which had appeared unchangingly from month to month in so far as their main features were concerned, and alter only a few words before returning them to the forms. He wondered at the sameness of them, and when, at last, they were given to him to revise he often wished he could change them a little. The language seemed so dull.

"Why don't they ever put little drawings in these ads?" he asked Lyle one day. "Don't you think they'd look a little better?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jonas. "They look pretty good. These people around here wouldn't want anything like that. They'd think it was too fancy." Eugene had seen and in a way studied the ads. in the magazines. They seemed so much more fascinating to him. Why couldn't newspaper ads. be different?

Still it was never given to him to trouble over this problem. Mr. Burgess dealt with the advertisers. He settled how the ads were to be. He never talked to Eugene or Summers about them, not always to Lyle. He would sometimes have Williams explain just what their character and layout was to be. Eugene was so young that Williams at first did not pay very much attention to him, but after a while he began to realize that there was a personality here, and then he would explain things, – why space had to be short for some items and long for others, why county news, news of small towns around Alexandria, and about people, was much more important financially to the paper than the correct reporting of the death of the sultan of Turkey. The most important thing was to get the local names right. "Don't ever misspell them," he once cautioned him. "Don't ever leave out a part of a name if you can help it. People are awfully sensitive about that. They'll stop their subscription if you don't watch out, and you won't know what's the matter."

Eugene took all these things to heart. He wanted to see how the thing was done, though basically it seemed to be a little small. In fact people seemed a little small, mostly.

One of the things that did interest him was to see the paper put on the press and run off. He liked to help lock up the forms, and to see how they were imposed and registered. He liked to hear the press run, and to help carry the wet papers to the mailing tables and the distributing counter out

in front. The paper hadn't a very large circulation but there was a slight hum of life about that time and he liked it. He liked the sense of getting his hands and face streaked and not caring, and of seeing his hair tousled, in the mirror. He tried to be useful and the various people on the paper came to like him, though he was often a little awkward and slow. He was not strong at this period and his stomach troubled him. He thought, too, that the smell of the ink might affect his lungs, though he did not seriously fear it. In the main it was interesting but small; there was a much larger world outside, he knew that. He hoped to go to it some day; he hoped to go to Chicago.

CHAPTER III

Eugene grew more and more moody and rather restless under Stella's increasing independence. She grew steadily more indifferent because of his moods. The fact that other boys were crazy for her consideration was a great factor; the fact that one particular boy, Harvey Rutter, was persistently genial, not insistent, really better looking than Eugene and much better tempered, helped a great deal. Eugene saw her with him now and then, saw her go skating with him, or at least with a crowd of which he was a member. Eugene hated him heartily; he hated her at times for not yielding to him wholly; but he was none the less wild over her beauty. It stamped his brain with a type or ideal. Thereafter he knew in a really definite way what womanhood ought to be, to be really beautiful.

Another thing it did was to bring home to him a sense of his position in the world. So far he had always been dependent on his parents for food, clothes and spending money, and his parents were not very liberal. He knew other boys who had money to run up to Chicago or down to Springfield – the latter was nearer – to have a Saturday and Sunday lark. No such gaieties were for him. His father would not allow it, or rather would not pay for it. There were other boys who, in consequence of amply provided spending money, were the town dandies. He saw them kicking their heels outside the corner book store, the principal loafing place of the elite, on Wednesdays and Saturdays and sometimes on Sunday evenings preparatory to going somewhere, dressed in a luxury of clothing which was beyond his wildest dreams. Ted Martinwood, the son of the principal drygoods man, had a frock coat in which he sometimes appeared when he came down to the barber shop for a shave before he went to call on his girl. George Anderson was possessed of a dress suit, and wore dancing pumps at all dances. There was Ed Waterbury, who was known to have a horse and runabout of his own. These youths were slightly older, and were interested in girls of a slightly older set, but the point was the same. These things hurt him.

He himself had no avenue of progress which, so far as he could see, was going to bring him to any financial prosperity. His father was never going to be rich, anybody could see that. He himself had made no practical progress in schoolwork – he knew that. He hated insurance – soliciting or writing, despised the sewing machine business, and did not know where he would get with anything which he might like to do in literature or art. His drawing seemed a joke, his writing, or wish for writing, pointless. He was broodingly unhappy.

One day Williams, who had been watching him for a long time, stopped at his desk.

"I say, Witla, why don't you go to Chicago?" he said. "There's a lot more up there for a boy like you than down here. You'll never get anywhere working on a country newspaper."

"I know it," said Eugene.

"Now with me it's different," went on Williams. "I've had my rounds. I've got a wife and three children and when a man's got a family he can't afford to take chances. But you're young yet. Why don't you go to Chicago and get on a paper? You could get something."

"What could I get?" asked Eugene.

"Well, you might get a job as type-setter if you'd join the union. I don't know how good you'd be as a reporter – I hardly think that's your line. But you might study art and learn to draw. Newspaper artists make good money."

Eugene thought of his art. It wasn't much. He didn't do much with it. Still he thought of Chicago; the world appealed to him. If he could only get out of here – if he could only make more than seven or eight dollars a week. He brooded about this.

One Sunday afternoon he and Stella went with Myrtle to Sylvia's home, and after a brief stay Stella announced that she would have to be going; her mother would be expecting her back. Myrtle was for going with her, but altered her mind when Sylvia asked her to stay to tea. "Let Eugene take her home," Sylvia said. Eugene was delighted in his persistent, hopeless way. He was not yet convinced

that she could not be won to love. When they walked out in the fresh sweet air – it was nearing spring – he felt that now he should have a chance of saying something which would be winning – which would lure her to him.

They went out on a street next to the one she lived on quite to the confines of the town. She wanted to turn off at her street, but he had urged her not to. "Do you have to go home just yet?" he asked, pleadingly.

"No, I can walk a little way," she replied.

They reached a vacant place – the last house a little distance back – talking idly. It was getting hard to make talk. In his efforts to be entertaining he picked up three twigs to show her how a certain trick in balancing was performed. It consisted in laying two at right angles with each other and with a third, using the latter as an upright. She could not do it, of course. She was not really very much interested. He wanted her to try and when she did, took hold of her right hand to steady her efforts.

"No, don't," she said, drawing her hand away. "I can do it."

She trifled with the twigs unsuccessfully and was about to let them fall, when he took hold of both her hands. It was so sudden that she could not free herself, and so she looked him straight in the eye.

"Let go, Eugene, please let go."

He shook his head, gazing at her.

"Please let go," she went on. "You mustn't do this. I don't want you to."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Well, because I don't."

"Don't you like me any more, Stella, really?" he asked.

"I don't think I do, not that way."

"But you did."

"I thought I did."

"Have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, I think I have."

He dropped her hands and looked at her fixedly and dramatically. The attitude did not appeal to her. They strolled back to the street, and when they neared her door he said, "Well, I suppose there's no use in my coming to see you any more."

"I think you'd better not," she said simply.

She walked in, never looking back, and instead of going back to his sister's he went home. He was in a very gloomy mood, and after sitting around for a while went to his room. The night fell, and he sat there looking out at the trees and grieving about what he had lost. Perhaps he was not good enough for her – he could not make her love him. Was it that he was not handsome enough – he did not really consider himself good looking – or what was it, a lack of courage or strength?

After a time he noticed that the moon was hanging over the trees like a bright shield in the sky. Two layers of thin clouds were moving in different directions on different levels. He stopped in his cogitations to think where these clouds came from. On sunny days when there were great argosies of them he had seen them disappear before his eyes, and then, marvel of marvels, reappear out of nothingness. The first time he ever saw this it astonished him greatly, for he had never known up to then what clouds were. Afterward he read about them in his physical geography. Tonight he thought of that, and of the great plains over which these winds swept, and of the grass and trees – great forests of them – miles and miles. What a wonderful world! Poets wrote about these things, Longfellow, and Bryant, and Tennyson. He thought of "Thanatopsis," and of the "Elegy," both of which he admired greatly. What was this thing, life?

Then he came back to Stella with an ache. She was actually gone, and she was so beautiful. She would never really talk to him any more. He would never get to hold her hand or kiss her. He clenched his hands with the hurt. Oh, that night on the ice; that night in the sleigh! How wonderful they were! Finally he undressed and went to bed. He wanted to be alone – to be lonely. On his clean white pillow he lay and dreamed of the things that might have been, kisses, caresses, a thousand joys.

One Sunday afternoon he was lying in his hammock thinking, thinking of what a dreary place Alexandria was, anyhow, when he opened a Chicago Saturday afternoon paper, which was something like a Sunday one because it had no Sunday edition, – and went gloomily through it. It was as he had always found, full of a subtle wonder, the wonder of the city, which drew him like a magnet. Here was the drawing of a big hotel someone was going to build; there was a sketch of a great pianist who was coming to play. An account of a new comedy drama; of a little romantic section of Goose Island in the Chicago river, with its old decayed boats turned into houses and geese waddling about; an item of a man falling through a coal hole on South Halstead street fascinated him. This last was at sixty-two hundred and something and the idea of such a long street seized on his imagination. What a tremendous city Chicago must be. The thought of car lines, crowds, trains, came to him with almost a yearning appeal.

All at once the magnet got him. It gripped his very soul, this wonder, this beauty, this life.

"I'm going to Chicago," he thought, and got up.

There was his nice, quiet little home laid out before him. Inside were his mother, his father, Myrtle. Still he was going. He could come back. "Sure I can come back," he thought. Propelled by this magnetic power he went in and upstairs to his room, and got a little grip or portmanteau he had. He put in it the things he thought he would immediately need. In his pocket were nine dollars, money he had been saving for some time. Finally he came downstairs and stood in the door of the sitting room.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother, looking at his solemn introspective face.

"I'm going to Chicago," he said.

"When?" she asked, astonished, a little uncertain of just what he meant.

"Today," he said.

"No, you're joking." She smiled unbelievingly. This was a boyish prank.

"I'm going today," he said. "I'm going to catch that four o'clock train."

Her face saddened. "You're not?" she said.

"I can come back," he replied, "if I want to. I want to get something else to do."

His father came in at this time. He had a little work room out in the barn where he sometimes cleaned machines and repaired vehicles. He was fresh from such a task now.

"What's up?" he asked, seeing his wife close to her boy.

"Eugene's going to Chicago."

"Since when?" he inquired amusedly.

"Today. He says he's going right now."

"You don't mean it," said Witla, astonished. He really did not believe it. "Why don't you take a little time and think it over? What are you going to live on?"

"I'll live," said Eugene. "I'm going. I've had enough of this place. I'm going to get out."

"All right," said his father, who, after all, believed in initiative. Evidently after all he hadn't quite understood this boy. "Got your trunk packed?"

"No, but mother can send me that."

"Don't go today," pleaded his mother. "Wait until you get something ready, Eugene. Wait and do a little thinking about it. Wait until tomorrow."

"I want to go today, ma." He slipped his arm around her. "Little ma." He was bigger than she by now, and still growing.

"All right, Eugene," she said softly, "but I wish you wouldn't." Her boy was leaving her – her heart was hurt.

"I can come back, ma. It's only a hundred miles."

"Well, all right," she said finally, trying to brighten. "I'll pack your bag."

"I have already."

She went to look.

"Well, it'll soon be time," said Witla, who was thinking that Eugene might back down. "I'm sorry. Still it may be a good thing for you. You're always welcome here, you know."

"I know," said Eugene.

They went finally to the train together, he and his father and Myrtle. His mother couldn't. She stayed to cry.

On the way to the depot they stopped at Sylvia's.

"Why, Eugene," she exclaimed, "how ridiculous! Don't go."

"He's set," said Witla.

Eugene finally got loose. He seemed to be fighting love, home ties, everything, every step of the way. Finally he reached the depot. The train came. Witla grabbed his hand affectionately. "Be a good boy," he said, swallowing a gulp.

Myrtle kissed him. "You're so funny, Eugene. Write me."

"I will."

He stepped on the train. The bell rang. Out the cars rolled – out and on. He looked out on the familiar scenes and then a real ache came to him – Stella, his mother, his father, Myrtle, the little home. They were all going out of his life.

"Hm," he half groaned, clearing his throat. "Gee!"

And then he sank back and tried, as usual, not to think. He must succeed. That's what the world was made for. That was what he was made for. That was what he would have to do…

CHAPTER IV

The city of Chicago – who shall portray it! This vast ruck of life that had sprung suddenly into existence upon the dank marshes of a lake shore. Miles and miles of dreary little houses; miles and miles of wooden block-paved streets, with gas lamps placed and water mains laid, and empty wooden walks set for pedestrians; the beat of a hundred thousand hammers; the ring of a hundred thousand trowels! Long, converging lines of telegraph poles; thousands upon thousands of sentinel cottages, factory plants, towering smoke stacks, and here and there a lone, shabby church steeple, sitting out pathetically upon vacant land. The raw prairie stretch was covered with yellow grass; the great broad highways of the tracks of railroads, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, laid side by side and strung with thousands upon thousands of shabby cars, like beads upon a string. Engines clanging, trains moving, people waiting at street crossings – pedestrians, wagon drivers, street car drivers, drays of beer, trucks of coal, brick, stone, sand – a spectacle of new, raw, necessary life!

As Eugene began to draw near it he caught for the first time the sense and significance of a great city. What were these newspaper shadows he had been dealing with in his reading compared to this vivid, articulate, eager thing? Here was the substance of a new world, substantial, fascinating, different. The handsome suburban station at South Chicago, the first of its kind he had ever seen, took his eye, as the train rolled cityward. He had never before seen a crowd of foreigners – working men – and here were Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, waiting for a local train. He had never seen a really large factory plant, and here was one, and another, and another – steel works, potteries, soap-factories, foundries, all gaunt and hard in the Sunday evening air. There seemed to be, for all it was Sunday, something youthful, energetic and alive about the streets. He noted the streetcars waiting; at one place a small river was crossed on a draw, – dirty, gloomy, but crowded with boats and lined with great warehouses, grain elevators, coal pockets – that architecture of necessity and utility. His imagination was fired by this for here was something that could be done brilliantly in black – a spot of red or green for ship and bridge lights. There were some men on the magazines who did things like this, only not so vivid.

The train threaded its way through long lines of cars coming finally into an immense train shed where arc lights were spluttering – a score under a great curved steel and glass roof, where people were hurrying to and fro. Engines were hissing; bells clanging raucously. He had no relatives, no soul to turn to, but somehow he did not feel lonely. This picture of life, this newness, fascinated him. He stepped down and started leisurely to the gate, wondering which way he should go. He came to a corner where a lamp post already lit blazoned the name Madison. He looked out on this street and saw, as far as the eye could reach, two lines of stores, jingling horse cars, people walking. What a sight, he thought, and turned west. For three miles he walked, musing, and then as it was dark, and he had arranged for no bed, he wondered where he should eat and sleep. A fat man sitting outside a livery stable door in a tilted, cane-seated chair offered a possibility of information.

"Do you know where I can get a room around here?" asked Eugene.

The lounger looked him over. He was the proprietor of the place.

"There's an old lady living over there at seven-thirty-two," he said, "who has a room, I think. She might take you in." He liked Eugene's looks.

Eugene crossed over and rang a downstairs bell. The door was opened shortly by a tall, kindly woman, of a rather matriarchal turn. Her hair was gray.

"Yes?" she inquired.

"The gentleman at the livery stable over there said I might get a room here. I'm looking for one."

She smiled pleasantly. This boy looked his strangeness, his wide-eyed interest, his freshness from the country. "Come in," she said. "I have a room. You can look at it."

It was a front room – a little bed-room off the one main living room, clean, simple, convenient. "This looks all right," he said.

She smiled.

"You can have it for two dollars a week," she proffered.

"That's all right," he said, putting down his grip. "I'll take it."

"Have you had supper?" she asked.

"No, but I'm going out soon. I want to see the streets. I'll find some place."

"I'll give you something," she said.

Eugene thanked her, and she smiled. This was what Chicago did to the country. It took the boys.

He opened the closed shutters of his window and knelt before it, leaning on the sill. He looked out idly, for it was all so wonderful. Bright lights were burning in store windows. These people hurrying – how their feet sounded – clap, clap, clap. And away east and away west it was all like this. It was all like this everywhere, a great big, wonderful city. It was nice to be here. He felt that now. It was all worth while. How could he have stayed in Alexandria so long! He would get along here. Certainly he would. He was perfectly sure of that. He knew.

Chicago at this time certainly offered a world of hope and opportunity to the beginner. It was so new, so raw; everything was in the making. The long lines of houses and stores were mostly temporary make-shifts – one and two story frame affairs – with here and there a three and four story brick building which spoke of better days to come. Down in the business heart which lay between the lake and the river, the North Side and the South Side, was a region which spoke of a tremendous future, for here were stores which served the buying public, not only of Chicago, but of the Middle West. There were great banks, great office buildings, great retail stores, great hotels. The section was running with a tide of people which represented the youth, the illusions, the untrained aspirations, of millions of souls. When you walked into this area you could feel what Chicago meant – eagerness, hope, desire. It was a city that put vitality into almost every wavering heart: it made the beginner dream dreams; the aged to feel that misfortune was never so grim that it might not change.

Underneath, of course, was struggle. Youth and hope and energy were setting a terrific pace. You had to work here, to move, to step lively. You had to have ideas. This city demanded of you your very best, or it would have little to do with you. Youth in its search for something – and age – were quickly to feel this. It was no fool's paradise.

Eugene, once he was settled, realized this. He had the notion, somehow, that the printer's trade was all over for him. He wanted no more of that. He wanted to be an artist or something like that, although he hardly knew how to begin. The papers offered one way, but he was not sure that they took on beginners. He had had no training whatever. His sister Myrtle had once said that some of his little thumb-nail sketches were pretty, but what did she know? If he could study somewhere, find someone who would teach him… Meanwhile he would have to work.

He tried the newspapers first of course, for those great institutions seemed the ideal resort for anyone who wanted to get up in the world, but the teeming offices with frowning art directors and critical newspaper workers frightened him. One art director did see something in the three or four little sketches he showed, but he happened to be in a crusty mood, and did not want anybody anyway. He simply said no, there was nothing. Eugene thought that perhaps as an artist also, he was destined to be a failure.

The trouble with this boy was really that he was not half awake yet. The beauty of life, its wonder, had cast a spell over him, but he could not yet interpret it in line and color. He walked about these wonderful streets, gazing in the windows, looking at the boats on the river, looking at the ships on the lake. One day, while he was standing on the lake shore, there came a ship in full sail in the offing – the first he had ever seen. It gripped his sense of beauty. He clasped his hands nervously and thrilled to it. Then he sat down on the lake wall and looked and looked and looked until it gradually sank below the horizon. So this was how the great lakes were; and how the great seas must be – the

Atlantic and the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Ah, the sea! Some day, perhaps he would go to New York. That was where the sea was. But here it was also, in miniature, and it was wonderful.

One cannot moon by lake shores and before store windows and at bridge draws and live, unless one is provided with the means of living, and this Eugene was not. He had determined when he left home that he would be independent. He wanted to get a salary in some way that he could at least live on. He wanted to write back and be able to say that he was getting along nicely. His trunk came, and a loving letter from his mother, and some money, but he sent that back. It was only ten dollars, but he objected to beginning that way. He thought he ought to earn his own way, and he wanted to try, anyhow.

After ten days his funds were very low, a dollar and seventy-five cents, and he decided that any job would have to do. Never mind about art or type-setting now. He could not get the last without a union card, he must take anything, and so he applied from store to store. The cheap little shops in which he asked were so ugly they hurt, but he tried to put his artistic sensibilities aside. He asked for anything, to be made a clerk in a bakery, in a dry goods store, in a candy store. After a time a hardware store loomed up, and he asked there. The man looked at him curiously. "I might give you a place at storing stoves."

Eugene did not understand, but he accepted gladly. It only paid six dollars a week, but he could live on that. He was shown to a loft in charge of two rough men, stove fitters, polishers, and repairers, who gruffly explained to him that his work was to brush the rust off the decayed stoves, to help piece and screw them together, to polish and lift things, for this was a second hand stove business which bought and repaired stoves from junk dealers all over the city. Eugene had a low bench near a window where he was supposed to do his polishing, but he very frequently wasted his time here looking out into the green yards of some houses in a side street. The city was full of wonder to him – its every detail fascinating. When a rag-picker would go by calling "rags, old iron," or a vegetable vender crying "tomatoes, potatoes, green corn, peas," he would stop and listen, the musical pathos of the cries appealing to him. Alexandria had never had anything like this. It was all so strange. He saw himself making pen and ink sketches of things, of the clothes lines in the back yards and of the maids with baskets.

On one of the days when he thought he was working fairly well (he had been there two weeks), one of the two repairers said, "Hey, get a move on you. You're not paid to look out the window." Eugene stopped. He had not realized that he was loafing.

"What have you got to do with it?" he asked, hurt and half defiant. He was under the impression that he was working with these men, not under them.

"I'll show you, you fresh kid," said the older of the two, who was an individual built on the order of "Bill Sykes." "You're under me. You get a move on you, and don't give me any more of your lip."

Eugene was startled. It was a flash of brutality out of a clear sky. The animal, whom he had been scanning as an artist would, as a type, out of the corner of his eye, was revealing himself.

"You go to the devil," said Eugene, only half awake to the grim reality of the situation.

"What's that!" exclaimed the man, making for him. He gave him a shove toward the wall, and attempted to kick him with his big, hob-nailed boot. Eugene picked up a stove leg. His face was wax white.

"Don't you try that again," he said darkly. He fixed the leg in his hand firmly.

"Call it off, Jim," said the other man, who saw the uselessness of so much temper. "Don't hit him. Send him down stairs if you don't like him."

"You get to hell out of here, then," said Eugene's noble superior.

Eugene walked to a nail where his hat and coat were, carrying the stove leg. He edged past his assailant cautiously, fearing a second attack. The man was inclined to kick at him again because of his stubbornness, but forebore.

"You're too fresh, Willie. You want to wake up, you dough face," he said as Eugene went.

Eugene slipped out quietly. His spirit was hurt and torn. What a scene! He, Eugene Witla, kicked at, and almost kicked out, and that in a job that paid six dollars a week. A great lump came up in his throat, but it went down again. He wanted to cry but he could not. He went downstairs, stovepolish on his hands and face and slipped up to the desk.

"I want to quit," he said to the man who had hired him.

"All right, what's the matter?"

"That big brute up there tried to kick me," he explained.

"They're pretty rough men," answered the employer. "I was afraid you wouldn't get along. I guess you're not strong enough. Here you are." He laid out three dollars and a half. Eugene wondered at this queer interpretation of his complaint. He must get along with these men? They musn't get along with him? So the city had that sort of brutality in it.

He went home and washed up, and then struck out again, for it was no time now to be without a job. After a week he found one, – as a house runner for a real estate concern, a young man to bring in the numbers of empty houses and post up the "For Rent" signs in the windows. It paid eight dollars and seemed to offer opportunities of advancement. Eugene might have stayed there indefinitely had it not failed after three months. He had reached the season of fall clothes then, and the need of a winter overcoat, but he made no complaint to his family. He wanted to appear to be getting along well, whether he was or not.

One of the things which tended to harden and sharpen his impressions of life at this time was the show of luxury seen in some directions. On Michigan Avenue and Prairie Avenue, on Ashland Avenue and Washington Boulevard, were sections which were crowded with splendid houses such as Eugene had never seen before. He was astonished at the magnificence of their appointments, the beauty of the lawns, the show of the windows, the distinction of the equipages which accompanied them and served them. For the first time in his life he saw liveried footmen at doors: he saw at a distance girls and women grown who seemed marvels of beauty to him – they were so distinguished in their dress; he saw young men carrying themselves with an air of distinction which he had never seen before. These must be the society people the newspapers were always talking about. His mind made no distinctions as yet. If there were fine clothes, fine trappings, of course social prestige went with them. It made him see for the first time what far reaches lay between the conditions of a beginner from the country and what the world really had to offer – or rather what it showered on some at the top. It subdued and saddened him a little. Life was unfair.

These fall days, too, with their brown leaves, sharp winds, scudding smoke and whirls of dust showed him that the city could be cruel. He met shabby men, sunken eyed, gloomy, haggard, who looked at him, apparently out of a deep despair. These creatures all seemed to be brought where they were by difficult circumstances. If they begged at all, – and they rarely did of him, for he did not look prosperous enough, it was with the statement that unfortunate circumstances had brought them where they were. You could fail so easily. You could really starve if you didn't look sharp, – the city quickly taught him that.

During these days he got immensely lonely. He was not very sociable, and too introspective. He had no means of making friends, or thought he had none. So he wandered about the streets at night, marveling at the sights he saw, or staying at home in his little room. Mrs. Woodruff, the landlady, was nice and motherly enough, but she was not young and did not fit into his fancies. He was thinking about girls and how sad it was not to have one to say a word to him. Stella was gone – that dream was over. When would he find another like her?

After wandering around for nearly a month, during which time he was compelled to use some money his mother sent him to buy a suit of clothes on an instalment plan, he got a place as driver of a laundry, which, because it paid ten dollars a week, seemed very good. He sketched now and then when he was not tired, but what he did seemed pointless. So he worked here, driving a wagon, when he should have been applying for an art opening, or taking art lessons.

During this winter Myrtle wrote him that Stella Appleton had moved to Kansas, whither her father had gone; and that his mother's health was bad, and that she did so want him to come home and stay awhile. It was about this time that he became acquainted with a little Scotch girl named Margaret Duff, who worked in the laundry, and became quickly involved in a relationship which established a precedent in his experiences with women. Before this he had never physically known a girl. Now, and of a sudden, he was plunged into something which awakened a new, and if not evil, at least disrupting and disorganizing propensity of his character. He loved women, the beauty of the curves of their bodies. He loved beauty of feature and after a while was to love beauty of mind, – he did now, in a vague, unformed way, – but his ideal was as yet not clear to him. Margaret Duff represented some simplicity of attitude, some generosity of spirit, some shapeliness of form, some comeliness of feature, – it was not more. But, growing by what it fed on, his sex appetite became powerful. In a few weeks it had almost mastered him. He burned to be with this girl daily – and she was perfectly willing that he should, so long as the relationship did not become too conspicuous. She was a little afraid of her parents, although those two, being working people, retired early and slept soundly. They did not seem to mind her early philanderings with boys. This latest one was no novelty. It burned fiercely for three months – Eugene was eager, insatiable: the girl not so much so, but complaisant. She liked this evidence of fire in him, – the hard, burning flame she had aroused, and yet after a time she got a little tired. Then little personal differences arose, – differences of taste, differences of judgment, differences of interest. He really could not talk to her of anything serious, could not get a response to his more delicate emotions. For her part she could not find in him any ready appreciation of the little things she liked – theater jests, and the bright remarks of other boys and girls. She had some conception of what was tasteful in dress, but as for anything else, art, literature, public affairs, she knew nothing at all, while Eugene, for all his youth, was intensely alive to what was going on in the great world. The sound of great names and great fames was in his ears, – Carlyle, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman. He read of great philosophers, painters, musicians, meteors that sped across the intellectual sky of the western world, and he wondered. He felt as though some day he would be called to do something – in his youthful enthusiasm he half-thought it might be soon. He knew that this girl he was trifling with could not hold him. She had lured him, but once lured he was master, judge, critic. He was beginning to feel that he could get along without her, – that he could find someone better.

Naturally such an attitude would make for the death of passion, as the satiation of passion would make for the development of such an attitude. Margaret became indifferent. She resented his superior airs, his top-lofty tone at times. They quarreled over little things. One night he suggested something that she ought to do in the haughty manner customary with him.

"Oh, don't be so smart!" she said. "You always talk as though you owned me."

"I do," he said jestingly.

"Do you?" she flared. "There are others."

"Well, whenever you're ready you can have them. I'm willing."

The tone cut her, though actually it was only an ill-timed bit of teasing, more kindly meant than it sounded.

"Well, I'm ready now. You needn't come to see me unless you want to. I can get along."

She tossed her head.

"Don't be foolish, Margy," he said, seeing the ill wind he had aroused. "You don't mean that."

"Don't I? Well, we'll see." She walked away from him to another corner of the room. He followed her, but her anger re-aroused his opposition. "Oh, all right," he said after a time. "I guess I'd better be going."

She made no response, neither pleas nor suggestions. He went and secured his hat and coat and came back. "Want to kiss me good-bye?" he inquired.

"No," she said simply.

"Good-night," he called.

"Good-night," she replied indifferently.
The relationship was never amicably readjusted after this, although it did endure for some time.

CHAPTER V

For the time being this encounter stirred to an almost unbridled degree Eugene's interest in women. Most men are secretly proud of their triumph with woman – their ability to triumph – and any evidence of their ability to attract, entertain, hold, is one of those things which tends to give them an air of superiority and self-sufficiency which is sometimes lacking in those who are not so victorious. This was, in its way, his first victory of the sort, and it pleased him mightily. He felt much more sure of himself instead of in any way ashamed. What, he thought, did the silly boys back in Alexandria know of life compared to this? Nothing. He was in Chicago now. The world was different. He was finding himself to be a man, free, individual, of interest to other personalities. Margaret Duff had told him many pretty things about himself. She had complimented his looks, his total appearance, his taste in the selection of particular things. He had felt what it is to own a woman. He strutted about for a time, the fact that he had been dismissed rather arbitrarily having little weight with him because he was so very ready to be dismissed, sudden dissatisfaction with his job now stirred up in him, for ten dollars a week was no sum wherewith any self-respecting youth could maintain himself, – particularly with a view to sustaining any such relationship as that which had just ended. He felt that he ought to get a better place.

Then one day a woman to whom he was delivering a parcel at her home in Warren Avenue, stopped him long enough to ask: "What do you drivers get a week for your work?"

"I get ten dollars," said Eugene. "I think some get more."

"You ought to make a good collector," she went on. She was a large, homely, incisive, straight-talking woman. "Would you like to change to that kind of work?"

Eugene was sick of the laundry business. The hours were killing. He had worked as late as one o'clock Sunday morning.

"I think I would," he exclaimed. "I don't know anything about it, but this work is no fun."

"My husband is the manager of The People's Furniture Company," she went on. "He needs a good collector now and then. I think he's going to make a change very soon. I'll speak to him."

Eugene smiled joyously and thanked her. This was surely a windfall. He was anxious to know what collectors were paid but he thought it scarcely tactful to ask.

"If he gives you a job you will probably get fourteen dollars to begin with," she volunteered.

Eugene thrilled. That would be really a rise in the world. Four dollars more! He could get some nice clothes out of that and have spending money besides. He might get a chance to study art. His visions began to multiply. One could get up in the world by trying. The energetic delivery he had done for this laundry had brought him this. Further effort in the other field might bring him more. And he was young yet.

He had been working for the laundry company for six months. Six weeks later, Mr. Henry Mitchly, manager of the People's Furniture, wrote him care of the laundry company to call at his home any evening after eight and he would see him. "My wife has spoken to me of you," he added.

Eugene complied the same day that he received the note, and was looked over by a lean, brisk, unctuous looking man of forty, who asked him various questions as to his work, his home, how much money he took in as a driver, and what not. Finally he said, "I need a bright young man down at my place. It's a good job for one who is steady and honest and hardworking. My wife seems to think you work pretty well, so I'm willing to give you a trial. I can put you to work at fourteen dollars. I want you to come to see me a week from Monday."

Eugene thanked him. He decided, on Mr. Mitchly's advice, to give his laundry manager a full week's notice. He told Margaret that he was leaving and she was apparently glad for his sake. The management was slightly sorry, for Eugene was a good driver. During his last week he helped break in a new man in his place, and on Monday appeared before Mr. Mitchly.

Mr. Mitchly was glad to have him, for he had seen him as a young man of energy and force. He explained the simple nature of the work, which was to take bills for clocks, silverware, rugs, anything which the company sold, and go over the various routes collecting the money due, – which would average from seventy five to a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day. "Most companies in our line require a bond," he explained, "but we haven't come to that yet. I think I know honest young men when I see them. Anyhow we have a system of inspection. If a man's inclined to be dishonest he can't get very far with us."

Eugene had never thought of this question of honesty very much. He had been raised where he did not need to worry about the matter of a little pocket change, and he had made enough at the *Appeal* to supply his immediate wants. Besides, among the people he had always associated with it was considered a very right and necessary thing to be honest. Men were arrested for not being. He remembered one very sad case of a boy he knew being arrested at Alexandria for breaking into a store at night. That seemed a terrible thing to him at the time. Since then he had been speculating a great deal, in a vague way as to what honesty was, but he had not yet decided. He knew that it was expected of him to account for the last penny of anything that was placed in his keeping and he was perfectly willing to do so. The money he earned seemed enough if he had to live on it. There was no need for him to aid in supporting anyone else. So he slipped along rather easily and practically untested.

Eugene took the first day's package of bills as laid out for him, and carefully went from door to door. In some places money was paid him for which he gave a receipt, in others he was put off or refused because of previous difficulties with the company. In a number of places people had moved, leaving no trace of themselves, and packing the unpaid for goods with them. It was his business, as Mr. Mitchly explained, to try to get track of them from the neighbors.

Eugene saw at once that he was going to like the work. The fresh air, the out-door life, the walking, the quickness with which his task was accomplished, all pleased him. His routes took him into strange and new parts of the city, where he had never been before, and introduced him to types he had never met. His laundry work, taking him from door to door, had been a freshening influence, and this was another. He saw scenes that he felt sure he could, when he had learned to draw a little better, make great things of, – dark, towering factory-sites, great stretches of railroad yards laid out like a puzzle in rain, snow, or bright sunlight; great smoke-stacks throwing their black heights athwart morning or evening skies. He liked them best in the late afternoon when they stood out in a glow of red or fading purple. "Wonderful," he used to exclaim to himself, and think how the world would marvel if he could ever come to do great pictures like those of Doré. He admired the man's tremendous imagination. He never thought of himself as doing anything in oils or water colors or chalk – only pen and ink, and that in great, rude splotches of black and white. That was the way. That was the way force was had.

But he could not do them. He could only think them.

One of his chief joys was the Chicago river, its black, mucky water churned by puffing tugs and its banks lined by great red grain elevators and black coal chutes and yellow lumber yards. Here was real color and life – the thing to draw; and then there were the low, drab, rain-soaked cottages standing in lonely, shabby little rows out on flat prairie land, perhaps a scrubby tree somewhere near. He loved these. He would take an envelope and try to get the sense of them – the feel, as he called it – but it wouldn't come. All he did seemed cheap and commonplace, mere pointless lines and stiff wooden masses. How did the great artists get their smoothness and ease? He wondered.

CHAPTER VI

Eugene collected and reported faithfully every day, and had managed to save a little money. Margaret was now a part of his past. His landlady, Mrs. Woodruff, had gone to live with a daughter in Sedalia, Missouri, and he had moved to a comparatively nice house in East Twenty-first Street on the South Side. It had taken his eye because of a tree in a fifty foot space of ground before it. Like his other room it cost him little, and he was in a private family. He arranged a twenty cent rate per meal for such meals as he took there, and thus he managed to keep his bare living expenses down to five dollars a week. The remaining nine he spent sparingly for clothes, car-fare, and amusements – almost nothing of the latter. When he saw he had a little money in reserve he began to think of looking up the Art Institute, which had been looming up in his mind as an avenue of advancement, and find out on what condition he could join a night class in drawing. They were very reasonable, he heard, only fifteen dollars a quarter, and he decided to begin if the conditions were not too severe. He was beginning to be convinced that he was born to be an artist – how soon he could not tell.

The old Art Institute, which preceded the present impressive structure, was located at Michigan Avenue and Monroe Street, and presented an atmosphere of distinction which was not present in most of the structures representing the public taste of the period. It was a large six storey building of brown stone, and contained a number of studios for painters, sculptors, and music teachers, besides the exhibition rooms and the rooms for the classes. There were both day and evening classes, and even at that time a large number of students. The western soul, to a certain extent, was fired by the wonder of art. There was so little of it in the life of the people – the fame of those who could accomplish things in this field and live in a more refined atmosphere was great. To go to Paris! To be a student in any one of the great ateliers of that city! Or of Munich or Rome, to know the character of the artistic treasures of Europe – the life of the Art quarter – that was something. There was what might have been termed a wild desire in the breast of many an untutored boy and girl to get out of the ranks of the commonplace; to assume the character and the habiliments of the artistic temperament as they were then supposed to be; to have a refined, semi-languorous, semi-indifferent manner; to live in a studio, to have a certain freedom in morals and temperament not accorded to the ordinary person – these were the great things to do and be. Of course, art composition was a part of this. You were supposed ultimately to paint great pictures or do noble sculptures, but in the meanwhile you could and should live the life of the artist. And that was beautiful and wonderful and free.

Eugene had long had some sense of this. He was aware that there were studios in Chicago; that certain men were supposed to be doing good work – he saw it in the papers. There were mentions now and then of exhibitions, mostly free, which the public attended but sparingly. Once there was an exhibition of some of the war pictures of Verestchagin, a great Russian painter who had come West for some purpose. Eugene saw them one Sunday afternoon, and was enthralled by the magnificence of their grasp of the elements of battle; the wonder of color; the truth of character; the dramatic quality; the sense of force and danger and horror and suffering which was somehow around and in and through everything that was shown. This man had virility and insight; stupendous imagination and temperament. Eugene stood and stared, wondering how such things could be done. Ever afterward the name of Verestchagin was like a great call to his imagination; that was the kind of an artist to be if you were going to be one.

Another picture came there once, which appealed to another side of his nature, although primarily the basis of its appeal was artistic. It was a great, warm tinted nude by Bouguereau, a French artist who was startling his day with his daring portrayal of the nude. The types he depicted were not namby-pamby little slim-bodied women with spindling qualities of strength and passion, but great, full-blown women whose voluptuous contour of neck and arms and torso and hip and thigh was enough to set the blood of youth at fever heat. The man obviously understood and had passion, love of

form, love of desire, love of beauty. He painted with a sense of the bridal bed in the background; of motherhood and of fat, growing babies, joyously nursed. These women stood up big in their sense of beauty and magnetism, the soft lure of desire in their eyes, their full lips parted, their cheeks flushed with the blood of health. As such they were anathema to the conservative and puritanical in mind, the religious in temperament, the cautious in training or taste. The very bringing of this picture to Chicago as a product for sale was enough to create a furore of objection. Such pictures should not be painted, was the cry of the press; or if painted, not exhibited. Bouguereau was conceived of by many as one of those dastards of art who were endeavoring to corrupt by their talent the morals of the world; there was a cry raised that the thing should be suppressed; and as is always the case in all such outbursts of special class opposition, the interest of the general public was aroused.

Eugene was one of those who noted the discussion. He had never seen a picture by Bouguereau or, indeed, an original nude by any other artist. Being usually at liberty after three o'clock, he was free to visit some of these things, and having found it possible to do his work in good clothes he had come to wear his best suit every day. He was a fairly presentable youth with a solemn mien, and his request to be shown anything in any art store would have aroused no surprise. He looked as though he belonged to the intellectual and artistic classes.

Not being sure of what reception would be accorded one so young – he was now nearing twenty – he nevertheless ventured to stop at the gallery where the Bouguereau was being exhibited and ask to see it. The attendant in charge eyed him curiously, but led him back to a room hung in dark red, and turning on a burst of incandescent bulbs set in the ceiling of a red plush hung cabinet, pulled back the curtain revealing the picture. Eugene had never seen such a figure and face. It was a dream of beauty – his ideal come to life. He studied the face and neck, the soft mass of brown, sensuous hair massed at the back of the head, the flowerlike lips and soft cheeks. He marveled at the suggestion of the breasts and the abdomen, that potentiality of motherhood that is so firing to the male. He could have stood there hours dreaming, luxuriating, but the attendant who had left him alone with it for a few minutes returned.

"What is the price of this?" Eugene asked.

"Ten thousand dollars," was the reply.

He smiled solemnly. "It's a wonderful thing," he said, and turned to go. The attendant put out the light.

This picture, like those of Verestchagin, made a sharp impression on him. Curiously he had no longing to paint anything of this kind. He only rejoiced to look at it. It spoke to him of his present ideal of womanhood – physical beauty, and he longed with all his heart to find a creature like that who would look on him with favor.

There were other exhibitions – one containing a genuine Rembrandt – which impressed him, but none like these that had definitely stirred him. His interest in art was becoming eager. He wanted to find out all about it – to do something himself. One day he ventured to call at the Art Institute building and consult the secretary, who explained to him what the charges were. He learned from her, for she was a woman of a practical, clerical turn, that the classes ran from October to May, that he could enter a life or antique class or both, though the antique alone was advisable for the time, and a class in illustration, where costumes of different periods were presented on different models. He found that each class had an instructor of supposed note, whom it was not necessary for him to see. Each class had a monitor and each student was supposed to work faithfully for his own benefit. Eugene did not get to see the class rooms, but he gained a sense of the art of it all, nevertheless, for the halls and offices were decorated in an artistic way, and there were many plaster casts of arms, legs, busts, and thighs and heads. It was as though one stood in an open doorway and looked out upon a new world. The one thing that gratified him was that he could study pen and ink or brush in the illustration class, and that he could also join a sketch class from five to six every afternoon without extra charges if he preferred to devote his evening hours to studying drawing in the life class. He

was a little astonished to learn from a printed prospectus given him that the life class meant nude models to work from – both men and women. He was surely approaching a different world now. It seemed necessary and natural enough, and yet there was an aloof atmosphere about it, something that suggested the inner precincts of a shrine, to which only talent was admitted. Was he talented? Wait! He would show the world, even if he was a raw country boy.

The classes which he decided to enter were first a life class which convened Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings at seven in one of the study rooms and remained in session until ten o'clock, and second a sketch class which met from five to six every afternoon. Eugene felt that he knew little or nothing about figure and anatomy and had better work at that. Costume and illustration would have to wait, and as for the landscapes, or rather city-scapes, of which he was so fond, he could afford to defer those until he learned something of the fundamentals of art.

Heretofore he had rarely attempted the drawing of a face or figure except in miniature and as details of a larger scene. Now he was confronted with the necessity of sketching in charcoal the head or body of a living person, and it frightened him a little. He knew that he would be in a class with fifteen or twenty other male students. They would be able to see and comment on what he was doing. Twice a week an instructor would come around and pass upon his work. There were honors for those who did the best work during any one month, he learned from the prospectus, namely: first choice of seats around the model at the beginning of each new pose. The class instructors must be of considerable significance in the American art world, he thought, for they were N. A.'s, and that meant National Academicians. He little knew with what contempt this honor was received in some quarters, or he would not have attached so much significance to it.

One Monday evening in October, armed with the several sheets of paper which he had been told to purchase by his all-informing prospectus, he began his work. He was a little nervous at sight of the brightly lighted halls and class rooms, and the moving crowd of young men and women did not tend to allay his fears. He was struck at once with the quality of gaiety, determination and easy grace which marked the different members of this company. The boys struck him as interesting, virile, in many cases good looking; the girls as graceful, rather dashing and confident. One or two whom he noted were beautiful in a dark way. This was a wonderful world.

The rooms too, were exceptional. They were old enough in use to be almost completely covered, as to the walls, with the accumulation of paint scraped from the palettes. There were no easels or other paraphernalia, but simply chairs and little stools – the former, as Eugene learned, to be turned upside down for easels, the latter for the students to sit on. In the center of the room was a platform, the height of an ordinary table, for the model to pose on, and in one corner a screen which constituted a dressing room. There were no pictures or statuary – just the bare walls – but curiously, in one corner, a piano. Out in the halls and in the general lounging center were pictures of nude figures or parts of figures posed in all sorts of ways which Eugene, in his raw, youthful way, thought suggestive. He secretly rejoiced to look at them but he felt that he must not say anything about what he thought. An art student, he felt sure, must appear to be indifferent to such suggestion – to be above such desire. They were here to work, not to dream of women.

When the time came for the classes to assemble there was a scurrying to and fro, conferring between different students, and then the men found themselves in one set of rooms and the women in another. Eugene saw a young girl in his room, sitting up near the screen, idly gazing about. She was pretty, of a slightly Irish cast of countenance, with black hair and black eyes. She wore a cap that was an imitation of the Polish national head-dress, and a red cape. Eugene assumed her to be the class model and secretly wondered if he was really to see her in the nude. In a few minutes all the students were gathered, and then there was a stir as there strolled in a rather vigorous and picturesque man of thirty-six or thereabouts, who sauntered to the front of the room and called the class to order. He was clad in a shabby suit of grey tweed and crowned with a little brown hat, shoved rakishly over one ear, which he did not trouble to take off. He wore a soft blue hickory shirt without collar or tie, and

looked immensely self-sufficient. He was tall and lean and raw-boned, with a face which was long and narrow; his eyes were large and wide set, his mouth big and firm in its lines; he had big hands and feet, and an almost rolling gait. Eugene assumed instinctively that this was Mr. Temple Boyle, N. A., the class instructor, and he imagined there would be an opening address of some kind. But the instructor merely announced that Mr. William Ray had been appointed monitor and that he hoped that there would be no disorder or wasting of time. There would be regular criticism days by him – Wednesdays and Fridays. He hoped that each pupil would be able to show marked improvement. The class would now begin work. Then he strolled out.

Eugene soon learned from one of the students that this really was Mr. Boyle. The young Irish girl had gone behind the screen. Eugene could see partially, from where he was sitting, that she was disrobing. It shocked him a little, but he kept his courage and his countenance because of the presence of so many others. He turned a chair upside down as he saw the others do, and sat down on a stool. His charcoal was lying in a little box beside him. He straightened his paper on its board and fidgeted, keeping as still as he could. Some of the students were talking. Suddenly he saw the girl divest herself of a thin, gauze shirt, and the next moment she came out, naked and composed, to step upon the platform and stand perfectly erect, her arms by her side, her head thrown back. Eugene tingled and blushed and was almost afraid to look directly at her. Then he took a stick of charcoal and began sketching feebly, attempting to convey something of this personality and this pose to paper. It seemed a wonderful thing for him to be doing – to be in this room, to see this girl posing so; in short, to be an art student. So this was what it was, a world absolutely different from anything he had ever known. And he was self-called to be a member of it.

CHAPTER VII

It was after he had decided to enter the art class that Eugene paid his first visit to his family. Though they were only a hundred miles away, he had never felt like going back, even at Christmas. Now it seemed to him he had something definite to proclaim. He was going to be an artist; and as to his work, he was getting along well in that. Mr. Mitchly appeared to like him. It was to Mr. Mitchly that he reported daily with his collections and his unsatisfied bills. The collections were checked up by Mr. Mitchly with the cash, and the unpaid bills certified. Sometimes Eugene made a mistake, having too much or too little, but the "too much" was always credited against the "too little," so that in the main he came out even. In money matters there was no tendency on Eugene's part to be dishonest. He thought of lots of things he wanted, but he was fairly well content to wait and come by them legitimately. It was this note in him that appealed to Mitchly. He thought that possibly something could be made of Eugene in a trade way.

He left the Friday night preceding Labor Day, the first Monday in September, which was a holiday throughout the city. He had told Mr. Mitchly that he thought of leaving Saturday after work for over Sunday and Monday, but Mr. Mitchly suggested that he might double up his Saturday's work with Thursday's and Friday's if he wished, and go Friday evening.

"Saturday's a short day, anyhow," he said. "That would give three days at home and still you wouldn't be behind in your work."

Eugene thanked his employer and did as suggested. He packed his bag with the best he had in the way of clothes, and journeyed homeward, wondering how he would find things. How different it all was! Stella was gone. His youthful unsophistication had passed. He could go home as a city man with some prospects. He had no idea of how boyish he looked – how much the idealist he was – how far removed from hard, practical judgment which the world values so highly.

When the train reached Alexandria, his father and Myrtle and Sylvia were at the depot to greet him – the latter with her two year old son. They had all come down in the family carryall, which left one seat for Eugene. He greeted them warmly and received their encomiums on his looks with a befitting sense of humility.

"You're bigger," his father exclaimed. "You're going to be a tall man after all, Eugene. I was afraid you had stopped growing."

"I hadn't noticed that I had grown any," said Eugene.

"Ah, yes," put in Myrtle. "You're much bigger, Gene. It makes you look a little thinner. Are you good and strong?"

"I ought to be," laughed Eugene. "I walk about fifteen or twenty miles a day, and I'm out in the air all the time. If I don't get strong now I never will."

Sylvia asked him about his "stomach trouble." About the same, he told her. Sometimes he thought it was better, sometimes worse. A doctor had told him to drink hot water in the morning but he didn't like to do it. It was so hard to swallow the stuff.

While they were talking, asking questions, they reached the front gate of the house, and Mrs. Witla came out on the front porch. Eugene, at sight of her in the late dusk, jumped over the front wheel and ran to meet her.

"Little ma," he exclaimed. "Didn't expect me back so soon, did you?"

"So soon," she said, her arms around his neck. Then she held him so, quite still for a few moments. "You're getting to be a big man," she said when she released him.

He went into the old sitting room and looked around. It was all quite the same – no change. There were the same books, the same table, the same chairs, the same pulley lamp hanging from the center of the ceiling. In the parlor there was nothing new, nor in the bed rooms or the kitchen. His mother looked a little older – his father not. Sylvia had changed greatly – being slightly "peaked" in

the face compared to her former plumpness; it was due to motherhood, he thought. Myrtle seemed a little more calm and happy. She had a real "steady" now, Frank Bangs, the superintendent of the local furniture factory. He was quite young, good-looking, going to be well-off some day, so they thought. "Old Bill," one of the big horses, had been sold. Rover, one of the two collies, was dead. Jake the cat had been killed in a night brawl somewhere.

Somehow, as Eugene stood in the kitchen watching his mother fry a big steak and make biscuits and gravy in honor of his coming, he felt that he did not belong to this world any more. It was smaller, narrower than he had ever thought. The town had seemed smaller as he had come through its streets, the houses too; and yet it was nice. The yards were sweet and simple, but countrified. His father, running a sewing machine business, seemed tremendously limited. He had a country or small town mind. It struck Eugene as curious now, that they had never had a piano. And Myrtle liked music, too. As for himself, he had learned that he was passionately fond of it. There were organ recitals in the Central Music Hall, of Chicago, on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, and he had managed to attend some after his work. There were great preachers like Prof. Swing and the Rev. H. W. Thomas and the Rev. F. W. Gunsaulus and Prof. Saltus, liberal thinkers all, whose public services in the city were always accompanied by lovely music. Eugene had found all these men and their services in his search for life and to avoid being lonely. Now they had taught him that his old world was no world at all. It was a small town. He would never come to this any more.

After a sound night's rest in his old room he went down the next day to see Mr. Caleb Williams at the *Appeal* office, and Mr. Burgess, and Jonas Lyle, and John Summers. As he went, on the court house square he met Ed Mitchell and George Taps and Will Groniger, and four or five others whom he had known in school. From them he learned how things were. It appeared that George Anderson had married a local girl and was in Chicago, working out in the stock yards. Ed Waterbury had gone to San Francisco. The pretty Sampson girl, Bessie Sampson, who had once gone with Ted Martinwood so much, had run away with a man from Anderson, Indiana. There had been a lot of talk about it at the time. Eugene listened.

It all seemed less, though, than the new world that he had entered. Of these fellows none knew the visions that were now surging in his brain. Paris – no less – and New York – by what far route he could scarcely tell. And Will Groniger had got to be a baggage clerk at one of the two depots and was proud of it. Good Heavens!

At the office of the *Appeal* things were unchanged. Somehow Eugene had had the feeling that two years would make a lot of difference, whereas the difference was in him only. He was the one who had undergone cataclysmic changes. He had a been a stove polisher, a real estate assistant, a driver and a collector. He had known Margaret Duff, and Mr. Redwood, of the laundry, and Mr. Mitchly. The great city had dawned on him; Verestchagin, and Bouguereau, and the Art Institute. He was going on at one pace, the town was moving at another one – a slower, but quite as fast as it had ever gone.

Caleb Williams was there, skipping about as of yore, cheerful, communicative, interested. "I'm glad to see you back, Eugene," he declared, fixing him with the one good eye which watered. "I'm glad you're getting along – that's fine. Going to be an artist, eh? Well, I think that's what you were cut out for. I wouldn't advise every young fellow to go to Chicago, but that's where you belong. If it wasn't for my wife and three children I never would have left it. When you get a wife and family though – " he paused and shook his head. "I gad! You got to do the best you can." Then he went to look up some missing copy.

Jonas Lyle was as portly, phlegmatic and philosophic as ever. He greeted Eugene with a solemn eye in which there was inquiry. "Well, how is it?" he asked.

Eugene smiled. "Oh, pretty good."

"Not going to be a printer, then?"

"No, I think not."

"Well, it's just as well, there're an awful lot of them."

While they were talking John Summers sidled up.

"How are you, Mr. Witla?" he inquired.

Eugene looked at him. John was certainly marked for the grave in the near future. He was thinner, of a bluish-grey color, bent at the shoulders.

"Why, I'm fine, Mr. Summers," Eugene said.

"I'm not so good," said the old printer. He tapped his chest significantly. "This thing's getting the best of me."

"Don't you believe it," put in Lyle. "John's always gloomy. He's just as good as ever. I tell him he'll live twenty years yet."

"No, no," said Summers, shaking his head, "I know."

He left after a bit to "go across the street," his customary drinking excuse.

"He can't last another year," Lyle observed the moment the door was closed. "Burgess only keeps him because it would be a shame to turn him out. But he's done for."

"Anyone can see that," said Eugene. "He looks terrible."

So they talked.

At noon he went home. Myrtle announced that he was to come with her and Mr. Bangs to a party that evening. There were going to be games and refreshments. It never occurred to him that in this town there had never been dancing among the boys and girls he moved with, and scarcely any music. People did not have pianos – or at least only a few of them.

After supper Mr. Bangs called, and the three of them went to a typical small town party. It was not much different from the ones Eugene had attended with Stella, except that the participants were, in the main, just that much older. Two years make a great deal of difference in youth. There were some twenty-two young men and women all crowded into three fair sized rooms and on a porch, the windows and doors leading to which were open. Outside were brown grass and some autumn flowers. Early crickets were chirping, and there were late fire-flies. It was warm and pleasant.

The opening efforts to be sociable were a little stiff. There were introductions all around, much smart badinage among town dandies, for most of them were here. There were a number of new faces – girls who had moved in from other towns or blossomed into maturity since Eugene had left.

"If you'll marry me, Madge, I'll buy you a nice new pair of seal skin earrings," he heard one of the young bloods remark.

Eugene smiled, and the girl laughed back. "He always thinks he's so cute."

It was almost impossible for Eugene to break through the opening sense of reserve which clogged his actions at everything in the way of social diversion. He was a little nervous because he was afraid of criticism. That was his vanity and deep egotism. He stood about, trying to get into the swing of the thing with a bright remark or two. Just as he was beginning to bubble, a girl came in from one of the other rooms. Eugene had not met her. She was with his prospective brother-in-law, Bangs, and was laughing in a sweet, joyous way which arrested his attention. She was dressed in white, he noticed, with a band of golden brown ribbon pulled through the loops above the flounces at the bottom of her dress. Her hair was a wonderful ashen yellow, a great mass of it – and laid in big, thick braids above her forehead and ears. Her nose was straight, her lips were thin and red, her cheek-bones faintly but curiously noticeable. Somehow there was a sense of distinction about her – a faint aroma of personality which Eugene did not understand. It appealed to him.

Bangs brought her over. He was a tight, smiling youth, as sound as oak, as clear as good water.

"Here's Miss Blue, Eugene. She's from up in Wisconsin, and comes down to Chicago occasionally. I told her you ought to know her. You might meet up there sometime."

"Say, but that's good luck, isn't it?" smiled Eugene. "I'm sure I'm glad to know you. What part of Wisconsin do you come from?"

"Blackwood," she laughed, her greenish-blue eyes dancing.

"Her hair is yellow, her eyes are blue, and she comes from Blackwood," commented Bangs. "How's that?" His big mouth, with its even teeth, was wide with a smile.

"You left out the blue name and the white dress. She ought to wear white all the time."

"Oh, it does harmonize with my name, doesn't it?" she cried. "At home I do wear white mostly. You see I'm just a country girl, and I make most of my things."

"Did you make that?" asked Eugene.

"Of course I did."

Bangs moved away a little, looking at her as if critically. "Well, that's really pretty," he pronounced.

"Mr. Bangs is such a flatterer," she smiled at Eugene. "He doesn't mean any thing he says. He just tells me one thing after another."

"He's right," said Eugene. "I agree as to the dress, and it fits the hair wonderfully."

"You see, he's lost, too," laughed Bangs. "That's the way they all do. Well, I'm going to leave you two. I've got to get back. I left your sister in the hands of a rival of mine."

Eugene turned to this girl and laughed his reserved laugh. "I was just thinking what was going to become of me. I've been away for two years, and I've lost track of some of these people."

"I'm worse yet. I've only been here two weeks and I scarcely know anybody. Mrs. King takes me around everywhere, but it's all so new I can't get hold of it. I think Alexandria is lovely."

"It is nice. I suppose you've been out on the lakes?"

"Oh, yes. We've fished and rowed and camped. I have had a lovely time but I have to go back tomorrow."

"Do you?" said Eugene. "Why I do too. I'm going to take the four-fifteen."

"So am I!" she laughed. "Perhaps we can go together."

"Why, certainly. That's fine. I thought I'd have to go back alone. I only came down for over Sunday. I've been working up in Chicago."

They fell to telling each other their histories. She was from Blackwood, only eighty-five miles from Chicago, and had lived there all her life. There were several brothers and sisters. Her father was evidently a farmer and politician and what not, and Eugene gleaned from stray remarks that they must be well thought of, though poor. One brother-in-law was spoken of as a banker; another as the owner of a grain elevator; she herself was a school teacher at Blackwood – had been for several years.

Eugene did not realize it, but she was fully five years older than himself, with the tact and the superior advantage which so much difference in years brings. She was tired of school-teaching, tired of caring for the babies of married sisters, tired of being left to work and stay at home when the ideal marrying age was rapidly passing. She was interested in able people, and silly village boys did not appeal to her. There was one who was begging her to marry him at this moment, but he was a slow soul up in Blackwood, not actually worthy of her nor able to support her well. She was hopefully, sadly, vaguely, madly longing for something better, and as yet nothing had ever turned up. This meeting with Eugene was not anything which promised a way out to her. She was not seeking so urgently – nor did she give introductions that sort of a twist in her consciousness. But this young man had an appeal for her beyond anyone she had met recently. They were in sympathetic accord, apparently. She liked his clear, big eyes, his dark hair, his rather waxen complexion. He seemed something better than she had known, and she hoped that he would be nice to her.

CHAPTER VIII

The rest of that evening Eugene spent not exactly with, but near Miss Blue – Miss Angela Blue, as he found her name to be. He was interested in her not so much from the point of view of looks, though she was charming enough, but because of some peculiarity of temperament which lingered with him as a grateful taste might dwell on the palate. He thought her young; and was charmed by what he considered her innocence and unsophistication. As a matter of fact she was not so much young and unsophisticated as an unconscious simulator of simplicity. In the conventional sense she was a thoroughly good girl, loyal, financially honest, truthful in all commonplace things, and thoroughly virtuous, moreover, in that she considered marriage and children the fate and duty of all women. Having had so much trouble with other peoples' children she was not anxious to have any, or at least many, of her own. Of course, she did not believe that she would escape with what seemed to be any such good fortune. She fancied that she would be like her sisters, the wife of a good business or professional man; the mother of three or four or five healthy children; the keeper of an ideal middle class home; the handmaiden of her husband's needs. There was a deep current of passion in her which she had come to feel would never be satisfied. No man would ever understand, no man at least whom she was likely to meet; but she knew she had a great capacity to love. If someone would only come along and arouse that – be worthy of it – what a whirlwind of affection she would return to him! How she would love, how sacrifice! But it seemed now that her dreams were destined never to be fulfilled, because so much time had slipped by and she had not been courted by the right one. So here she was now at twenty-five, dreaming and longing – the object of her ideals thus accidentally brought before her, and no immediate consciousness that that was the case.

It does not take sexual affinity long to manifest itself, once its subjects are brought near to each other. Eugene was older in certain forms of knowledge, broader in a sense, potentially greater than she would ever comprehend; but nevertheless, swayed helplessly by emotion and desire. Her own emotions, though perhaps stronger than his, were differently aroused. The stars, the night, a lovely scene, any exquisite attribute of nature could fascinate him to the point of melancholy. With her, nature in its largest aspects passed practically unnoticed. She responded to music feelingly, as did Eugene. In literature, only realism appealed to him; for her, sentiment, strained though not necessarily unreal, had the greatest charm. Art in its purely æsthetic forms meant nothing at all to her. To Eugene it was the last word in the matter of emotional perception. History, philosophy, logic, psychology, were sealed books to her. To Eugene they were already open doors, or, better yet, flowery paths of joy, down which he was wandering. Yet in spite of these things they were being attracted toward each other.

And there were other differences. With Eugene convention meant nothing at all, and his sense of evil and good was something which the ordinary person would not have comprehended. He was prone to like all sorts and conditions of human beings – the intellectual, the ignorant, the clean, the dirty, the gay, the sorrowful, white, yellow, black. As for Angela, she had a distinct preference for those who conducted themselves according to given standards of propriety. She was brought up to think of those people as best who worked the hardest, denied themselves the most, and conformed to the ordinary notions of right and wrong. There was no questioning of current standards in her mind. As it was written socially and ethically upon the tables of the law, so was it. There might be charming characters outside the pale, but they were not admitted to association or sympathy. To Eugene a human being was a human being. The ruck of misfits or ne'er-do-wells he could laugh joyously with or at. It was all wonderful, beautiful, amusing. Even its grimness and tragedy were worth while, although they hurt him terribly at times. Why, under these circumstances, he should have been so thoroughly attracted to Angela remains a mystery. Perhaps they complemented each other at this

time as a satellite complements a larger luminary – for Eugene's egoism required praise, sympathy, feminine coddling; and Angela caught fire from the warmth and geniality of his temperament.

On the train next day Eugene had nearly three hours of what he deemed most delightful talk with her. They had not journeyed far before he had told her how he had traveled this way, on this train, at this hour, two years before; how he had walked about the streets of the big city, looking for a place to sleep, how he had got work and stayed away until he felt that he had found himself. Now he was going to study art and then to New York or Paris, and do magazine illustrating and possibly paint pictures. He was truly your flamboyant youth of talent when he got to talking – when he had a truly sympathetic ear. He loved to boast to someone who really admired him, and he felt that he had admiration here. Angela looked at him with swimming eyes. He was really different from anything she had ever known, young, artistic, imaginative, ambitious. He was going out into a world which she had longed for but never hoped to see – that of art. Here he was telling her of his prospective art studies, and talking of Paris. What a wonderful thing!

As the train neared Chicago she explained that she would have to make an almost immediate connection with one which left over the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul, for Blackwood. She was a little lonely, to tell the truth, a little sick at heart, for the summer vacation was over and she was going back to teach school. Alexandria, for the two weeks she had been there visiting Mrs. King (formerly a Blackwood girl and school-day chum of hers), was lovely. Her girlhood friend had tried to make things most pleasant and now it was all over. Even Eugene was over, for he said nothing much of seeing her again, or had not so far. She was wishing she might see more of this world he painted in such glowing colors, when he said:

"Mr. Bangs said that you come down to Chicago every now and then?"

"I do," she replied. "I sometimes come down to go to the theatres and shop." She did not say that there was an element of practical household commercialism in it, for she was considered one of the best buyers in the family and that she was sent to buy by various members of the family in quantities. From a practical household point of view she was a thoroughbred and was valued by her sisters and friends as someone who loved to do things. She might have come to be merely a family pack horse, solely because she loved to work. It was instinct to do everything she did thoroughly, but she worked almost exclusively in minor household matters.

"How soon do you expect to come down again?" he asked.

"Oh, I can't tell. I sometimes come down when Opera is on in the winter. I may be here around Thanksgiving."

"Not before that?"

"I don't think so," she replied archly.

"That's too bad. I thought maybe I'd see you a few times this fall. When you do come I wish you could let me know. I'd like to take you to the theatre."

Eugene spent precious little money on any entertainment, but he thought he could venture this. She would not be down often. Then, too, he had the notion that he might get a rise one of these days – that would make a difference. When she came again he would be in art school, opening up another field for himself. Life looked hopeful.

"That's so nice of you," she replied. "And when I come I'll let you know. I'm just a country girl," she added, with a toss of her head, "and I don't get to the city often."

Eugene liked what he considered the guileless naïveté of her confessions – the frankness with which she owned up to simplicity and poverty. Most girls didn't. She almost made a virtue out of these thing – at least they were charming as a confession in her.

"I'll hold you to that," he assured her.

"Oh, you needn't. I'll be glad to let you know."

They were nearing the station. He forgot, for the moment that she was not as remote and delicate in her beauty as Stella, that she was apparently not as passionate temperamentally as Margaret. He

saw her wonderfully dull hair and her thin lips and peculiar blue eyes, and admired her honesty and simplicity. He picked up her grip and helped her to find her train. When they came to part he pressed her hand warmly, for she had been very nice to him, so attentive and sympathetic and interested.

"Now remember!" he said gaily, after he had put her in her seat in the local.

"I won't forget."

"You wouldn't mind if I wrote you now and then?"

"Not at all. I'd like it."

"Then I will," he said, and went out.

He stood outside and looked at her through the train window as it pulled out. He was glad to have met her. This was the right sort of girl, clean, honest, simple, attractive. That was the way the best women were – good and pure – not wild pieces of fire like Margaret; nor unconscious, indifferent beauties like Stella, he was going to add, but couldn't. There was a voice within him that said that artistically Stella was perfect and even now it hurt him a little to remember. But Stella was gone forever, there was no doubt about that.

During the days that followed he thought of the girl often. He wondered what sort of a town Blackwood was; what sort of people she moved with, what sort of a house she lived in. They must be nice, simple people like his own in Alexandria. These types of city bred people whom he saw – girls particularly – and those born to wealth, had no appeal for him as yet. They were too distant, too far removed from anything he could aspire to. A good woman such as Miss Blue obviously was, must be a treasure anywhere in the world. He kept thinking he would write to her – he had no other girl acquaintance now; and just before he entered art school he did this, penning a little note saying that he remembered so pleasantly their ride; and when was she coming? Her answer, after a week, was that she expected to be in the city about the middle or the end of October and that she would be glad to have him call. She gave him the number of an aunt who lived out on the North Side in Ohio Street, and said she would notify him further. She was hard at work teaching school now, and didn't even have time to think of the lovely summer she had had.

"Poor little girl," he thought. She deserved a better fate. "When she comes I'll surely look her up," he thought, and there was a lot that went with the idea. Such wonderful hair!

CHAPTER IX

The succeeding days in the art school after his first admission revealed many new things to Eugene. He understood now, or thought he did, why artists were different from the rank and file of mankind. This Art Institute atmosphere was something so refreshing after his days rambling among poor neighborhoods collecting, that he could hardly believe that he, Eugene Witla, belonged there. These were exceptional young people; some of them, anyhow. If they weren't cut out to be good artists they still had imagination – the dream of the artist. They came, as Eugene gradually learned, from all parts of the West and South, from Chicago and St. Louis – from Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa – from Texas and California and Minnesota. One boy was in from Saskatchewan of the Canadian north west, another from the then territory of New Mexico. Because his name was Gill they called him the Gila monster – the difference in the pronunciation of the "G's" not troubling them at all. A boy who came down from Minnesota was a farmer's son, and talked about going back to plow and sow and reap during the next spring and summer. Another boy was the son of a Kansas City millionaire.

The mechanics of drawing interested Eugene from the first. He learned the first night that there was some defect in his understanding of light and shade as it related to the human form. He could not get any roundness or texture in his drawings.

"The darkest shadow is always closest to the high light," observed his instructor laconically on Wednesday evening, looking over his shoulder. "You're making everything a dull, even tone." So that was it.

"You're drawing this figure as a bricklayer who isn't an architect might start to build a house. You're laying bricks without having a plan. Where's your plan?" The voice was that of Mr. Boyle looking over his shoulder.

Eugene looked up. He had begun to draw the head only.

"A plan! A plan!" said his instructor, making a peculiar motion with his hands which described the outline of the pose in a single motion. "Get your general lines first. Then you can put in the details afterward."

Eugene saw at once.

Another time his instructor was watching him draw the female breast. He was doing it woodenly – without much beauty of contour.

"They're round! They're round! I tell you!" exclaimed Boyle. "If you ever see any square ones let me know."

This caught Eugene's sense of humor. It made him laugh, even though he flushed painfully, for he knew he had a lot to learn.

The cruelest thing he heard this man say was to a boy who was rather thick and fat but conscientious. "You can't draw," he said roughly. "Take my advice and go home. You'll make more money driving a wagon."

The class winced, but this man was ugly in his intolerance of futility. The idea of anybody wasting his time was obnoxious to him. He took art as a business man takes business, and he had no time for the misfit, the fool, or the failure. He wanted his class to know that art meant effort.

Aside from this brutal insistence on the significance of art, there was another side to the life which was not so hard and in a way more alluring. Between the twenty-five minute poses which the model took, there were some four or five minute rests during the course of the evening in which the students talked, relighted their pipes and did much as they pleased. Sometimes students from other classes came in for a few moments.

The thing that astonished Eugene though, was the freedom of the model with the students and the freedom of the students with her. After the first few weeks he observed some of those who had been there the year before going up to the platform where the girl sat, and talking with her. She had

a little pink gauze veil which she drew around her shoulders or waist that instead of reducing the suggestiveness of her attitudes heightened them.

"Say, ain't that enough to make everything go black in front of your eyes," said one boy sitting next to Eugene.

"Well, I guess," he laughed. "There's some edge to that."

The boys would sit and laugh and jest with this girl, and she would laugh and coquette in return. He saw her strolling about looking at some of the students' drawings of her over their shoulders, standing face to face with others – and so calmly. The strong desire which it invariably aroused in Eugene he quelled and concealed, for these things were not to be shown on the surface. Once, while he was looking at some photographs that a student had brought, she came and looked over his shoulder, this little flower of the streets, her body graced by the thin scarf, her lips and cheeks red with color. She came so close that she leaned against his shoulder and arm with her soft flesh. It pulled him tense, like a great current; but he made no sign, pretending that it was the veriest commonplace. Several times, because the piano was there, and because students would sing and play in the interludes, she came and sat on the piano stool herself, strumming out an accompaniment to which some one or three or four would sing. Somehow this, of all things, seemed most sensuous to him – most oriental. It set him wild. He felt his teeth click without volition on his part. When she resumed her pose, his passion subsided, for then the cold, æsthetic value of her beauty became uppermost. It was only the incidental things that upset him.

In spite of these disturbances, Eugene was gradually showing improvement as a draughtsman and an artist. He liked to draw the figure. He was not as quick at that as he was at the more varied outlines of landscapes and buildings, but he could give lovely sensuous touches to the human form – particularly to the female form – which were beginning to be impressive. He'd got past the place where Boyle had ever to say "They're round." He gave a sweep to his lines that attracted the instructor's attention.

"You're getting the thing as a whole, I see," he said quietly, one day. Eugene thrilled with satisfaction. Another Wednesday he said: – "A little colder, my boy, a little colder. There's sex in that. It isn't in the figure. You ought to make a good mural decorator some day, if you have the inclination," Boyle went on; "you've got the sense of beauty." The roots of Eugene's hair tingled. So art was coming to him. This man saw his capacity. He really had art in him.

One evening a paper sign pasted up on the bulletin board bore the significant legend: "Artists! Attention! We eat! We eat! Nov. 16th. at Sofroni's. All those who want to get in give their names to the monitor."

Eugene had heard nothing of this, but he judged that it originated in one of the other classes. He spoke to the monitor and learned that only seventy-five cents was required of him. Students could bring girls if they wished. Most of them would. He decided that he would go. But where to get a girl? Sofroni's was an Italian restaurant in lower Clark Street, which had originally started out as an eating place for Italian laborers, because it was near an Italian boarding house section. It was located in an old house that was not exactly homely. A yard in the back had been set with plain wooden tables, and benches had been placed for use in the summer time and, later, this had been covered with a mouldy tent-cloth to protect the diners from rain. Still later this became glass and was used in winter. The place was clean and the food good. Some struggling craftsman in journalism and art had found it and by degrees Signor Sofroni had come to realize that he was dealing with a better element. He began to exchange greetings with these people to set aside a little corner for them. Finally he entertained a small group of them at dinner – charging them hardly more than cost price – and so he was launched. One student told another. Sofroni now had his yard covered in so that he could entertain a hundred at dinner, even in winter. He could serve several kinds of wines and liquors with a dinner for seventy-five cents a piece. So he was popular.

The dinner was the culmination of several other class treats. It was the custom of a class, whenever a stranger, or even a new member appeared, to yell "Treat! Treat!" at which the victim or new member was supposed to produce two dollars as a contribution to a beer fund. If the money was not produced – the stranger was apt to be thrown out or some ridiculous trick played upon him – if it was forthcoming, work for the evening ceased. A collection was immediately taken up. Kegs of beer were sent for, with sandwiches and cheese. Drinking, singing, piano playing, jesting followed. Once, to Eugene's utter astonishment, one of the students – a big, good natured, carousing boy from Omaha – lifted the nude model to his shoulders, set her astride his neck and proceeded around the room, jigging as he went – the girl meantime pulling his black hair, the other students following and shouting uproariously. Some of the girls in an adjoining room, studying in an evening life class, stopped their work to peep through a half dozen small holes which had been punched in the intervening partition. The sight of Showalter carrying the girl so astonished the eavesdroppers that the news of it was soon all over the building. Knowledge of the escapade reached the Secretary and the next day the student was dropped. But the Bacchic dance had been enacted – its impression was left.

There were other treats like this in which Eugene was urged to drink, and he did – a very little. He had no taste for beer. He also tried to smoke, but he did not care for it. He could become nervously intoxicated at times, by the mere sight of such revelry, and then he grew witty, easy in his motions, quick to say bright things. On one of these occasions one of the models said to him: "Why, you're nicer than I thought. I imagined you were very solemn."

"Oh, no," he said, "only at times. You don't know me."

He seized her about the waist, but she pushed him away. He wished now that he danced, for he saw that he might have whirled her about the room then and there. He decided to learn at once.

The question of a girl for the dinner, troubled him. He knew of no one except Margaret, and he did not know that she danced. There was Miss Blue, of Blackwood – whom he had seen when she made her promised visit to the city – but the thought of her in connection with anything like this was to him incongruous. He wondered what she would think if she saw such scenes as he had witnessed.

It chanced that one day when he was in the members' room, he met Miss Kenny, the girl whom he had seen posing the night he had entered the school. Eugene remembered her fascination, for she was the first nude model he had ever seen and she was pretty. She was also the one who had come and stood by him when she was posing. He had not seen her since then. She had liked Eugene, but he had seemed a little distant and, at first, a little commonplace. Lately he had taken to a loose, flowing tie and a soft round hat which became him. He turned his hair back loosely and emulated the independent swing of Mr. Temple Boyle. That man was a sort of god to him – strong and successful. To be like that!

The girl noted a change for what she deemed the better. He was so nice now, she thought, so white-skinned and clear-eyed and keen.

She pretended to be looking at the drawing of a nude when she saw him.

"How are you?" he asked, smiling, venturing to speak to her because he was lonely and because he knew no other girl.

She turned gaily, and returned the question, facing him with smiling lips and genial eyes.

"I haven't seen you for some time," he said. "Are you back here now?"

"For this week," she said. "I'm doing studio work. I don't care for classes when I can get the other."

"I thought you liked them!" he replied, recalling her gaiety of mood.

"Oh, I don't dislike it. Only, studio work is better."

"We've missed you," he said. "The others haven't been nearly as nice."

"Aren't you complimentary," she laughed, her black eyes looking into his with a twinkle.

"No, it's so," he returned, and then asked hopefully, "Are you going to the dinner on the 16th?"

"Maybe," she said. "I haven't made up my mind. It all depends."

"On what?"

"On how I feel and who asks me."

"I shouldn't think there'd be any trouble about that," he observed. "If I had a girl I'd go," he went on, making a terrific effort to reach the point where he could ask her. She saw his intention.

"Well?" she laughed.

"Would you go with me?" he ventured, thus so shamelessly assisted.

"Sure!" she said, for she liked him.

"That's fine!" he exclaimed. "Where do you live? I'll want to know that." He searched for a pencil.

She gave him her number on West Fifty-seventh Street.

Because of his collecting he knew the neighborhood. It was a street of shabby frame houses far out on the South Side. He remembered great mazes of trade near it, and unpaved streets and open stretches of wet prairie land. Somehow it seemed fitting to him that this little flower of the muck and coal yard area should be a model.

"I'll be sure and get you," he laughed. "You won't forget, will you, Miss – "

"Just Ruby," she interrupted. "Ruby Kenny."

"It's a pretty name, isn't it?" he said. "It's euphonious. You wouldn't let me come out some Sunday and see just where it is?"

"Yes, you may," she replied, pleased by his comment on her name. "I'm home most every Sunday. Come out next Sunday afternoon, if you want to."

"I will," said Eugene.

He walked out to the street with her in a very buoyant mood.

CHAPTER X

Ruby Kenny was the adopted child of an old Irish laborer and his wife who had taken her from a quarrelling couple when they had practically deserted her at the age of four years. She was bright, good natured, not at all informed as to the social organization of the world, just a simple little girl with a passion for adventure and no saving insight which would indicate beforehand whither adventure might lead. She began life as a cash girl in a department store and was spoiled of her virtue at fifteen. She was rather fortunate in that her smartness attracted the rather superior, capable, self-protecting type of man; and these were fortunate too, in that she was not utterly promiscuous, appetite with her waiting on strong liking, and in one or two cases real affection, and culminating only after a period of dalliance which made her as much a victim of her moods as were her lovers. Her foster parents provided no guidance of any intelligent character. They liked her, and since she was brighter than they were, submitted to her rule, her explanations of conduct, her taste. She waved aside with a laughing rejoinder any slight objections they might make, and always protested that she did not care what the neighbors thought.

The visits which Eugene paid, and the companionship which ensued, were of a piece with every other relationship of this character which he ever entered into. He worshiped beauty as beauty, and he never wholly missed finding a certain quality of mind and heart for which he longed. He sought in women, besides beauty, good nature and sympathy; he shunned criticism and coldness, and was never apt to select for a sweetheart anyone who could outshine him either in emotion or rapidity or distinction of ideas.

He liked, at this time, simple things, simple homes, simple surroundings, the commonplace atmosphere of simple life, for the more elegant and imposing overawed him. The great mansions which he saw, the great trade structures, the great, significant personalities, seemed artificial and cold. He liked little people – people who were not known, but who were sweet and kindly in their moods. If he could find female beauty with anything like that as a background he was happy and settled down near it, if he could, in comfort. His drawing near to Ruby was governed by this mood.

The Sunday Eugene called, it rained and the neighborhood in which she lived was exceedingly dreary. Looking around here and there one could see in the open spaces between the houses pools of water standing in the brown, dead grass. He had crossed a great maze of black cindered car tracks, where engines and cars were in great masses, and speculated on the drawings such scenes would make – big black engines throwing up clouds of smoke and steam in a grey, wet air; great mazes of parti-colored cars dank in the rain but lovely. At night the switch lights in these great masses of yards bloomed like flowers. He loved the sheer yellows, reds, greens, blues, that burned like eyes. Here was the stuff that touched him magnificently, and somehow he was glad that this raw flowering girl lived near something like this.

When he reached the door and rang the bell he was greeted by an old shaky Irish-American who seemed to him rather low in the scale of intelligence – the kind of a man who would make a good crossing guard, perhaps. He had on common, characterful clothes, the kind that from long wear have taken the natural outlines of the body. In his fingers was a short pipe which he had been smoking.

"Is Miss Kenny in?" Eugene inquired.

"Yus," said the man. "Come in. I'll git her." He poked back through a typical workingman's parlor to a rear room. Someone had seen to it that almost everything in the room was red – the big silk-shaded lamp, the family album, the carpet and the red flowered wall paper.

While he was waiting he opened the album and looked at what he supposed were her relatives – commonplace people, all – clerks, salesmen, store-keepers. Presently Ruby came, and then his eye lighted, for there was about her a smartness of youth – she was not more than nineteen – which captivated his fancy. She had on a black cashmere dress with touches of red velvet at the neck and

elsewhere, and she wore a loose red tie, much as a boy might. She looked gay and cheerful and held out her hand.

"Did you have much trouble in getting here?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I know this country pretty well. I collect all through here week days. I work for the Peoples' Furniture Company, you know."

"Oh, then it's all right," she said, enjoying his frankness. "I thought you'd have a hard time finding it. It's a pretty bad day, isn't it?"

Eugene admitted that it was, but commented on the car tracks he had seen. "If I could paint at all I'd like to paint those things. They're so big and wonderful."

He went to the window and gazed out at the neighborhood.

Ruby watched him with interest. His movements were pleasing to her. She felt at home in his company – as though she were going to like him very much. It was so easy to talk to him. There were the classes, her studio work, his own career, this neighborhood, to give her a feeling of congeniality with him.

"Are there many big studios in Chicago?" he asked when they finally got around to that phase of her work. He was curious to know what the art life of the city was.

"No, not so very many – not, at least, of the good ones. There are a lot of fellows who think they can paint."

"Who are the big ones?" he asked.

"Well, I only know by what I hear artists say. Mr. Rose is pretty good. Byam Jones is pretty fine on *genre* subjects, so they say. Walter Low is a good portrait painter, and so is Manson Steele. And let's see – there's Arthur Biggs – he does landscapes only; I've never been in his studio; and Finley Wood, he's another portrait man; and Wilson Brooks, he does figures – Oh! I don't know, there are quite a number."

Eugene listened entranced. This patter of art matters was more in the way of definite information about personalities than he had heard during all the time he had been in the city. The girl knew these things. She was in the movement. He wondered what her relationship to these various people was?

He got up after a time and looked out of the window again. She came also. "It's not very nice around here," she explained, "but papa and mamma like to live here. It's near papa's work."

"Was that your father I met at the door?"

"They're not my real parents," she explained. "I'm an adopted child. They're just like real parents to me, though, I certainly owe them a lot."

"You can't have been posing in art very long," said Eugene thoughtfully, thinking of her age.

"No; I only began about a year ago."

She told how she had been a clerk in The Fair and how she and another girl had got the idea from seeing articles in the Sunday papers. There was once a picture in the Tribune of a model posing in the nude before the local life class. This had taken her eye and she had consulted with the other girl as to whether they had not better try posing, too. Her friend, like herself, was still posing. She was coming to the dinner.

Eugene listened entranced. It reminded him of how he was caught by the picture of Goose Island in the Chicago River, of the little tumble-down huts and upturned hulls of boats used for homes. He told her of that and of how he came, and it touched her fancy. She thought he was sentimental but nice – and then he was big, too, and she was so much smaller.

"You play?" he asked, "don't you?"

"Oh, just a little. But we haven't got a piano. I learned what I know by practising at the different studios."

"Do you dance?" asked Eugene.

"Yes, indeed," she replied.

"I wish I did," he commented ruefully.

"Why don't you? It's easy. You could learn in no time. I could teach you in a lesson."

"I wish you would," he said persuasively.

"It isn't hard," she went on, moving away from him. "I can show you the steps. They always begin with the waltz."

She lifted her skirts and exposed her little feet. She explained what to do and how to do it. He tried it alone, but failed; so she got him to put his arm around her and placed her hand in his. "Now, follow me," she said.

It was so delightful to find her in his arms! And she was apparently in no hurry to conclude the lesson, for she worked with him quite patiently, explaining the steps, stopping and correcting him, laughing at her mistakes and his. "You're getting it, though," she said, after they had turned around a few times.

They had looked into each other's eyes a number of times and she gave him frank smiles in return for his. He thought of the time when she stood by him in the studio, looking over his shoulder. Surely, surely this gap of formalities might be bridged over at once if he tried if he had the courage. He pulled her a little closer and when they stopped he did not let go.

"You're mighty sweet to me," he said with an effort.

"No, I'm just good natured," she laughed, not endeavoring to break away.

He became emotionally tense, as always.

She rather liked what seemed the superiority of his mood. It was different, stronger than was customary in the men she knew.

"Do you like me?" he asked, looking at her.

She studied his face and hair and eyes.

"I don't know," she returned calmly.

"Are you sure you don't?"

There was another pause in which she looked almost mockingly at him and then, sobering, away at the hall door.

"Yes, I think I do," she said.

He picked her up in his arms. "You're as cute as a doll," he said and carried her to the red settee. She spent the rest of the rainy afternoon resting in his arms and enjoying his kisses. He was a new and peculiar kind of boy.

CHAPTER XI

A little while before, Angela Blue at Eugene's earnest solicitation had paid her first Fall visit to Chicago. She had made a special effort to come, lured by a certain poignancy of expression which he could give to any thought, particularly when it concerned his desires. In addition to the art of drawing he had the gift of writing – very slow in its development from a structural and interpretative point of view, but powerful already on its descriptive side. He could describe anything, people, houses, horses, dogs, landscapes, much as he could draw them and give a sense of tenderness and pathos in the bargain which was moving. He could describe city scenes and the personal atmosphere which surrounded him in the most alluring fashion. He had little time to write, but he took it in this instance to tell this girl what he was doing and how he was doing it. She was captivated by the quality of the world in which he was moving, and the distinction of his own personality, which he indicated rather indirectly than otherwise. By contrast her own little world began to look very shabby indeed.

She came shortly after his art school opened, and at her invitation he went out to the residence of her aunt on the North Side, a nice, pleasant brick house in a quiet side street, which had all the airs of middle class peace and comfort. He was impressed with what seemed to him a sweet, conservative atmosphere – a fitting domicile for a girl so dainty and refined as Angela. He paid his respects early Saturday morning because her neighborhood happened to be in the direction of his work.

She played for him – better than anyone he had ever known. It seemed to him a great accomplishment. Her temperament attracted her to music of a high emotional order and to songs and instrumental compositions of indefinable sweetness. In the half hour he stayed she played several things, and he noted with a new pleasure her small shapely body in a dress of a very simple, close fitting design; her hair hung in two great braids far below her waist. She reminded him the least bit of Marguerite in "Faust."

He went again in the evening, shining and eager, and arrayed in his best. He was full of the sense of his art prospects, and happy to see her again, for he was satisfied that he was going to fall in love with her. She had a strong, sympathetic attitude which allured him. She wanted to be nice to this youth – wanted him to like her – and so the atmosphere was right.

That evening he took her to the Chicago Opera House, where there was playing an extravaganza. This fantasy, so beautiful in its stage-craft, so gorgeous in its show of costumes and pretty girls, so idle in its humor and sweet in its love songs, captivated both Eugene and Angela. Neither had been to a theatre for a long time; both were en rapport with some such fantastic interpretation of existence. After the short acquaintance at Alexandria it was a nice coming together. It gave point to their reunion.

After the performance he guided her through the surging crowds to a North Division Street car – they had laid cables since his arrival – and together they went over the beauties and humor of the thing they had seen. He asked permission to call again next day, and at the end of an afternoon in her company, proposed that they go to hear a famous preacher who was speaking in Central Music Hall evenings.

Angela was pleased at Eugene's resourcefulness. She wanted to be with him; this was a good excuse. They went early and enjoyed it. Eugene liked the sermon as an expression of youth and beauty and power to command. He would have liked to be an orator like that, and he told Angela so. And he confided more and more of himself to her. She was impressed by his vivid interest in life, his selective power, and felt that he was destined to be a notable personality.

There were other meetings. She came again in early November and before Christmas and Eugene was fast becoming lost in the meshes of her hair. Although he met Ruby in November and took up a tentative relation on a less spiritual basis – as he would have said at the time – he nevertheless held this acquaintanceship with Angela in the background as a superior and more significant thing. She was purer than Ruby; there was in her certainly a deeper vein of feeling, as expressed in her

thoughts and music. Moreover she represented a country home, something like his own, a nice simple country town, nice people. Why should he part with her, or ever let her know anything of this other world that he touched? He did not think he ought to. He was afraid that he would lose her, and he knew that she would make any man an ideal wife. She came again in December and he almost proposed to her – he must not be free with her or draw too near too rapidly. She made him feel the sacredness of love and marriage. And he did propose in January.

The artist is a blend of subtleties in emotion which can not be classified. No one woman could have satisfied all sides of Eugene's character at that time. Beauty was the point with him. Any girl who was young, emotional or sympathetic to the right degree and beautiful would have attracted and held him for a while. He loved beauty – not a plan of life. He was interested in an artistic career, not in the founding of a family. Girlhood – the beauty of youth – was artistic, hence he craved it.

Angela's mental and emotional composition was stable. She had learned to believe from childhood that marriage was a fixed thing. She believed in one life and one love. When you found that, every other relationship which did not minister to it was ended. If children came, very good; if not, very good; marriage was permanent anyhow. And if you did not marry happily it was nevertheless your duty to endure and suffer for whatever good might remain. You might suffer badly in such a union, but it was dangerous and disgraceful to break it. If you could not stand it any more, your life was a failure.

Of course, Eugene did not know what he was trifling with. He had no conception of the nature of the relationship he was building up. He went on blindly dreaming of this girl as an ideal, and anticipating eventual marriage with her. When that would be, he had no idea, for though his salary had been raised at Christmas he was getting only eighteen dollars a week; but he deemed it would come within a reasonable time.

Meanwhile, his visits to Ruby had brought the inevitable result. The very nature of the situation seemed to compel it. She was young, brimming over with a love of adventure, admiring youth and strength in men. Eugene, with his pale face, which had just a touch of melancholy about it, his sex magnetism, his love of beauty, appealed to her. Uncurbed passion was perhaps uppermost to begin with; very shortly it was confounded with affection, for this girl could love. She was sweet, good natured, ignorant of life from many points of view. Eugene represented the most dramatic imagination she had yet seen. She described to him the character of her foster parents, told how simple they were and how she could do about as she pleased. They did not know that she posed in the nude. She confided to him her particular friendship for certain artists, denying any present intimacies. She admitted them in the past, but asserted that they were bygones. Eugene really did not believe this. He suspected her of meeting other approaches in the spirit in which she had met his own. It aroused his jealousy, and he wished at once that she were not a model. He said as much and she laughed. She knew he would act like that, it was the first proof of real, definite interest in her on his part.

From that time on there were lovely days and evenings spent in her company. Before the dinner she invited him over to breakfast one Sunday. Her foster parents were to be away and she was to have the house to herself. She wanted to cook Eugene a breakfast – principally to show him she could cook – and then it was novel. She waited till he arrived at nine to begin operations and then, arrayed in a neat little lavender, close fitting house dress, and a ruffled white apron, went about her work, setting the table, making biscuit, preparing a kidney ragout with strong wine, and making coffee.

Eugene was delighted. He followed her about, delaying her work by taking her in his arms and kissing her. She got flour on her nose and he brushed it off with his lips.

It was on this occasion that she showed him a very pleasing little dance she could do – a clog dance, which had a running, side-ways motion, with frequent and rapid clicking of the heels. She gathered her skirts a little way above her ankles and twinkled her feet through a maze of motions. Eugene was beside himself with admiration. He told himself he had never met such a girl – to be so clever at posing, playing and dancing, and so young. He thought she would make a delightful creature

to live with, and he wished now he had money enough to make it possible. At this high-flown moment and at some others he thought he might almost marry her.

On the night of the dinner he took her to Sofroni's, and was surprised to find her arrayed in a red dress with a row of large black leather buttons cutting diagonally across the front. She had on red stockings and shoes and wore a red carnation in her hair. The bodice was cut low in the neck and the sleeves were short. Eugene thought she looked stunning and told her so. She laughed. They went in a cab, for she had warned him beforehand that they would have to. It cost him two dollars each way but he excused his extravagance on the ground of necessity. It was little things like this that were beginning to make him think strongly of the problem of getting on.

The students who had got up this dinner were from all the art classes, day and night. There were over two hundred of them, all of them young, and there was a mixed collection of girl art students, artist's models and girl friends of various grades of thought and condition, who were brought as companions. The big dining-room was tempestuous with the rattling of dishes, the shouting of jests, the singing of songs and the exchange of greetings. Eugene knew a few of these people outside his own classes, enough to give him the chance to be sociable and not appear lonely or out of it.

From the outset it was apparent that she, Ruby, was generally known and liked. Her costume – a little bold – made her conspicuous. From various directions there were cries of "Hey! Rube!" which was a familiar interpretation of her first name, Ruby.

Eugene was surprised at this – it shocked him a little. All sorts of boys he did not know came and talked to her, exchanging familiar gossip. She was called away from him a dozen times in as many minutes. He saw her laughing and chatting at the other end of the hall, surrounded by half a dozen students. It made him jealous.

As the evening progressed the attitude of each toward the other and all toward anyone became more and more familiar. When the courses were over, a space was cleared at one end and a screen of green cloth rigged up in one corner as a dressing room for *stunts*. Eugene saw one of the students called with much applause to do an Irish monologue, wearing green whiskers, which he adjusted in the presence of the crowd. There was another youth who pretended to have with him an immense roll of verse – an epic, no less – wound in so tight a manner that it looked as though it might take all night to read it. The crowd groaned. With amazing savoir faire he put up one hand for silence, dropped the roll, holding, of course, to the outer end and began reading. It was not bad verse, but the amusing part was that it was really short, not more than twenty lines. The rest of the paper had been covered with scribbling to deceive the crowd. It secured a round of applause. There was one second-year man who sang a song – "Down in the Lehigh Valley" – and another who gave imitations of Temple Boyle and other instructors at their work of criticising and painting for the benefit of the class. These were greatly enjoyed. Finally one of the models, after much calling by the crowd of "Desmond! Desmond!" – her last name – went behind the green cloth screen and in a few moments reappeared in the short skirt of a Spanish dancer, with black and silver spangles, and castanets. Some friendly student had brought a mandolin and "La Paloma" was danced.

Eugene had little of Ruby's company during all these doings. She was too much sought after. As the other girl was concluding her dance he heard the cry of "Hey, Rube! Why don't you do your turn?" Someone else, eager to see her dance, called "Come on, Ruby!" The rest of the room, almost unthinkingly took it up. Some boys surrounding her had started to push her toward the dancing space. Before Eugene knew it she was up in someone's arms being passed from group to group for a joke. The crowd cheered. Eugene, however, having come so close to her, was irritated by this familiarity. She did not appear to belong to him, but to the whole art-student body. And she was laughing. When she was put down in the clear space she lifted her skirts as she had done for him and danced. A crowd of students got very close. He had to draw near to see her at all. And there she was, unconscious of him, doing her gay clog dance. When she stopped, three or four of the more daring youths urged her, seizing her by the hands and arms, to do something else. Someone cleared a table and someone else

picked her up and put her on it. She did still other dances. Someone cried, "Hey, Kenny, do you need the red dress?" So this was his temporary sweetheart.

When she was finally ready to go home at four o'clock in the morning, or when the others were agreed to let her go, she hardly remembered that she had Eugene with her. She saw him waiting as two students were asking for the privilege of taking her home.

"No," she exclaimed, seeing him, "I have my escort. I'm going now. Good-bye," and came toward him. He felt rather frozen and out of it.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

He nodded gloomily, reproachfully.

CHAPTER XII

From drawing from the nude, which Eugene came to do very successfully that winter, his interest switched to his work in the illustration class where costume figures were used. Here, for the first time, he tried his hand at wash drawings, the current medium for magazine work, and was praised after a time for his execution. Not always, however; for the instructors, feeling that harsh criticism would make for steadier effort, pooh-poohed some of his best work. But he had faith in what he was destined to do, and after sinking to depths of despair he would rise to great heights of self-confidence.

His labor for the Peoples' Furniture Company was becoming a rather dreary grind when Vincent Beers, the instructor in the illustration class, looking over his shoulder one Wednesday afternoon said: – "You ought to be able to make a little money by your work pretty soon, Witla."

"Do you think so?" questioned Eugene.

"It's pretty good. There ought to be a place on one of the newspapers here for a man like you – an afternoon newspaper possibly. Did you ever try to get on?"

"I did when I first came to the city, but they didn't want anyone. I'm rather glad they didn't now. I guess they wouldn't have kept me very long."

"You draw in pen and ink pretty well, don't you?"

"I thought I liked that best of all at first."

"Well, then, they ought to be able to use you. I wouldn't stay very long at it though. You ought to go to New York to get in the magazine illustration field – there's nothing out here. But a little newspaper work now wouldn't hurt you."

Eugene decided to try the afternoon papers, for he knew that if he got work on one of these he could still continue his night classes. He could give the long evening session to the illustration class and take an occasional night off to work on the life studies. That would make an admirable arrangement. For several days he took an hour after his work to make inquiry, taking with him some examples of his pen and inks. Several of the men he saw liked what he had to show, but he found no immediate opening. There was only one paper, one of the poorest, that offered him any encouragement. The editor-in-chief said he might be in need of a man shortly. If Eugene would come in again in three or four weeks he could tell him. They did not pay very much – twenty-five dollars to beginners.

Eugene thought of this as a great opportunity, and when he went back in three weeks and actually secured the place, he felt that he was now fairly on the road to prosperity. He was given a desk in a small back room on a fourth floor where there was accidentally west and north light. He was in a department which held two other men, both several years older than himself, one of whom posed as "dean" of the staff.

The work here was peculiar in that it included not only pen and ink but the chalk plate process which was a method of drawing with a steel point upon a zinc plate covered with a deposit of chalk, which left a design which was easily reproduced. Eugene had never done this, he had to be shown by the "dean," but he soon picked it up. He found it hard on his lungs, for he had constantly to keep blowing the chalk away as he scratched the surface of the plate, and sometimes the dust went up into his nostrils. He hoped sincerely there would not be much of this work, but there was rather an undue proportion at first owing to the fact that it was shouldered on to him by the other two – he being the beginner. He suspected as much after a little time, but by that time he was beginning to make friends with his companions and things were not so bad.

These two, although they did not figure vastly in his life, introduced him to conditions and personalities in the Chicago newspaper world which broadened him and presented points of view which were helpful. The elder of the two, the "dean," was dressy and art-y; his name was Horace Howe. The other, Jeremiah Mathews, Jerry for short, was short and fat, with a round, cheerful, smiling countenance and a wealth of coarse black hair. He loved chewing tobacco, was a little mussy about

his clothes, but studious, generous and good natured. Eugene found that he had several passions, one for good food, another for oriental curios and a third for archæology. He was alive to all that was going on in the world, and was utterly without any prejudices, social, moral or religious. He liked his work, and whistled or talked as he did it. Eugene took a secret like for him from the beginning.

It was while working on this paper that Eugene first learned that he really could write. It came about accidentally for he had abandoned the idea that he could ever do anything in newspaper work, which was the field he had originally contemplated. Here there was great need for cheap Sunday specials of a local character, and in reading some of these, which were given to him for illustration, he came to the conclusion that he could do much better himself.

"Say," he asked Mathews, "who writes the articles in here?" He was looking over the Sunday issue.

"Oh, the reporters on the staff – anyone that wants to. I think they buy some from outsiders. They only pay four dollars a column."

Eugene wondered if they would pay him, but pay or no pay he wanted to do them. Maybe they would let him sign his name. He saw that some were signed. He suggested he believed he could do that sort of thing but Howe, as a writer himself, frowned on this. He wrote and drew. Howe's opposition piqued Eugene who decided to try when the opportunity offered. He wanted to write about the Chicago River, which he thought he could illustrate effectively. Goose Island, because of the description he had read of it several years before, the simple beauties of the city parks where he liked to stroll and watch the lovers on Sundays. There were many things, but these stood as susceptible of delicious, feeling illustration and he wanted to try his hand. He suggested to the Sunday Editor, Mitchell Goldfarb, with whom he had become friendly, that he thought something nice in an illustrative way could be done on the Chicago River.

"Go ahead, try your hand," exclaimed that worthy, who was a vigorous, robust, young American of about thirty-one, with a gaspy laugh that sounded as if someone had thrown cold water down his back. "We need all that stuff. Can you write?"

"I sometimes think I might if I practiced a little."

"Why not," went on the other, who saw visions of a little free copy. "Try your hand. You might make a good thing of it. If your writing is anything like your drawing it will be all right. We don't pay people on the staff, but you can sign your name to it."

This was enough for Eugene. He tried his hand at once. His art work had already begun to impress his companions. It was rough, daring, incisive, with a touch of soul to it. Howe was already secretly envious, Mathews full of admiration. Encouraged thus by Goldfarb Eugene took a Sunday afternoon and followed up the branches of the Chicago River, noting its wonders and peculiarities, and finally made his drawings. Afterward he went to the Chicago library and looked up its history – accidentally coming across the reports of some government engineers who dwelt on the oddities of its traffic. He did not write an article so much as a panegyric on its beauty and littleness, finding the former where few would have believed it to exist. Goldfarb was oddly surprised when he read it. He had not thought Eugene could do it.

The charm of Eugene's writing was that while his mind was full of color and poetry he had logic and a desire for facts which gave what he wrote stability. He liked to know the history of things and to comment on the current phases of life. He wrote of the parks, Goose Island, the Bridewell, whatever took his fancy.

His real passion was for art, however. It was a slightly easier medium for him – quicker. He thrilled to think, sometimes, that he could tell a thing in words and then actually draw it. It seemed a beautiful privilege and he loved the thought of making the commonplace dramatic. It was all dramatic to him – the wagons in the streets, the tall buildings, the street lamps – anything, everything.

His drawing was not neglected meantime, but seemed to get stronger.

"I don't know what there is about your stuff, Witla, that gets me," Mathews said to him one day, "but you do something to it. Now why did you put those birds flying above that smokestack?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Eugene. "It's just the way I feel about it. I've seen pigeons flying like that."

"It's all to the good," replied Mathews. "And then you handle your masses right. I don't see anybody doing this sort of thing over here."

He meant in America, for these two art workers considered themselves connoisseurs of pen and ink and illustration generally. They were subscribers to *Jugend*, *Simplicissimus*, *Pick-Me-Up* and the radical European art journals. They were aware of Steinlen and Cheret and Mucha and the whole rising young school of French poster workers. Eugene was surprised to hear of these men and these papers. He began to gain confidence in himself – to think of himself as somebody.

It was while he was gaining this knowledge – finding out who was who and what and why that he followed up his relationship with Angela Blue to its logical conclusion – he became engaged to her. In spite of his connection with Ruby Kenny, which continued unbroken after the dinner, he nevertheless felt that he must have Angela; partly because she offered more resistance than any girl since Stella, and partly because she appeared to be so innocent, simple and good hearted. And she was altogether lovely. She had a beautiful figure, which no crudity of country dressmaking could conceal. She had her wonderful wealth of hair and her large, luring, water-clear blue eyes. She had colorful lips and cheeks, a natural grace in walking, could dance and play the piano. Eugene looked at her and came to the conclusion after a time that she was as beautiful as any girl he had ever seen – that she had more soul, more emotion, more sweetness. He tried to hold her hand, to kiss her, to take her in his arms, but she eluded him in a careful, wary and yet half yielding way. She wanted him to propose to her, not because she was anxious to trap him, but because her conventional conscience told her these things were not right outside a definite engagement and she wanted to be engaged first. She was already in love with him. When he pleaded, she was anxious to throw herself in his arms in a mad embrace, but she restrained herself, waiting. At last he flung his arms about her as she was sitting at the piano one evening and holding her tight pressed his lips to her cheek.

She struggled to her feet. "You musn't," she said. "It isn't right. I can't let you do that."

"But I love you," he exclaimed, pursuing her. "I want to marry you. Will you have me, Angela? Will you be mine?"

She looked at him yearningly, for she realized that she had made him do things her way – this wild, unpractical, artistic soul. She wanted to yield then and there but something told her to wait.

"I won't tell you now," she said, "I want to talk to papa and mamma. I haven't told them anything as yet. I want to ask them about you, and then I'll tell you when I come again."

"Oh, Angela," he pleaded.

"Now, please wait, Mr. Witla," she pleaded. She had never yet called him Eugene. "I'll come again in two or three weeks. I want to think it over. It's better."

He curbed his desire and waited, but it made all the more vigorous and binding the illusion that she was the one woman in the world for him. She aroused more than any woman yet a sense of the necessity of concealing the eagerness of his senses – of pretending something higher. He even tried to deceive himself into the belief that this was a spiritual relationship, but underneath all was a burning sense of her beauty, her physical charm, her passion. She was sleeping as yet, bound in convention and a semi-religious interpretation of life. If she were aroused! He closed his eyes and dreamed.

CHAPTER XIII

In two weeks Angela came back, ready to plight her faith; and Eugene was waiting, eager to receive it. He had planned to meet her under the smoky train shed of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul depot, to escort her to Kinsley's for dinner, to bring her some flowers, to give her a ring he had secured in anticipation, a ring which had cost him seventy-five dollars and consumed quite all his savings; but she was too regardful of the drama of the situation to meet him anywhere but in the parlor of her aunt's house, where she could look as she wished. She wrote that she must come down early and when he arrived at eight of a Saturday evening she was dressed in the dress that seemed most romantic to her, the one she had worn when she first met him at Alexandria. She half suspected that he would bring flowers and so wore none, and when he came with pink roses, she added those to her corsage. She was a picture of rosy youth and trimness and not unlike the character by whose name he had christened her – the fair Elaine of Arthur's court. Her yellow hair was done in a great mass that hung sensuously about her neck; her cheeks were rosy with the elation of the hour; her lips moist; her eyes bright. She fairly sparkled her welcome as he entered.

At the sight of her Eugene was beside himself. He was always at the breaking point over any romantic situation. The beauty of the idea – the beauty of love as love; the delight of youth filled his mind as a song might, made him tense, feverish, enthusiastic.

"You're here at last, Angela!" he said, trying to keep hold of her hands. "What word?"

"Oh, you musn't ask so soon," she replied. "I want to talk to you first. I'll play you something."

"No," he said, following her as she backed toward the piano. "I want to know. I must. I can't wait."

"I haven't made up my mind," she pleaded evasively. "I want to think. You had better let me play."

"Oh, no," he urged.

"Yes, let me play."

She ignored him and swept into the composition, but all the while she was conscious of him hovering over her – a force. At the close, when she had been made even more emotionally responsive by the suggestion of the music, he slipped his arms about her as he had once before, but she struggled away again, slipping to a corner and standing at bay. He liked her flushed face, her shaken hair, the roses awry at her waist.

"You must tell me now," he said, standing before her. "Will you have me?"

She dropped her head down as though doubting, and fearing familiarities; he slipped to one knee to see her eyes. Then, looking up, he caught her about the waist. "Will you?" he asked.

She looked at his soft hair, dark and thick, his smooth pale brow, his black eyes and even chin. She wanted to yield dramatically and this was dramatic enough. She put her hands to his head, bent over and looked into his eyes; her hair fell forward about her face. "Will you be good to me?" she asked, yearning into his eyes.

"Yes, yes," he declared. "You know that. Oh, I love you so."

She put his head far back and laid her lips to his. There was fire, agony in it. She held him so and then he stood up heaping kisses upon her cheeks, her lips, her eyes, her neck.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "how wonderful you are!"

The expression shocked her.

"You mustn't," she said.

"I can't help it. You are so beautiful!"

She forgave him for the compliment.

There were burning moments after this, moments in which they clung to each other desperately, moments in which he took her in his arms, moments in which he whispered his dreams of the future.

He took the ring he had bought and put it on her finger. He was going to be a great artist, she was going to be an artist's bride; he was going to paint her lovely face, her hair, her form. If he wanted love scenes he would paint these which they were now living together. They talked until one in the morning and then she begged him to go, but he would not. At two he left, only to come early the next morning to take her to church.

There ensued for Eugene a rather astonishing imaginative and emotional period in which he grew in perception of things literary and artistic and in dreams of what marriage with Angela would mean to him. There was a peculiar awareness about Eugene at this time, which was leading him into an understanding of things. The extraordinary demands of some phases of dogma in the matter of religion; the depths of human perversity in the matter of morality; the fact that there were worlds within worlds of our social organism; that really basically and actually there was no fixed and definite understanding of anything by anybody. From Mathews he learned of philosophies – Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer – faint inklings of what they believed. From association with Howe he heard of current authors who expressed new moods, Pierre Loti, Thomas Hardy, Maeterlinck, Tolstoi. Eugene was no person to read – he was too eager to live, – but he gained much by conversation and he liked to talk. He began to think he could do almost anything if he tried – write poems, write plays, write stories, paint, illustrate, etc. He used to conceive of himself as a general, an orator, a politician – thinking how wonderful he would be if he could set himself definitely to any one thing. Sometimes he would recite passages from great speeches he had composed in his imagination as he walked. The saving grace in his whole make-up was that he really loved to work and he would work at the things he could do. He would not shirk his assignments or dodge his duties.

After his evening class Eugene would sometimes go out to Ruby's house, getting there by eleven and being admitted by an arrangement with her that the front door be left open so that he could enter quietly. More than once he found her sleeping in her little room off the front room, arrayed in a red silk dressing gown and curled up like a little black-haired child. She knew he liked her art instincts and she strove to gratify them, affecting the peculiar and the exceptional. She would place a candle under a red shade on a small table by her bed and pretend to have been reading, the book being usually tossed to one side on the coverlet where he would see it lying when he came. He would enter silently, gathering her up in his arms as she dozed, kissing her lips to waken her, carrying her in his arms into the front room to caress her and whisper his passion. There was no cessation of this devotion to Ruby the while he was declaring his love for Angela, and he really did not see that the two interfered greatly. He loved Angela, he thought. He liked Ruby, thought she was sweet. He felt sorry for her at times because she was such a little thing, so unthinking. Who was going to marry her eventually? What was going to become of her?

Because of this very attitude he fascinated the girl who was soon ready to do anything for him. She dreamed dreams of how nice it would be if they could live in just a little flat together – all alone. She would give up her art posing and just keep house for him. He talked to her of this – imagining it might possibly come to pass – realizing quite fully that it probably wouldn't. He wanted Angela for his wife, but if he had money he thought Ruby and he might keep a separate place – somehow. What Angela would think of this did not trouble him – only that she should not know. He never breathed anything to either of the other, but there were times when he wondered what they would think each of the other if they knew. Money, money, that was the great deterrent. For lack of money he could not marry anybody at present – neither Angela nor Ruby nor anyone else. His first duty, he thought, was so to place himself financially that he could talk seriously to any girl. That was what Angela expected of him, he knew. That was what he would have to have if he wanted Ruby.

There came a time when the situation began to grow irksome. He had reached the point where he began to understand how limited his life was. Mathews and Howe, who drew more money, were able to live better than he. They went out to midnight suppers, theatre parties, and expeditions to the tenderloin section (not yet known by that name). They had time to browse about the sections

of the city which had peculiar charms for them as Bohemians after dark – the levee, as a certain section of the Chicago River was called; Gambler's Row in South Clark Street; the Whitechapel Club, as a certain organization of newspaper men was called, and other places frequented by the literati and the more talented of the newspaper makers. Eugene, first because of a temperament which was introspective and reflective, and second because of his æsthetic taste, which was offended by much that he thought was tawdry and cheap about these places, and third by what he considered his lack of means, took practically no part in these diversions. While he worked in his class he heard of these things – usually the next day – and they were amplified and made more showy and interesting by the narrative powers of the participants. Eugene hated coarse, vulgar women and ribald conduct, but he felt that he was not even permitted to see them at close range had he wanted to. It took money to carouse and he did not have it.

Perhaps, because of his youth and a certain air of unsophistication and impracticability which went with him, his employers were not inclined to consider money matters in connection with him. They seemed to think he would work for little and would not mind. He was allowed to drift here six months without a sign of increase, though he really deserved more than any one of those who worked with him during the same period. He was not the one to push his claims personally but he grew restless and slightly embittered under the strain and ached to be free, though his work was as effective as ever.

It was this indifference on their part which fixed his determination to leave Chicago, although Angela, his art career, his natural restlessness and growing judgment of what he might possibly become were deeper incentives. Angela haunted him as a dream of future peace. If he could marry her and settle down he would be happy. He felt now, having fairly satiated himself in the direction of Ruby, that he might leave her. She really would not care so very much. Her sentiments were not deep enough. Still, he knew she would care, and when he began going less regularly to her home, really becoming indifferent to what she did in the artists' world, he began also to feel ashamed of himself, for he knew that it was a cruel thing to do. He saw by her manner when he absented himself that she was hurt and that she knew he was growing cold.

"Are you coming out Sunday night?" she asked him once, wistfully.

"I can't," he apologized; "I have to work."

"Yes, I know how you have to work. But go on. I don't mind, I know."

"Oh, Ruby, how you talk. I can't always be here."

"I know what it is, Eugene," she replied. "You don't care any more. Oh, well, don't mind me."

"Now, sweet, don't talk like that," he would say, but after he was gone she would stand by her window and look out upon the shabby neighborhood and sigh sadly. He was more to her than anyone she had met yet, but she was not the kind that cried.

"He is going to leave me," was her one thought. "He is going to leave me."

Goldfarb had watched Eugene a long time, was interested in him, realized that he had talent. He was leaving shortly to take a better Sunday-Editorship himself on a larger paper, and he thought Eugene was wasting his time and ought to be told so.

"I think you ought to try to get on one of the bigger papers here, Witla," he said to him one Saturday afternoon when things were closing up. "You'll never amount to anything on this paper. It isn't big enough. You ought to get on one of the big ones. Why don't you try the *Tribune*– or else go to New York? I think you ought to do magazine work."

Eugene drank it all in. "I've been thinking of that," he said. "I think I'll go to New York. I'll be better off there."

"I would either do one or the other. If you stay too long in a place like this it's apt to do you harm."

Eugene went back to his desk with the thought of change ringing in his ears. He would go. He would save up his money until he had one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars and then try his luck in the East. He would leave Ruby and Angela, the latter only temporarily, the former for

good very likely, though he only vaguely confessed this to himself. He would make some money and then he would come back and marry his dream from Blackwood. Already his imaginative mind ran forward to a poetic wedding in a little country church, with Angela standing beside him in white. Then he would bring her back with him to New York – he, Eugene Witla, already famous in the East. Already the lure of the big eastern city was in his mind, its palaces, its wealth, its fame. It was the great world he knew, this side of Paris and London. He would go to it now, shortly. What would he be there? How great? How soon?

So he dreamed.

CHAPTER XIV

Once this idea of New York was fixed in his mind as a necessary step in his career, it was no trouble for him to carry it out. He had already put aside sixty dollars in a savings bank since he had given Angela the ring and he decided to treble it as quickly as possible and then start. He fancied that all he needed was just enough to live on for a little while until he could get a start. If he could not sell drawings to the magazines he might get a place on a newspaper and anyhow he felt confident that he could live. He communicated to Howe and Mathews his intention of going East pretty soon and aroused in their respective bosoms the emotions which were characteristic of each. Howe, envious from the start, was glad to have him off the paper, but regretful of the stellar career which his determination foreboded. He half suspected now that Eugene would do something exceptional – he was so loose in his moods – so eccentric. Mathews was glad for Eugene and a little sorry for himself. He wished he had Eugene's courage, his fire, his talent.

"You'll make good when you get down there," Mathews said to him one afternoon when Howe was out of the room, for he realized that the latter was jealous. "You've got the stuff. Some of the work you have done here will give you a fine introduction. I wish I were going."

"Why don't you?" suggested Eugene.

"Who? me? What good would it do me? I'm not ready yet. I can't do that sort of stuff. I might go down some time."

"I think you do good work," said Eugene generously. He really did not believe it was good art, but it was fair newspaper sketching.

"Oh, no, you don't mean that, Witla," replied Mathews. "I know what I can do."

Eugene was silent.

"I wish when you get down there," went on Mathews, "you would write us occasionally. I would like to know how you are getting along."

"Sure, I'll write," replied Eugene, flattered by the interest his determination had aroused. "Sure I will." But he never did.

In Ruby and Angela he had two problems to adjust which were not so easy. In the one case it was sympathy, regret, sorrow for her helplessness, her hopelessness. She was so sweet and lovely in her way, but not quite big enough mentally or emotionally for him. Could he really live with her if he wanted to? Could he substitute her for a girl like Angela? Could he? And now he had involved Angela, for since her return to tell him that she accepted him as her affianced lover, there had been some scenes between them in which a new standard of emotion had been set for him. This girl who looked so simple and innocent was burning at times with a wild fire. It snapped in her eyes when Eugene undid her wonderful hair and ran his hands through its heavy strands. "The Rhine Maiden," he would say. "Little Lorelei! You are like the mermaid waiting to catch the young lover in the strands of her hair. You are Marguerite and I Faust. You are a Dutch Gretchen. I love this wonderful hair when it is braided. Oh, sweet, you perfect creature! I will put you in a painting yet. I will make you famous."

Angela thrilled to this. She burned in a flame which was of his fanning. She put her lips to his in long hot kisses, sat on his knee and twined her hair about his neck; rubbed his face with it as one might bathe a face in strands of silk. Finding such a response he went wild, kissed her madly, would have been still more masterful had she not, at the slightest indication of his audacity, leaped from his embrace, not opposition but self protection in her eyes. She pretended to think better of his love, and Eugene, checked by her ideal of him, tried to restrain himself. He did manage to desist because he was sure that he could not do what he wanted to. Daring such as that would end her love. So they wrestled in affection.

It was the fall following his betrothal to Angela that he actually took his departure. He had drifted through the summer, pondering. He had stayed away from Ruby more and more, and finally

left without saying good-bye to her, though he thought up to the last that he intended to go out and see her.

As for Angela, when it came to parting from her, he was in a depressed and downcast mood. He thought now that he did not really want to go to New York, but was being drawn by fate. There was no money for him in the West; they could not live on what he could earn there. Hence he must go and in doing so must lose her. It looked very tragic.

Out at her aunt's house, where she came for the Saturday and Sunday preceding his departure, he walked the floor with her gloomily, counted the lapse of the hours after which he would be with her no more, pictured the day when he would return successful to fetch her. Angela had a faint foreboding fear of the events which might intervene. She had read stories of artists who had gone to the city and had never come back. Eugene seemed such a wonderful person, she might not hold him; and yet he had given her his word and he was madly in love with her – no doubt of that. That fixed, passionate, yearning look in his eyes – what did it mean if not enduring, eternal love? Life had brought her a great treasure – a great love and an artist for a lover.

"Go, Eugene!" she cried at last tragically, almost melodramatically. His face was in her hands. "I will wait for you. You need never have one uneasy thought. When you are ready I will be here, only, come soon – you will, won't you?"

"Will I!" he declared, kissing her, "will I? Look at me. Don't you know?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed, "of course I know. Oh, yes! yes!"

The rest was a passionate embrace. And then they parted. He went out brooding over the subtlety and the tragedy of life. The sharp October stars saddened him more. It was a wonderful world but bitter to endure at times. Still it could be endured and there was happiness and peace in store for him probably. He and Angela would find it together living in each other's company, living in each other's embrace and by each other's kisses. It must be so. The whole world believed it – even he, after Stella and Margaret and Ruby and Angela. Even he.

The train which bore him to New York bore a very meditative young man. As it pulled out through the great railroad yards of the city, past the shabby back yards of the houses, the street crossings at grade, the great factories and elevators, he thought of that other time when he had first ventured in the city. How different! Then he was so green, so raw. Since then he had become a newspaper artist, he could write, he could find his tongue with women, he knew a little something about the organization of the world. He had not saved any money, true, but he had gone through the art school, had given Angela a diamond ring, had this two hundred dollars with which he was venturing to reconnoitre the great social metropolis of the country. He was passing Fifty-seventh Street; he recognized the neighborhood he traversed so often in visiting Ruby. He had not said good-bye to her and there in the distance were the rows of commonplace, two family frame dwellings, one of which she occupied with her foster parents. Poor little Ruby! and she liked him. It was a shame, but what was he to do about it? He didn't care for her. It really hurt him to think and then he tried not to remember. These tragedies of the world could not be healed by thinking.

The train passed out into the flat fields of northern Indiana and as little country towns flashed past he thought of Alexandria and how he had pulled up his stakes and left it. What was Jonas Lyle doing and John Summers? Myrtle wrote that she was going to be married in the spring. She had delayed solely because she wanted to delay. He thought sometimes that Myrtle was a little like himself, fickle in her moods. He was sure he would never want to go back to Alexandria except for a short visit, and yet the thought of his father and his mother and his old home were sweet to him. His father! How little he knew of the real world!

As they passed out of Pittsburgh he saw for the first time the great mountains, raising their heads in solemn majesty in the dark, and great lines of coke ovens, flaming red tongues of fire. He saw men working, and sleeping towns succeeding one another. What a great country America was! What a great thing to be an artist here! Millions of people and no vast artistic voice to portray these things

– these simple dramatic things like the coke ovens in the night. If he could only do it! If he could only stir the whole country, so that his name would be like that of Doré in France or Verestchagin in Russia. If he could but get fire into his work, the fire he felt!

He got into his berth after a time and looked out on the dark night and the stars, longing, and then he dozed. When he awoke again the train had already passed Philadelphia. It was morning and the cars were speeding across the flat meadows toward Trenton. He arose and dressed, watching the array of towns the while, Trenton, New Brunswick, Metuchen, Elizabeth. Somehow this country was like Illinois, flat. After Newark they rushed out upon a great meadow and he caught the sense of the sea. It was beyond this. These were tide-water streams, the Passaic and the Hackensack, with small ships and coal and brick barges tied at the water side. The thrill of something big overtook him as the brakeman began to call "Jersey City," and as he stepped out into the vast train shed his heart misgave him a little. He was all alone in New York. It was wealthy, cold and critical. How should he prosper here? He walked out through the gates to where low arches concealed ferry boats, and in another moment it was before him, sky line, bay, the Hudson, the Statue of Liberty, ferry boats, steamers, liners, all in a grey mist of fierce rain and the tugs and liners blowing mournfully upon great whistles. It was something he could never have imagined without seeing it, and this swish of real salt water, rolling in heavy waves, spoke to him as music might, exalting his soul. What a wonderful thing this was, this sea – where ships were and whales and great mysteries. What a wonderful thing New York was, set down by it, surrounded by it, this metropolis of the country. Here was the sea; yonder were the great docks that held the vessels that sailed to the ports of all the world. He saw them – great grey and black hulls, tied to long piers jutting out into the water. He listened to the whistles, the swish of the water, saw the circling gulls, realized emotionally the mass of people. Here were Jay Gould and Russell Sage and the Vanderbilts and Morgan – all alive and all here. Wall Street, Fifth Avenue, Madison Square, Broadway – he knew of these by reputation. How would he do here – how fare? Would the city ever acclaim him as it did some? He looked wide eyed, with an open heart, with intense and immense appreciation. Well, he was going to enter, going to try. He could do that – perhaps, perhaps. But he felt lonely. He wished he were back with Angela where her soft arms could shut him safe. He wished he might feel her hands on his cheeks, his hair. He would not need to fight alone then. But now he was alone, and the city was roaring about him, a great noise like the sea. He must enter and do battle.

CHAPTER XV

Not knowing routes or directions in New York, Eugene took a Desbrosses Street ferry, and coming into West Street wandered along that curious thoroughfare staring at the dock entrances. Manhattan Island seemed a little shabby to him from this angle but he thought that although physically, perhaps, it might not be distinguished, there must be other things which made it wonderful. Later when he saw the solidity of it, the massed houses, the persistent streams of people, the crush of traffic, it dawned on him that mere humanity in packed numbers makes a kind of greatness, and this was the island's first characteristic. There were others, like the prevailing lowness of the buildings in its old neighborhoods, the narrowness of the streets in certain areas, the shabbiness of brick and stone when they have seen an hundred years of weather, which struck him as curious or depressing. He was easily touched by exterior conditions.

As he wandered he kept looking for some place where he might like to live, some house that had a yard or a tree. At length he found a row of houses in lower Seventh Avenue with an array of iron balconies in front which appealed to him. He applied here and in one house found a room for four dollars which he thought he had better take for the present. It was cheaper than any hotel. His hostess was a shabby woman in black who made scarcely any impression on him as a personality, merely giving him a thought as to what a dreary thing it was to keep roomers and the room itself was nothing, a commonplace, but he had a new world before him and all his interests were outside. He wanted to see this city. He deposited his grip and sent for his trunk and then took to the streets, having come to see and hear things which would be of advantage to him.

He went about this early relationship to the city in the right spirit. For a little while he did not try to think what he would do, but struck out and walked, here, there and everywhere, this very first day down Broadway to the City Hall and up Broadway from 14th to 42nd street the same night. Soon he knew all Third Avenue and the Bowery, the wonders of Fifth Avenue and Riverside Drive, the beauties of the East River, the Battery, Central Park and the lower East Side. He sought out quickly the wonders of metropolitan life – its crowds at dinner and theatre time in Broadway, its tremendous throngs morning and afternoon in the shopping district, its amazing world of carriages in Fifth Avenue and Central Park. He had marveled at wealth and luxury in Chicago, but here it took his breath away. It was obviously so much more fixed, so definite and comprehensible. Here one felt intuitively the far reaches which separate the ordinary man from the scion of wealth. It curled him up like a frozen leaf, dulled his very soul, and gave him a clear sense of his position in the social scale. He had come here with a pretty high estimate of himself, but daily, as he looked, he felt himself crumbling. What was he? What was art? What did the city care? It was much more interested in other things, in dressing, eating, visiting, riding abroad. The lower part of the island was filled with cold commercialism which frightened him. In the upper half, which concerned only women and show – a voluptuous sybaritism – caused him envy. He had but two hundred dollars with which to fight his way, and this was the world he must conquer.

Men of Eugene's temperament are easily depressed. He first gorged the spectacle of life and then suffered from mental indigestion. He saw too much of it too quickly. He wandered about for weeks, looking in the shop windows, the libraries, the museums, the great streets, growing all the while more despondent. At night he would return to his bare room and indite long epistles to Angela, describing what he had seen and telling her of his undying love for her – largely because he had no other means of ridding himself of his superabundant vitality and moods. They were beautiful letters, full of color and feeling, but to Angela they gave a false impression of emotion and sincerity because they appeared to be provoked by absence from her. In part of course they were, but far more largely they were the result of loneliness and the desire for expression which this vast spectacle of life itself incited. He also sent her some tentative sketches of things he had seen – a large crowd in the dark at

34th Street; a boat off 86th Street in the East River in the driving rain; a barge with cars being towed by a tug. He could not think exactly what to do with these things at that time, but he wanted to try his hand at illustrating for the magazines. He was a little afraid of these great publications, however, for now that he was on the ground with them his art did not appear so significant.

It was during the first few weeks that he received his only letter from Ruby. His parting letter to her, written when he reached New York, had been one of those makeshift affairs which faded passion indites. He was so sorry he had to leave without seeing her. He had intended to come out but the rush of preparation at the last moment, and so forth; he hoped to come back to Chicago one of these days and he would look her up. He still loved her, but it was necessary for him to leave – to come where the greatest possibilities were. "I remember how sweet you were when I first saw you," he added. "I shall never forget my first impressions, little Ruby."

It was cruel to add this touch of remembrance, but the artist in him could not refrain. It cut Ruby as a double edged sword, for she understood that he cared well enough that way – æsthetically. It was not her but beauty that he loved, and her particular beauty had lost its appeal.

She wrote after a time, intending to be defiant, indifferent, but she really could not be. She tried to think of something sharp to say, but finally put down the simple truth.

> "Dear Eugene: " she wrote, "I got your note several weeks ago, but I could not bring myself to answer it before this. I know everything is over between us and that is all right, for I suppose it has to be. You couldn't love any woman long, I think. I know what you say about your having to go to New York to broaden your field is true. You ought to, but I'm sorry you didn't come out. You might have. Still I don't blame you, Eugene. It isn't much different from what has been going on for some time. I have cared but I'll get over that, I know, and I won't ever think hard of you. Won't you return me the notes I have sent you from time to time and my pictures? You won't want them now.
>
> "Ruby."

There was a little blank space on the paper and then: —

> "I stood by the window last night and looked out on the street. The moon was shining and those dead trees were waving in the wind. I saw the moon on that pool of water over in the field. It looked like silver. Oh, Eugene, I wish I were dead."

He jumped up as he read these words and clenched the letter in his hands. The pathos of it all cut him to the quick, raised his estimate of her, made him feel as if he had made a mistake in leaving her. He really cared for her after all. She was sweet. If she were here now he could live with her. She might as well be a model in New York as in Chicago. He was on the verge of writing this, when one of the long, almost daily epistles Angela was sending arrived and changed his mood. He did not see how, in the face of so great and clean a love as hers, he could go on with Ruby. His affection had obviously been dying. Should he try to revive it now?

This conflict of emotions was so characteristic of Eugene's nature, that had he been soundly introspective, he would have seen that he was an idealist by temperament, in love with the æsthetic, in love with love, and that there was no permanent faith in him for anybody – except the impossible she.

As it was, he wrote Ruby a letter breathing regret and sorrow but not inviting her to come. He could not have supported her long if she had, he thought. Besides he was anxious to secure Angela. So that affair lapsed.

In the meantime he visited the magazine offices. On leaving Chicago he had put in the bottom of his trunk a number of drawings which he had done for the *Globe*– his sketches of the Chicago River, of Blue Island Avenue, of which he had once made a study as a street, of Goose Island and of the Lake front. There were some street scenes, too, all forceful in the peculiar massing of their blacks, the unexpected, almost flashing, use of a streak of white at times. There was emotion in them, a sense

of life. He should have been appreciated at once, but, oddly, there was just enough of the radically strange about what he did to make his work seem crude, almost coarse. He drew a man's coat with a single dash of his pen. He indicated a face by a spot. If you looked close there was seldom any detail, frequently none at all. From the praise he had received at the art school and from Mathews and Goldfarb he was slowly coming to the conclusion that he had a way of his own. Being so individual he was inclined to stick to it. He walked with an air of conviction which had nothing but his own belief in himself to back it up, and it was not an air which drew anybody to him. When he showed his pictures at the *Century*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, they were received with an air of weary consideration. Dozens of magnificent drawings were displayed on their walls signed by men whom Eugene now knew to be leaders in the illustration world. He returned to his room convinced that he had made no impression at all. They must be familiar with artists a hundred times better than himself.

As a matter of fact Eugene was simply overawed by the material face of things. These men whose pictures he saw displayed on the walls of the art and editorial rooms of the magazines were really not, in many instances, any better than himself, if as good. They had the advantage of solid wood frames and artistic acceptance. He was a long way as yet from magazine distinction but the work he did later had no more of the fire than had this early stuff. It was a little broader in treatment, a little less intolerant of detail, but no more vigorous if as much so. The various art directors were weary of smart young artists showing drawings. A little suffering was good for them in the beginning. So Eugene was incontinently turned away with a little faint praise which was worse than opposition. He sank very low in spirits.

There were still the smaller magazines and the newspapers, however, and he hunted about faithfully, trying to get something to do. From one or two of the smaller magazines, he secured commissions, after a time, three or four drawings for thirty-five dollars; and from that had to be extracted models' fees. He had to have a room where he could work as an artist, receiving models to pose, and he finally found one in West 14th Street, a back bedroom, looking out over an open court and with a public stair which let all come who might without question. This cost him twenty-five dollars a month, but he thought he had better risk it. If he could get a few commissions he could live.

CHAPTER XVI

The art world of New York is peculiar. It was then and for some time after, broken up into cliques with scarcely any unity. There was a world of sculptors, for instance, in which some thirty or forty sculptors had part – but they knew each other slightly, criticised each other severely and retired for the most part into a background of relatives and friends. There was a painting world, as distinguished from an illustrating world, in which perhaps a thousand alleged artists, perhaps more, took part. Most of these were men and women who had some ability – enough to have their pictures hung at the National Academy of Design exhibition – to sell some pictures, get some decorative work to do, paint some portraits. There were studio buildings scattered about various portions of the city; in Washington Square; in Ninth and Tenth Streets; in odd places, such as Macdougal Alley and occasional cross streets from Washington Square to Fifty-ninth Street, which were filled with painters, illustrators, sculptors and craftsmen in art generally. This painting world had more unity than the world of sculptors and, in a way, included the latter. There were several art clubs – the Salmagundi, the Kit-Kat and the Lotus – and there were a number of exhibitions, ink, water color, oil, with their reception nights where artists could meet and exchange the courtesies and friendship of their world. In addition to this there were little communal groups such as those who resided in the Tenth Street studios; the Twenty-third Street Y. M. C. A.; the Van Dyck studios, and so on. It was possible to find little crowds, now and then, that harmonized well enough for a time and to get into a group, if, to use a colloquialism, one *belonged*. If you did not, art life in New York might be a very dreary thing and one might go a long time without finding just the particular crowd with which to associate.

Beside the painting world there was the illustrating world, made up of beginners and those who had established themselves firmly in editorial favor. These were not necessarily a part of the painting or sculpture worlds and yet, in spirit, were allied to them, had their clubs also, and their studios were in the various neighborhoods where the painters and sculptors were. The only difference was that in the case of the embryo illustrators they were to be found living three or four in one studio, partly because of the saving in expense, but also because of the love of companionship and because they could hearten and correct one another in their work. A number of such interesting groups were in existence when Eugene arrived, but of course he did not know of them.

It takes time for the beginner to get a hearing anywhere. We all have to serve an apprenticeship, whatever field we enter. Eugene had talent and determination, but no experience, no savoir faire, no circle of friends and acquaintances. The whole city was strange and cold, and if he had not immediately fallen desperately in love with it as a spectacle he would have been unconscionably lonely and unhappy. As it was the great fresh squares, such as Washington, Union and Madison; the great streets, such as Broadway, Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue; the great spectacles, such as the Bowery at night, the East River, the water front, the Battery, all fascinated him with an unchanging glamor.

He was hypnotized by the wonder of this thing – the beauty of it. Such seething masses of people! such whirlpools of life! The great hotels, the opera, the theatres, the restaurants, all gripped him with a sense of beauty. These lovely women in magnificent gowns; these swarms of cabs, with golden eyes, like monstrous insects; this ebb and surge of life at morning and evening, made him forget his loneliness. He had no money to spend, no immediate hope of a successful career, he could walk these streets, look in these windows, admire these beautiful women; thrill at the daily newspaper announcements of almost hourly successes in one field or another. Here and there in the news an author had made a great success with a book; a scientist with a discovery; a philosopher with a new theory; a financier with an investment. There was news of great plays being put on; great actors and actresses coming from abroad; great successes being made by débutantes in society; great movements forwarded generally. Youth and ambition had the call – he saw that. It was only a question of time,

if you had talent, when you would get your hearing. He longed ardently for his but he had no feeling that it was coming to him quickly, so he got the blues. It was a long road to travel.

One of his pet diversions these days and nights was to walk the streets in rain or fog or snow. The city appealed to him, wet or white, particularly the public squares. He saw Fifth Avenue once in a driving snowstorm and under sputtering arc lights, and he hurried to his easel next morning to see if he could not put it down in black and white. It was unsuccessful, or at least he felt so, for after an hour of trying he threw it aside in disgust. But these spectacles were drawing him. He was wanting to do them – wanting to see them shown somewhere in color. Possible success was a solace at a time when all he could pay for a meal was fifteen cents and he had no place to go and not a soul with whom to talk.

It was an interesting phase of Eugene's character that he had a passion for financial independence. He might have written home from Chicago at times when he was hard pressed; he might have borrowed some money from his father now, but preferred to earn it – to appear to be further along than he was. If anyone had asked him he would have said he was doing fine. Practically he so wrote to Angela, giving as an excuse for further delay that he wanted to wait until he had ample means. He was trying all this time to make his two hundred dollars go as far as possible and to add to it by any little commissions he could get, however small. He figured his expenses down to ten dollars a week and managed to stay within that sum.

The particular building in which he had settled was really not a studio building but an old, run-down boarding and apartment house turned partially to uses of trade. The top floor contained three fair sized rooms and two hall bedrooms, all occupied by lonely individuals plying some craft or other. Eugene's next door neighbor chanced to be a hack illustrator, who had had his training in Boston and had set up his easel here in the hope of making a living. There were not many exchanges of courtesies between them at first, although, the door being open the second day he arrived, he saw that an artist worked there, for the easel was visible.

No models applying at first he decided to appeal to the Art Students' League. He called on the Secretary and was given the names of four, who replied to postal cards from him. One he selected, a young Swedish American girl who looked somewhat like the character in the story he had in mind. She was neat and attractive, with dark hair, a straight nose and pointed chin, and Eugene immediately conceived a liking for her. He was ashamed of his surroundings, however, and consequently diffident. This particular model was properly distant, and he finished his pictures with as much expedition and as little expense as he possibly could.

Eugene was not given to scraping odd acquaintances, though he made friends fast enough when the balance of intellect was right. In Chicago he had become friendly with several young artists as a result of working with them at the Institute, but here he knew no one, having come without introductions. He did become acquainted with his neighbor, Philip Shotmeyer. He wanted to find out about local art life from him, but Shotmeyer was not brilliant, and could not supply him with more than minor details of what Eugene desired to know. Through him he learnt a little of studio regions, art personalities; the fact that young beginners worked in groups. Shotmeyer had been in such a group the year before, though why he was alone now he did not say. He sold drawings to some of the minor magazines, better magazines than Eugene had yet had dealings with. One thing he did at once for Eugene which was very helpful: he admired his work. He saw, as had others before him, something of his peculiar distinction as an artist, attended every show and one day he gave him a suggestion which was the beginning of Eugene's successful magazine career. Eugene was working on one of his street scenes – a task which he invariably essayed when he had nothing else to do. Shotmeyer had drifted in and was following the strokes of his brush as he attempted to portray a mass of East Side working girls flooding the streets after six o'clock. There were dark walls of buildings, a flaring gas lamp or two, some yellow lighted shop windows, and many shaded, half seen faces – bare suggestions of souls and pulsing life.

"Say," said Shotmeyer at one point, "that kind o' looks like the real thing to me. I've seen a crowd like that."

"Have you?" replied Eugene.

"You ought to be able to get some magazine to use that as a frontispiece. Why don't you try *Truth* with that?"

"Truth" was a weekly which Eugene, along with many others in the West, had admired greatly because it ran a double page color insert every week and occasionally used scenes of this character. Somehow he always needed a shove of this kind to make him act when he was drifting. He put more enthusiasm into his work because of Shotmeyer's remark, and when it was done decided to carry it to the office of *Truth*. The Art Director approved it on sight, though he said nothing, but carried it in to the Editor.

"Here's a thing that I consider a find in its way."

He set it proudly upon the editorial desk.

"Say," said the Editor, laying down a manuscript, "that's the real thing, isn't it? Who did that?"

"A young fellow by the name of Witla, who has just blown in here. He looks like the real thing to me."

"Say," went on the Editor, "look at the suggestion of faces back there! What? Reminds me just a little of the masses in Doré stuff – It's good, isn't it?"

"It's fine," echoed the Art Director. "I think he's a comer, if nothing happens to him. We ought to get a few centre pages out of him."

"How much does he want for this?"

"Oh, he doesn't know. He'll take almost anything. I'll give him seventy-five dollars."

"That's all right," said the Editor as the Art Director took the drawing down. "There's something new there. You ought to hang on to him."

"I will," replied his associate. "He's young yet. He doesn't want to be encouraged too much."

He went out, pulling a solemn countenance.

"I like this fairly well," he said. "We may be able to find room for it. I'll send you a check shortly if you'll let me have your address."

Eugene gave it. His heart was beating a gay tattoo in his chest. He did not think anything of price, in fact it did not occur to him. All that was in his mind was the picture as a double page spread. So he had really sold one after all and to *Truth*! Now he could honestly say he had made some progress. Now he could write Angela and tell her. He could send her copies when it came out. He could really have something to point to after this and best of all, now he knew he could do street scenes.

He went out into the street treading not the grey stone pavement but air. He threw back his head and breathed deep. He thought of other scenes like this which he could do. His dreams were beginning to be realized – he, Eugene Witla, the painter of a double page spread in *Truth*! Already he was doing a whole series in his imagination, all he had ever dreamed of. He wanted to run and tell Shotmeyer – to buy him a good meal. He almost loved him, commonplace hack that he was – because he had suggested to him the right thing to do.

"Say, Shotmeyer," he said, sticking his head in that worthy's door, "you and I eat tonight. *Truth* took that drawing."

"Isn't that fine," said his floor-mate, without a trace of envy. "Well, I'm glad. I thought they'd like it."

Eugene could have cried. Poor Shotmeyer! He wasn't a good artist, but he had a good heart. He would never forget him.

CHAPTER XVII

This one significant sale with its subsequent check of seventy-five dollars and later the appearance of the picture in color, gave Eugene such a lift in spirit that he felt, for the time being, as though his art career had reached a substantial basis, and he began to think of going to Blackwood to visit Angela. But first he must do some more work.

He concentrated his attention on several additional scenes, doing a view of Greeley Square in a sopping drizzle, and a picture of an L train speeding up the Bowery on its high, thin trestle of steel. He had an eye for contrasts, picking out lights and shadows sharply, making wonderful blurs that were like colors in precious stones, confused and suggestive. He took one of these after a month to *Truth*, and again the Art Director was his victim. He tried to be indifferent, but it was hard. The young man had something that he wanted.

"You might show me anything else you do in this line," he said. "I can use a few if they come up to these two."

Eugene went away with his head in the air. He was beginning to get the courage of his ability.

It takes quite a number of drawings at seventy-five and one hundred dollars each to make a living income, and artists were too numerous to make anyone's opportunity for immediate distinction easy. Eugene waited months to see his first drawing come out. He stayed away from the smaller magazines in the hope that he would soon be able to contribute to the larger ones, but they were not eagerly seeking new artists. He met, through Shotmeyer, two artists who were living in one studio in Waverly Place and took a great liking to them. One of them, McHugh, was an importation from Wyoming with delicious stories of mountain farming and mining; the other, Smite, was a fisher lad from Nova Scotia. McHugh, tall and lean, with a face that looked like that of a raw yokel, but with some gleam of humor and insight in the eyes which redeemed it instantly, was Eugene's first choice of a pleasing, genial personality. Joseph Smite had a sense of the sea about him. He was short and stout, and rather solidly put together, like a blacksmith. He had big hands and feet, a big mouth, big, bony eye sockets and coarse brown hair. When he talked, ordinarily, it was with a slow, halting air and when he smiled or laughed it was with his whole face. When he became excited or gay something seemed to happen distinctly to every part of his body. His face became a curious cross-hatch of genial lines. His tongue loosened and he talked fast. He had a habit of emphasizing his language with oaths on these occasions – numerous and picturesque, for he had worked with sea-faring men and had accumulated a vast vocabulary of picturesque expressions. They were vacant of evil intent so far as he was concerned, for there was no subtlety or guile in him. He was kindly and genial all through. Eugene wanted to be friendly and struck a gay relationship with these two. He found that he got along excellently well with them and could swap humorous incidents and character touches by the hour. It was some months before he could actually say that he was intimate with them, but he began to visit them regularly and after a time they called on him.

It was during this year that he came to know several models passingly well, to visit the various art exhibitions, to be taken up by Hudson Dula, the Art Director of *Truth* and invited to two or three small dinners given to artists and girls. He did not find anyone he liked exceptionally well barring one Editor of a rather hopeless magazine called *Craft*, devoted to art subjects, a young blond, of poetic temperament, who saw in him a spirit of beauty and tried to make friends with him. Eugene responded cheerfully and thereafter Richard Wheeler was a visitor at his studio from time to time. He was not making enough to house himself much better these days, but he did manage to buy a few plaster casts and to pick up a few nice things in copper and brass for his studio. His own drawings, his street scenes, were hung here and there. The way in which the exceptionally clever looked at them convinced him by degrees that he had something big to say.

It was while he was settling himself in this atmosphere – the spring of the second year – that he decided to go back and visit Angela and incidentally Alexandria and Chicago. He had been away now sixteen months, had not seen anyone who had won his affections or alienated him from his love of Angela. He wrote in March that he thought he would be coming in May or June. He did get away in July – a season when the city was suffering from a wave of intense heat. He had not done so much – illustrated eight or ten stories and drawn four double page pictures for *Truth*, one of which had appeared; but he was getting along. Just as he was starting for Chicago and Blackwood a second one was put on the news-stand and he proudly carried a copy of it with him on the train. It was the Bowery by night, with the L train rushing overhead and, as reproduced, it had color and life. He felt intensely proud and knew that Angela would also. She had written him such a glowing appreciation of the East Side picture called "Six O'clock."

As he rode he dreamed.

He reached it at last, the long stretch between New York and Chicago traversed; he arrived in the Lake city in the afternoon, and without pausing to revisit the scenes of his earlier efforts took a five o'clock train for Blackwood. It was sultry, and on the way heavy thunder clouds gathered and broke in a short, splendid summer rain. The trees and grass were thoroughly wet and the dust of the roads was laid. There was a refreshing coolness about the air which caressed the weary flesh. Little towns nestling among green trees came into view and passed again, and at last Blackwood appeared. It was smaller than Alexandria, but not so different. Like the other it was marked by a church steeple, a saw mill, a pretty brick business street and many broad branching green trees. Eugene felt drawn to it at sight. It was such a place as Angela should live in.

It was seven o'clock and nearing dusk when he arrived. He had not given Angela the definite hour of his arrival and so decided to stay over night at the little inn or so-called hotel which he saw up the street. He had brought only a large suit case and a traveling bag. He inquired of the proprietor the direction and distance of the Blue house from the town, found that he could get a vehicle any time in the morning which would take him over, as the phrase ran, for a dollar. He ate his supper of fried steak and poor coffee and fried potatoes and then sat out on the front porch facing the street in a rocking chair, to see how the village of Blackwood wagged and to enjoy the cool of the evening. As he sat he thought of Angela's home and how nice it must be. This town was such a little place – so quiet. There would not be another train coming up from the city until after eleven.

After a time he rose and took a short walk, breathing the night air. Later he came back and throwing wide the windows of the stuffy room sat looking out. The summer night with its early rain, its wet trees, its smell of lush, wet, growing things, was impressing itself on Eugene as one might impress wet clay with a notable design. Eugene's mood was soft toward the little houses with their glowing windows, the occasional pedestrians with their "howdy Jakes" and "evenin' Henrys." He was touched by the noise of the crickets, the chirp of the tree toads, the hang of the lucent suns and planets above the tree tops. The whole night was quick with the richness of fertility, stirring subtly about some work which concerned man very little or not at all, yet of which he was at least a part, till his eyelids drooped after a time and he went to bed to sleep deeply and dreamlessly.

Next morning he was up early, eager for the hour to arrive when he might start. He did not think it advisable to leave before nine o'clock, and attracted considerable attention by strolling about, his tall, spare, graceful figure and forceful profile being an unusual sight to the natives. At nine o'clock a respectable carryall was placed at his disposal and he was driven out over a long yellow road, damp with the rain of the night before and shaded in places by overhanging trees. There were so many lovely wild flowers growing in the angles of the rail fences – wild yellow and pink roses, elder flower, Queen Anne's lace, dozens of beautiful blooms, that Eugene was lost in admiration. His heart sang over the beauty of yellowing wheatfields, the young corn, already three feet high, the vistas of hay and clover, with patches of woods enclosing them, and over all, house martens and swallows scudding after insects and high up in the air his boyhood dream of beauty, a soaring buzzard.

As he rode the moods of his boyhood days came back to him – his love of winging butterflies and birds; his passion for the voice of the wood-dove (there was one crying in the still distance now) – his adoration for the virile strength of the men of the countryside. He thought as he rode that he would like to paint a series of country scenes that would be as simple as those cottage dooryards that they now and then passed; this little stream that cut the road at right angles and made a drinking place for the horses; this skeleton of an old abandoned home, doorless and windowless, where the roof sagged and hollyhocks and morning glories grew high under the eaves. "We city dwellers do not know," he sighed, as though he had not taken the country in his heart and carried it to town as had every other boy and girl who had gone the way of the metropolis.

The Blue homestead was located in the centre of a rather wide rolling stretch of country which lay between two gently rising ridges of hill covered with trees. One corner of the farm, and that not so very far from the house, was cut by a stream, a little shallow thing, singing over pebbles and making willows and hazel bushes to grow in profusion along its banks, and there was a little lake within a mile of the house. In front of it was a ten acre field of wheat, to the right of it a grazing patch of several acres, to the left a field of clover; and near the house by a barn, a well, a pig pen, a corn crib and some smaller sheds. In front of the house was a long open lawn, down the centre of which ran a gravel path, lined on either side by tall old elm trees. The immediate dooryard was shut from this noble lawn by a low picket fence along the length of which grew lilac bushes and inside which, nearer the house, were simple beds of roses, calycanthus and golden glow. Over an arbor leading from the backdoor to a rather distant summer kitchen flourished a grapevine, and there was a tall remnant of a tree trunk covered completely with a yellow blooming trumpet vine. The dooryard's lawn was smooth enough, and the great lawn was a dream of green grass, graced with the shadows of a few great trees. The house was long and of no great depth, the front a series of six rooms ranged in a row, without an upper storey. The two middle rooms which had originally, perhaps seventy years before, been all there was of the house. Since then all the other rooms had been added, and there was in addition to these a lean-to containing a winter kitchen and dining room, and to the west of the arbor leading to the summer kitchen, an old unpainted frame storehouse. In all its parts the place was shabby and run down but picturesque and quaint.

Eugene was surprised to find the place so charming. It appealed to him, the long, low front, with doors opening from the centre and end rooms direct upon the grass, with windows set in climbing vines and the lilac bushes forming a green wall between the house and the main lawn. The great rows of elm trees throwing a grateful shade seemed like sentinel files. As the carryall turned in at the wagon gate in front he thought "What a place for love! and to think Angela should live here."

The carryall rattled down the pebble road to the left of the lawn and stopped at the garden gate. Marietta came out. Marietta was twenty-two years old, and as gay and joyous as her elder sister Angela was sober and in a way morbid. Light souled as a kitten, looking always on the bright side of things, she made hosts of friends everywhere she went, having a perfect swarm of lovers who wrote her eager notes, but whom she rebuffed with good natured, sympathetic simplicity. Here on this farm there was not supposed to be so much opportunity for social life as in town, but beaux made their way here on one pretext and another. Marietta was the magnet, and in the world of gaiety which she created Angela shared.

Angela was now in the dining room – easy to be called – but Marietta wanted to see for herself what sort of lover her sister had captured. She was surprised at his height, his presence, the keenness of his eyes. She hardly understood so fine a lover for her own sister, but held out her hand smilingly.

"This is Mr. Witla, isn't it?" she asked.

"The same," he replied, a little pompously. "Isn't it a lovely drive over here?"

"We think it nice in nice weather," she laughed. "You wouldn't like it so much in winter. Won't you come in and put your grip here in the hall? David will take it to your room."

Eugene obeyed, but he was thinking of Angela and when she would appear and how she would look. He stepped into the large, low ceiled, dark, cool parlor and was delighted to see a piano and some music piled on a rack. Through an open window he saw several hammocks out on the main lawn, under the trees. It seemed a wonderful place to him, the substance of poetry – and then Angela appeared. She was dressed in plain white linen. Her hair, braided as he liked it in a great rope, lay as a band across her forehead. She had picked a big pink rose and put it in her waist. At sight of her Eugene held out his arms and she flew to them. He kissed her vigorously, for Marietta had discreetly retired and they were left alone.

"So I have you at last," he whispered, and kissed her again.

"Oh, yes, yes, and it has been so long," she sighed.

"You couldn't have suffered any more than I have," he consoled. "Every minute has been torture, waiting, waiting, waiting!"

"Let's not think of that now," she urged. "We have each other. You are here."

"Yes, here I am," he laughed, "all the virtues done up in one brown suit. Isn't it lovely – these great trees, that beautiful lawn?"

He paused from kissing to look out of the window.

"I'm glad you like it," she replied joyously. "We think it's nice, but this place is so old."

"I love it for that," he cried appreciatively. "Those bushes are so nice – those roses. Oh, dear, you don't know how sweet it all seems – and you – you are so nice."

He held her off at arm's length and surveyed her while she blushed becomingly. His eager, direct, vigorous onslaught confused her at times – caused her pulse to beat at a high rate.

They went out into the dooryard after a time and then Marietta appeared again, and with her Mrs. Blue, a comfortable, round bodied mother of sixty, who greeted Eugene cordially. He could feel in her what he felt in his own mother – in every good mother – love of order and peace, love of the well being of her children, love of public respect and private honor and morality. All these things Eugene heartily respected in others. He was glad to see them, believed they had a place in society, but was uncertain whether they bore any fixed or important relationship to him. He was always thinking in his private conscience that life was somehow bigger and subtler and darker than any given theory or order of living. It might well be worth while for a man or woman to be honest and moral within a given condition or quality of society, but it did not matter at all in the ultimate substance and composition of the universe. Any form or order of society which hoped to endure must have individuals like Mrs. Blue, who would conform to the highest standards and theories of that society, and when found they were admirable, but they meant nothing in the shifting, subtle forces of nature. They were just accidental harmonies blossoming out of something which meant everything here to this order, nothing to the universe at large. At twenty-two years of age he was thinking these things, wondering whether it would be possible ever to express them; wondering what people would think of him if they actually knew what he did think; wondering if there was anything, anything, which was really stable – a rock to cling to – and not mere shifting shadow and unreality.

Mrs. Blue looked at her daughter's young lover with a kindly eye. She had heard a great deal about him. Having raised her children to be honest, moral and truthful she trusted them to associate only with those who were equally so. She assumed that Eugene was such a man, and his frank open countenance and smiling eyes and mouth convinced her that he was basically good. Also, what to her were his wonderful drawings, sent to Angela in the form of proofs from time to time, particularly the one of the East Side crowd, had been enough to prejudice her in his favor. No other daughter of the family, and there were three married, had approximated to this type of man in her choice. Eugene was looked upon as a prospective son-in-law who would fulfill all the conventional obligations joyfully and as a matter of course.

"It's very good of you to put me up, Mrs. Blue," Eugene said pleasantly. "I've always wanted to come out here for a visit – I've heard so much of the family from Angela."

"It's just a country home we have, not much to look at, but we like it," replied his hostess. She smiled blandly, asked if he wouldn't make himself comfortable in one of the hammocks, wanted to know how he was getting along with his work in New York and then returned to her cooking, for she was already preparing his first meal. Eugene strolled with Angela to the big lawn under the trees and sat down. He was experiencing the loftiest of human emotions on earth – love in youth, accepted and requited, hope in youth, justified in action by his success in New York; peace in youth, for he had a well earned holiday in his grasp, was resting with the means to do so and with love and beauty and admiration and joyous summer weather to comfort him.

As he rocked to and fro in the hammock gazing at the charming lawn and realizing all these things, his glance rested at last upon Angela, and he thought, "Life can really hold no finer thing than this."

CHAPTER XVIII

Toward noon old Jotham Blue came in from a cornfield where he had been turning the earth between the rows. Although sixty-five and with snowy hair and beard he looked to be vigorous, and good to live until ninety or a hundred. His eyes were blue and keen, his color rosy. He had great broad shoulders set upon a spare waist, for he had been a handsome figure of a man in his youth.

"How do you do, Mr. Witla," he inquired with easy grace as he strolled up, the yellow mud of the fields on his boots. He had pulled a big jackknife out of his pocket and begun whittling a fine twig he had picked up. "I'm glad to see you. My daughter, Angela, has been telling me one thing and another about you."

He smiled as he looked at Eugene. Angela, who was sitting beside him, rose and strolled toward the house.

"I'm glad to see you," said Eugene. "I like your country around here. It looks prosperous."

"It is prosperous," said the old patriarch, drawing up a chair which stood at the foot of a tree and seating himself. Eugene sank back into the hammock.

"It's a soil that's rich in lime and carbon and sodium – the things which make plant life grow. We need very little fertilizer here – very little. The principal thing is to keep the ground thoroughly cultivated and to keep out the bugs and weeds."

He cut at his stick meditatively. Eugene noted the chemical and physical knowledge relative to farming. It pleased him to find brain coupled with crop cultivation.

"I noticed some splendid fields of wheat as I came over," he observed.

"Yes, wheat does well here," Blue went on, "when the weather is moderately favorable. Corn does well. We have a splendid apple crop and grapes are generally successful in this state. I have always thought that Wisconsin had a little the best of the other valley states, for we are blessed with a moderate climate, plenty of streams and rivers and a fine, broken landscape. There are good mines up north and lots of lumber. We are a prosperous people, we Wisconsiners, decidedly prosperous. This state has a great future."

Eugene noted the wide space between his clear blue eyes as he talked. He liked the bigness of his conception of his state and of his country. No petty little ground-harnessed ploughman this, but a farmer in the big sense of the word – a cultivator of the soil, with an understanding of it – an American who loved his state and his country.

"I have always thought of the Mississippi valley as the country of the future," said Eugene. "We have had the Valley of the Nile and the Valley of the Euphrates with big populations, but this is something larger. I rather feel as though a great wave of population were coming here in the future."

"It is the new paradise of the world," said Jotham Blue, pausing in his whittling and holding up his right hand for emphasis. "We haven't come to realize its possibilities. The fruit, the corn, the wheat, to feed the nations of the world can be raised here. I sometimes marvel at the productivity of the soil. It is so generous. It is like a great mother. It only asks to be treated kindly to give all that it has."

Eugene smiled. The bigness of his prospective father-in-law's feelings lured him. He felt as though he could love this man.

They talked on about other things, the character of the surrounding population, the growth of Chicago, the recent threat of a war with Venezuela, the rise of a new leader in the Democratic party, a man whom Jotham admired very much. As he was telling of the latter's exploits – it appeared he had recently met him at Blackwood – Mrs. Blue appeared in the front door.

"Jotham!" she called.

He rose. "My wife must want a bucket of water," he said, and strolled away.

Eugene smiled. This was lovely. This was the way life should be – compounded of health, strength, good nature, understanding, simplicity. He wished he were a man like Jotham, as sound, as hearty, as clean and strong. To think he had raised eight children. No wonder Angela was lovely. They all were, no doubt.

While he was rocking, Marietta came back smiling, her blond hair blowing about her face. Like her father she had blue eyes, like him a sanguine temperament, warm and ruddy. Eugene felt drawn to her. She reminded him a little of Ruby – a little of Margaret. She was bursting with young health.

"You're stronger than Angela," he said, looking at her.

"Oh, yes, I can always outrun Angel-face," she exclaimed. "We fight sometimes but I can get things away from her. She has to give in. Sometimes I feel older – I always take the lead."

Eugene rejoiced in the sobriquet of Angel-face. It suited Angela, he thought. She looked like pictures of Angels in the old prints and in the stained glass windows he had seen. He wondered in a vague way, however, whether Marietta did not have the sweeter temperament – were not really more lovable and cosy. But he put the thought forcefully out of his mind. He felt he must be loyal to Angela here.

While they were talking the youngest boy, David, came up and sat down on the grass. He was short and stocky for his years – sixteen – with an intelligent face and an inquiring eye. Eugene noted stability and quiet force in his character at once. He began to see that these children had inherited character as well as strength from their parents. This was a home in which successful children were being reared. Benjamin came up after awhile, a tall, overgrown, puritanical youth, with western modifications and then Samuel, the oldest of the living boys and the most impressive. He was big and serene like his father, of brown complexion and hickory strength. Eugene learned in the conversation that he was a railroad man in St. Paul – home for a brief vacation, after three years of absence. He was with a road called the Great Northern, already a Second Assistant Passenger Agent and with great prospects, so the family thought. Eugene could see that all the boys and girls, like Angela, were ruggedly and honestly truthful. They were written all over with Christian precept – not church dogma – but Christian precept, lightly and good naturedly applied. They obeyed the ten commandments in so far as possible and lived within the limits of what people considered sane and decent. Eugene wondered at this. His own moral laxity was a puzzle to him. He wondered whether he were not really all wrong and they all right. Yet the subtlety of the universe was always with him – the mystery of its chemistry. For a given order of society no doubt he was out of place – for life in general, well, he could not say.

At 12.30 dinner was announced from the door by Mrs. Blue and they all rose. It was one of those simple home feasts common to any intelligent farming family. There was a generous supply of fresh vegetables, green peas, new potatoes, new string beans. A steak had been secured from the itinerant butcher who served these parts and Mrs. Blue had made hot light biscuit. Eugene expressed a predilection for fresh buttermilk and they brought him a pitcherful, saying that as a rule it was given to the pigs; the children did not care for it. They talked and jested and he heard odd bits of information concerning people here and there – some farmer who had lost a horse by colic; some other farmer who was preparing to cut his wheat. There were frequent references to the three oldest sisters, who lived in other Wisconsin towns. Their children appeared to be numerous and fairly troublesome. They all came home frequently, it appeared, and were bound up closely with the interests of the family as a whole.

"The more you know about the Blue family," observed Samuel to Eugene, who expressed surprise at the solidarity of interest, "the more you realize that they're a clan not a family. They stick together like glue."

"That's a rather nice trait, I should say," laughed Eugene, who felt no such keen interest in his relatives.

"Well, if you want to find out how the Blue family stick together just do something to one of them," observed Jake Doll, a neighbor who had entered.

"That's sure true, isn't it, Sis," observed Samuel, who was sitting next to Angela, putting his hand affectionately on his sister's arm. Eugene noted the movement. She nodded her head affectionately.

"Yes, we Blues all hang together."

Eugene almost begrudged him his sister's apparent affection. Could such a girl be cut out of such an atmosphere – separated from it completely, brought into a radically different world, he wondered. Would she understand him; would he stick by her. He smiled at Jotham and Mrs. Blue and thought he ought to, but life was strange. You never could tell what might happen.

During the afternoon there were more lovely impressions. He and Angela sat alone in the cool parlor for two hours after dinner while he restated his impressions of her over and over. He told her how charming he thought her home was, how nice her father and mother, what interesting brothers she had. He made a genial sketch of Jotham as he had strolled up to him at noon, which pleased Angela and she kept it to show to her father. He made her pose in the window and sketched her head and her halo of hair. He thought of his double page illustration of the Bowery by night and went to fetch it, looking for the first time at the sweet cool room at the end of the house which he was to occupy. One window, a west one, had hollyhocks looking in, and the door to the north gave out on the cool, shady grass. He moved in beauty, he thought; was treading on showered happiness. It hurt him to think that such joy might not always be, as though beauty were not everywhere and forever present.

When Angela saw the picture which *Truth* had reproduced, she was beside herself with joy and pride and happiness. It was such a testimony to her lover's ability. He had written almost daily of the New York art world, so she was familiar with that in exaggerated ideas, but these actual things, like reproduced pictures, were different. The whole world would see this picture. He must be famous already, she imagined.

That evening and the next and the next as they sat in the parlor alone he drew nearer and nearer to that definite understanding which comes between a man and woman when they love. Eugene could never stop with mere kissing and caressing in a reserved way, if not persistently restrained. It seemed natural to him that love should go on. He had not been married. He did not know what its responsibilities were. He had never given a thought to what his parents had endured to make him worth while. There was no instinct in him to tell him. He had no yearnings for parenthood, that normal desire which gives visions of a home and the proper social conditions for rearing a family. All he thought of was the love making period – the billing and cooing and the transports of delight which come with it. With Angela he felt that these would be super-normal precisely because she was so slow in yielding – so on the defensive against herself. He could look in her eyes at times and see a swooning veil which foreshadowed a storm of emotion. He would sit by her stroking her hands, touching her cheek, smoothing her hair, or at other times holding her in his arms. It was hard for her to resist those significant pressures he gave, to hold him at arm's length, for she herself was eager for the delights of love.

It was on the third night of his stay and in the face of his growing respect for every member of this family, that he swept Angela to the danger line – would have carried her across it had it not been for a fortuitous wave of emotion, which was not of his creation, but of hers.

They had been to the little lake, Okoonee, a little way from the house during the afternoon for a swim.

Afterward he and Angela and David and Marietta had taken a drive. It was one of those lovely afternoons that come sometimes in summer and speak direct to the heart of love and beauty. It was so fair and warm, the shadows of the trees so comforting that they fairly made Eugene's heart ache. He was young now, life was beautiful, but how would it be when he was old? A morbid anticipation of disaster seemed to harrow his soul.

The sunset had already died away when they drew near home. Insects hummed, a cow-bell tinkled now and then; breaths of cool air, those harbingers of the approaching eve, swept their cheeks as they passed occasional hollows. Approaching the house they saw the blue smoke curls rising from the kitchen chimney, foretelling the preparation of the evening meal. Eugene clasped Angela's hand in an ecstasy of emotion.

He wanted to dream – sitting in the hammock with Angela as the dusk fell, watching the pretty scene. Life was all around. Jotham and Benjamin came in from the fields and the sound of their voices and of the splashing water came from the kitchen door where they were washing. There was an anticipatory stamping of horses' feet in the barn, the lowing of a distant cow, the hungry grunt of pigs. Eugene shook his head – it was so pastoral, so sweet.

At supper he scarcely touched what was put before him, the group at the dining table holding his attention as a spectacle. Afterwards he sat with the family on the lawn outside the door, breathing the odor of flowers, watching the stars over the trees, listening to Jotham and Mrs. Blue, to Samuel, Benjamin, David, Marietta and occasionally Angela. Because of his mood, sad in the face of exquisite beauty, she also was subdued. She said little, listening to Eugene and her father, but when she did talk her voice was sweet.

Jotham arose, after a time, and went to bed, and one by one the others followed. David and Marietta went into the sitting room and then Samuel and Benjamin left. They gave as an excuse hard work for the morning. Samuel was going to try his hand again at thrashing. Eugene took Angela by the hand and led her out where some hydrangeas were blooming, white as snow by day, but pale and silvery in the dark. He took her face in his hands, telling her again of love.

"It's been such a wonderful day I'm all wrought up," he said. "Life is so beautiful here. This place is so sweet and peaceful. And you! oh, you!" kisses ended his words.

They stood there a little while, then went back into the parlor where she lighted a lamp. It cast a soft yellow glow over the room, just enough to make it warm, he thought. They sat first side by side on two rocking chairs and then later on a settee, he holding her in his arms. Before supper she had changed to a loose cream colored house gown. Now Eugene persuaded her to let her hair hang in the two braids.

Real passion is silent. It was so intense with him that he sat contemplating her as if in a spell. She leaned back against his shoulder stroking his hair, but finally ceased even that, for her own feeling was too intense to make movement possible. She thought of him as a young god, strong, virile, beautiful – a brilliant future before him. All these years she had waited for someone to truly love her and now this splendid youth had apparently cast himself at her feet. He stroked her hands, her neck, cheeks, then slowly gathered her close and buried his head against her bosom.

Angela was strong in convention, in the precepts of her parents, in the sense of her family and its attitude, but this situation was more than she could resist. She accepted first the pressure of his arm, then the slow subtlety with which he caressed her. Resistance seemed almost impossible now for he held her close – tight within the range of his magnetism. When finally she felt the pressure of his hand upon her quivering limbs, she threw herself back in a transport of agony and delight.

"No, no, Eugene," she begged. "No, no! Save me from myself. Save me from myself. Oh, Eugene!"

He paused a moment to look at her face. It was wrought in lines of intense suffering – pale as though she were ill. Her body was quite limp. Only the hot, moist lips told the significant story. He could not stop at once. Slowly he drew his hand away, then let his sensitive artists' fingers rest gently on her neck – her bosom.

She struggled lamely at this point and slipped to her knees, her dress loosened at the neck.

"Don't, Eugene," she begged, "don't. Think of my father, my mother. I, who have boasted so. I of whom they feel so sure. Oh, Eugene, I beg of you!"

He stroked her hair, her cheeks, looking into her face as Abélard might have looked at Héloïse.

"Oh, I know why it is," she exclaimed, convulsively. "I am no better than any other, but I have waited so long, so long! But I mustn't! Oh, Eugene, I mustn't! Help me!"

Vaguely Eugene understood. She had been without lovers. Why? he thought. She was beautiful. He got up, half intending to carry her to his room, but he paused, thinking. She was such a pathetic figure. Was he really as bad as this? Could he not be fair in this one instance? Her father had been so nice to him – her mother – He saw Jotham Blue before him, Mrs. Blue, her admiring brothers and sisters, as they had been a little while before. He looked at her and still the prize lured him – almost swept him on in spite of himself, but he stayed.

"Stand up, Angela," he said at last, pulling himself together, looking at her intensely. She did so. "Leave me now," he went on, "right away! I won't answer for myself if you don't. I am really trying. Please go."

She paused, looking at him fearfully, regretfully.

"Oh, forgive me, Eugene," she pleaded.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm the one. But you go now, sweet. You don't know how hard this is. Help me by going."

She moved away and he followed her with his eyes, yearningly, burningly, until she reached the door. When she closed it softly he went into his own room and sat down. His body was limp and weary. He ached from head to foot from the intensity of the mood he had passed through. He went over the recent incidents, almost stunned by his experience and then went outside and stood under the stairs, listening. Tree toads were chirping, there were suspicious cracklings in the grass as of bugs stirring. A duck quacked somewhere feebly. The bell of the family cow tinkled somewhere over near the water of the little stream. He saw the great dipper in the sky, Sirius, Canopus, the vast galaxy of the Milky Way.

"What is life anyway?" he asked himself. "What is the human body? What produces passion? Here we are for a few years surging with a fever of longing and then we burn out and die." He thought of some lines he might write, of pictures he might paint. All the while, reproduced before his mind's eye like a cinematograph, were views of Angela as she had been tonight in his arms, on her knees. He had seen her true form. He had held her in his arms. He had voluntarily resigned her charms for tonight; anyhow, no harm had come. It never should.

CHAPTER XIX

It would be hard to say in what respect, if any, the experiences of this particular night altered Eugene's opinion of Angela. He was inclined to like her better for what he would have called her humanness. Thus frankly to confess her weakness and inability to save herself was splendid. That he was given the chance to do a noble deed was fortunate and uplifting. He knew now that he could take her if he wished, but once calm again he resolved to be fair and not to insist. He could wait.

The state of Angela's mind, on the contrary, once she had come out of her paroxysm and gained the privacy of her own room, or rather the room she shared with Marietta at the other extreme of the house, was pitiable. She had for so long considered herself an estimable and virtuous girl. There was in her just a faint trace of prudery which might readily have led to an unhappy old maid existence for her if Eugene, with his superiority, or non-understanding, or indifference to conventional theories and to old-maidish feelings, had not come along and with his customary blindness to material prosperity and age limitations, seized upon and made love to her. He had filled her brain with a whirlwind of notions hitherto unfamiliar to her world and set himself up in her brain as a law unto himself. He was not like other men – she could see that. He was superior to them. He might not make much money, being an artist, but he could make other things which to her seemed more desirable. Fame, beautiful pictures, notable friends, were not these things far superior to money? She had had little enough money in all conscience, and if Eugene made anything at all it would be enough for her. He seemed to be under the notion that he needed a lot to get married, whereas she would have been glad to risk it on almost anything at all.

This latest revelation of herself, besides tearing her mind from a carefully nurtured belief in her own virtuous impregnability, raised at the same time a spectre of disaster in so far as Eugene's love for her was concerned. Would he, now that she had allowed him those precious endearments which should have been reserved for the marriage bed only, care for her as much as he had before? Would he not think of her as a light minded, easily spoiled creature who was waiting only for a propitious moment to yield herself? She had been lost to all sense of right and wrong in that hour, that she knew. Her father's character and what he stood for, her mother's decency and love of virtue, her cleanly-minded, right-living brothers and sisters, – all had been forgotten and here she was, a tainted maiden, virtuous in technical sense it is true, but tainted. Her convention-trained conscience smote her vigorously and she groaned in her heart. She went outside the door of her own room and sat down on the damp grass in the early morning to think. It was so cool and calm everywhere but in her own soul. She held her face in her hands, feeling her hot cheeks, wondering what Eugene was thinking now. What would her father think, her mother? She wrung her hands more than once and finally went inside to see if she could not rest. She was not unconscious of the beauty and joy of the episode, but she was troubled by what she felt she ought to think, what the consequences to her future might be. To hold Eugene now – that was a subtle question. To hold up her head in front of him as she had, could she? To keep him from going further. It was a difficult situation and she tossed restlessly all night, getting little sleep. In the morning she arose weary and disturbed, but more desperately in love than ever. This wonderful youth had revealed an entirely new and intensely dramatic world to her.

When they met on the lawn again before breakfast, Angela was garbed in white linen. She looked waxen and delicate and her eyes showed dark rings as well as the dark thoughts that were troubling her. Eugene took her hand sympathetically.

"Don't worry," he said, "I know. It isn't as bad as you think." And he smiled tenderly.

"Oh, Eugene, I don't understand myself now," she said sorrowfully. "I thought I was better than that."

"We're none of us better than that," he replied simply. "We just think we are sometimes. You are not any different to me. You just think you are."

"Oh, are you sure?" she asked eagerly.

"Quite sure," he replied. "Love isn't a terrible thing between any two. It's just lovely. Why should I think worse of you?"

"Oh, because good girls don't do what I have done. I have been raised to know better – to do better."

"All a belief, my dear, which you get from what has been taught you. You think it wrong. Why? Because your father and mother told you so. Isn't that it?"

"Oh, not that alone. Everybody thinks it's wrong. The Bible teaches that it is. Everybody turns his back on you when he finds out."

"Wait a minute," pleaded Eugene argumentatively. He was trying to solve this puzzle for himself. "Let's leave the Bible out of it, for I don't believe in the Bible – not as a law of action anyhow. The fact that everybody thinks it's wrong wouldn't necessarily make it so, would it?" He was ignoring completely the significance of *everybody* as a reflection of those principles which govern the universe.

"No-o-o," ventured Angela doubtfully.

"Listen," went on Eugene. "Everybody in Constantinople believes that Mahomet is the Prophet of God. That doesn't make him so, does it?"

"No."

"Well, then, everyone here might believe that what we did last night was wrong without making it so. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," replied Angela confusedly. She really did not know. She could not argue with him. He was too subtle, but her innate principles and instincts were speaking plainly enough, nevertheless.

"Now what you're really thinking about is what people will do. They'll turn their backs on you, you say. That is a practical matter. Your father might turn you out of doors – "

"I think he would," replied Angela, little understanding the bigness of the heart of her father.

"I think he wouldn't," said Eugene, "but that's neither here nor there. Men might refuse to marry you. Those are material considerations. You wouldn't say they had anything to do with real right or wrong, would you?"

Eugene had no convincing end to his argument. He did not know any more than anyone else what was right or wrong in this matter. He was merely talking to convince himself, but he had enough logic to confuse Angela.

"I don't know," she said vaguely.

"Right," he went on loftily, "is something which is supposed to be in accordance with a standard of truth. Now no one in all the world knows what truth is, no one. There is no way of telling. You can only act wisely or unwisely as regards your personal welfare. If that's what you're worrying about, and it is, I can tell you that you're no worse off. There's nothing the matter with your welfare. I think you're better off, for I like you better."

Angela wondered at the subtlety of his brain. She was not sure but that what he said might be true. Could her fears be baseless? She felt sure she had lost some of the bloom of her youth anyhow.

"How can you?" she asked, referring to his saying that he liked her better.

"Easily enough," he replied. "I know more about you. I admire your frankness. You're lovely – altogether so. You are sweet beyond compare." He started to particularize.

"Don't, Eugene," she pleaded, putting her finger over her lips. The color was leaving her cheeks. "Please don't, I can't stand it."

"All right," he said, "I won't. But you're altogether lovely. Let's go and sit in the hammock."

"No. I'm going to get you your breakfast. It's time you had something."

He took comfort in his privileges, for the others had all gone. Jotham, Samuel, Benjamin and David were in the fields. Mrs. Blue was sewing and Marietta had gone to see a girl friend up the road. Angela, as Ruby before her, bestirred herself about the youth's meal, mixing biscuit, broiling him some bacon, cleaning a basket of fresh dewberries for him.

"I like your man," said her mother, coming out where she was working. "He looks to be good-natured. But don't spoil him. If you begin wrong you'll be sorry."

"You spoiled papa, didn't you?" asked Angela sagely, recalling all the little humorings her father had received.

"Your father has a keen sense of duty," retorted her mother. "It didn't hurt him to be spoiled a little."

"Maybe Eugene has," replied her daughter, turning her slices of bacon.

Her mother smiled. All her daughters had married well. Perhaps Angela was doing the best of all. Certainly her lover was the most distinguished. Yet, "well to be careful," she suggested.

Angela thought. If her mother only knew, or her father. Dear Heaven! And yet Eugene was altogether lovely. She wanted to wait on him, to spoil him. She wished she could be with him every day from now on – that they need not part any more.

"Oh, if he would only marry me," she sighed. It was the one divine event which would complete her life.

Eugene would have liked to linger in this atmosphere indefinitely. Old Jotham, he found, liked to talk to him. He took an interest in national and international affairs, was aware of distinguished and peculiar personalities, seemed to follow world currents everywhere. Eugene began to think of him as a distinguished personality in himself, but old Jotham waved the suggestion blandly aside.

"I'm a farmer," he said. "I've seen my greatest success in raising good children. My boys will do well, I know."

For the first time Eugene caught the sense of fatherhood, of what it means to live again in your children, but only vaguely. He was too young, too eager for a varied life, too lustful. So its true import was lost for the time.

Sunday came and with it the necessity to leave. He had been here nine days, really two days more than he had intended to stay. It was farewell to Angela, who had come so close, so much in his grasp that she was like a child in his hands. It was farewell, moreover, to an ideal scene, a bit of bucolic poetry. When would he see again an old patriarch like Jotham, clean, kindly, intelligent, standing upright amid his rows of corn, proud to be a good father, not ashamed to be poor, not afraid to be old or to die. Eugene had drawn so much from him. It was like sitting at the feet of Isaiah. It was farewell to the lovely fields and the blue hills, the long rows of trees down the lawn walk, the white and red and blue flowers about the dooryard. He had slept so sweetly in his clean room, he had listened so joyously to the voices of birds, the wood dove and the poet thrush; he had heard the water in the Blue's branch rippling over its clean pebbles. The pigs in the barnyard pen, the horses, the cows, all had appealed to him. He thought of Gray's "Elegy" – of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" and "The Traveller." This was something like the things those men had loved.

He walked down the lawn with Angela, when the time came, repeating how sorry he was to go. David had hitched up a little brown mare and was waiting at the extreme end of the lawn.

"Oh, Sweet," he sighed. "I shall never be happy until I have you."

"I will wait," sighed Angela, although she was wishing to exclaim: "Oh, take me, take me!" When he was gone she went about her duties mechanically, for it was as if all the fire and joy had gone out of her life. Without this brilliant imagination of his to illuminate things, life seemed dull.

And he rode, parting in his mind with each lovely thing as he went – the fields of wheat, the little stream, Lake Okoonee, the pretty Blue farmhouse, all.

He said to himself: "Nothing more lovely will ever come again. Angela in my arms in her simple little parlor. Dear God! and there are only seventy years of life – not more than ten or fifteen of true youth, all told."

CHAPTER XX

Eugene carried home with him not only a curiously deepened feeling for Angela, due to their altered and more intimate relationship, but moreover a growing respect for her family. Old Jotham was so impressive a figure of a man; his wife so kindly and earnest. Their attitude toward their children and to each other was so sound, and their whole relationship to society so respectable. Another observer might have been repelled by the narrowness and frugality of their lives. But Eugene had not known enough of luxury to be scornful of the material simplicity of such existence. Here he had found character, poetry of location, poetry of ambition, youth and happy prospects. These boys, so sturdy and independent, were sure to make for themselves such places in the world as they desired. Marietta, so charming a girl, could not but make a good marriage. Samuel was doing well in his position with the railroad company; Benjamin was studying to be a lawyer and David was to be sent to West Point. He liked them for their familiar, sterling worth. And they all treated him as the destined husband of Angela. By the end of his stay he had become as much en rapport with the family as if he had known it all his life.

Before going back to New York he had stopped in Chicago, where he had seen Howe and Mathews grinding away at their old tasks, and then for a few days in Alexandria, where he found his father busy about his old affairs. Sewing machines were still being delivered by him in person, and the long roads of the country were as briskly traversed by his light machine-carrying buggy as in his earliest days. Eugene saw him now as just a little futile, and yet he admired him, his patience, his industry. The brisk sewing machine agent was considerably impressed by his son's success, and was actually trying to take an interest in art. One evening coming home from the post office he pointed out a street scene in Alexandria as a subject for a painting. Eugene knew that art had only been called to his father's attention by his own efforts. He had noticed these things all his life, no doubt, but attached no significance to them until he had seen his son's work in the magazines. "If you ever paint country things, you ought to paint Cook's Mill, over here by the falls. That's one of the prettiest things I know anywhere," he said to him one evening, trying to make his son feel the interest he took. Eugene knew the place. It was attractive, a little branch of bright water running at the base of a forty foot wall of red sandstone and finally tumbling down a fifteen foot declivity of grey mossy stones. It was close to a yellow road which carried a good deal of traffic and was surrounded by a company of trees which ornamented it and sheltered it on all sides. Eugene had admired it in his youth as beautiful and peaceful.

"It is nice," he replied to his father. "I'll take a look at it some day."

Witla senior felt set up. His son was doing him honor. Mrs. Witla, like her husband, was showing the first notable traces of the flight of time. The crow's-feet at the sides of her eyes were deeper, the wrinkles in her forehead longer. At the sight of Eugene the first night she fairly thrilled, for he was so well developed now, so self-reliant. He had come through his experiences to a kind of poise which she realized was manhood. Her boy, requiring her careful guidance, was gone. This was someone who could guide her, tease her as a man would a child.

"You've got so big I hardly know you," she said, as he folded her in his arms.

"No, you're just getting little, ma. I used to think I'd never get to the point where you couldn't shake me, but that's all over, isn't it?"

"You never did need much shaking," she said fondly.

Myrtle, who had married Frank Bangs the preceding year, had gone with her husband to live in Ottumwa, Iowa, where he had taken charge of a mill, so Eugene did not see her, but he spent some little time with Sylvia, now the mother of two children. Her husband was the same quiet, conservative plodder Eugene had first noted him to be. Revisiting the office of the *Appeal* he found that John Summers had recently died. Otherwise things were as they had been. Jonas Lyle and Caleb Williams

were still in charge – quite the same as before. Eugene was glad when his time was up, and took the train back to Chicago with a light heart.

Again as on his entrance to Chicago from the East, and on his return to it from Blackwood, he was touched keenly by the remembrance of Ruby. She had been so sweet to him. His opening art experiences had in a way been centred about her. But in spite of all, he did not want to go out and see her. Or did he? He asked himself this question with a pang of sorrow, for in a way he cared. He cared for her as one might care for a girl in a play or book. She had the quality of a tragedy about her. She – her life, her surroundings, her misfortune in loving him, constituted an artistic composition. He thought he might be able to write a poem about it some time. He was able to write rather charming verse which he kept to himself. He had the knack of saying things in a simple way and with feeling – making you see a picture. The trouble with his verse was that it lacked as yet any real nobility of thought – was not as final in understanding as it might have been.

He did not go to see Ruby. The reason he assigned to himself was that it would not be nice. She might not want him to now. She might be trying to forget. And he had Angela. It really wasn't fair to her. But he looked over toward the region in which she lived, as he travelled out of the city eastward and wished that some of those lovely moments he had spent with her might be lived again.

Back in New York, life seemed to promise a repetition of the preceding year, with some minor modifications. In the fall Eugene went to live with McHugh and Smite, the studio they had consisting of one big working room and three bed-rooms. They agreed that they could get along together, and for a while it was good for them all. The criticism they furnished each other was of real value. And they found it pleasant to dine together, to walk, to see the exhibitions. They stimulated each other with argument, each having a special point of view. It was much as it had been with Howe and Mathews in Chicago.

During this winter Eugene made his first appearance in one of the leading publications of the time —*Harper's Magazine*. He had gone to the Art Director with some proofs of his previous work, and had been told that it was admirable; if some suitable story turned up he would be considered. Later a letter came asking him to call, and a commission involving three pictures for $125 was given him. He worked them out successfully with models and was complimented on the result. His associates cheered him on also, for they really admired what he was doing. He set out definitely to *make Scribner's* and the *Century*, as getting into those publications was called, and after a time he succeeded in making an impression on their respective Art Directors, though no notable commissions were given him. From one he secured a poem, rather out of his mood to decorate, and from the other a short story; but somehow he could not feel that either was a real opportunity. He wanted an appropriate subject or to sell them some of his scenes.

Building up a paying reputation was slow work. Although he was being mentioned here and there among artists, his name was anything but a significant factor with the public or with the Art Directors. He was still a promising beginner – growing, but not yet arrived by a long distance.

There was one editor who was inclined to see him at his real worth, but had no money to offer. This was Richard Wheeler, editor of *Craft*, a rather hopeless magazine in a commercial sense, but devoted sincerely enough to art. Wheeler was a blond young man of poetic temperament, whose enthusiasm for Eugene's work made it easy for them to become friends.

It was through Wheeler that he met that winter Miriam Finch and Christina Channing, two women of radically different temperaments and professions, who opened for Eugene two entirely new worlds.

Miriam Finch was a sculptor by profession – a critic by temperament, with no great capacity for emotion in herself but an intense appreciation of its significance in others. To see her was to be immediately impressed with a vital force in womanhood. She was a woman who had never had a real youth or a real love affair, but clung to her ideal of both with a passionate, almost fatuous, faith that they could still be brought to pass. Wheeler had invited him to go round to her studio with him

one evening. He was interested to know what Eugene would think of her. Miriam, already thirty-two when Eugene met her – a tiny, brown haired, brown eyed girl, with a slender, rather cat-like figure and a suavity of address and manner which was artistic to the finger tips. She had none of that budding beauty that is the glory of eighteen, but she was altogether artistic and delightful. Her hair encircled her head in a fluffy cloudy mass; her eyes moved quickly, with intense intelligence, feeling, humor, sympathy. Her lips were sweetly modelled after the pattern of a Cupid's bow and her smile was subtly ingratiating. Her sallow complexion matched her brown hair and the drab velvet or corduroy of her dress. There was a striking simplicity about the things she wore which gave her a distinctive air. Her clothes were seldom fashionable but always exceedingly becoming, for she saw herself as a whole and arrayed herself as a decorative composition from head to foot, with a sense of fitness in regard to self and life.

To such a nature as Eugene's, an intelligent, artistic, self-regulating and self-poised human being was always intensely magnetic and gratifying. He turned to the capable person as naturally as a flower turns toward the light, finding a joy in contemplating the completeness and sufficiency of such a being. To have ideas of your own seemed to him a marvellous thing. To be able definitely to formulate your thoughts and reach positive and satisfying conclusions was a great and beautiful thing. From such personalities Eugene drank admiringly until his thirst was satiated – then he would turn away. If his thirst for what they had to give returned, he might come back – not otherwise.

Hitherto all his relationships with personages of this quality had been confined to the male sex, for he had not known any women of distinction. Beginning with Temple Boyle, instructor in the life class in Chicago, and Vincent Beers, instructor in the illustration class, he had encountered successively Jerry Mathews, Mitchell Goldfarb, Peter McHugh, David Smite and Jotham Blue, all men of intense personal feeling and convictions and men who had impressed him greatly. Now he was to encounter for the first time some forceful, really exceptional women of the same calibre. Stella Appleton, Margaret Duff, Ruby Kenny and Angela Blue were charming girls in their way, but they did not think for themselves. They were not organized, self-directed, self-controlled personalities in the way that Miriam Finch was. She would have recognized herself at once as being infinitely superior intellectually and artistically to any or all of them, while entertaining at the same time a sympathetic, appreciative understanding of their beauty, fitness, equality of value in the social scheme. She was a student of life, a critic of emotions and understanding, with keen appreciative intelligence, and yet longing intensely for just what Stella and Margaret and Ruby and even Angela had – youth, beauty, interest for men, the power or magnetism or charm of face and form to compel the impetuous passion of a lover. She wanted to be loved by someone who could love madly and beautifully, and this had never come to her.

Miss Finch's home, or rather studio, was with her family in East Twenty-sixth Street, where she occupied a north room on the third floor, but her presence in the bosom of that family did not prevent her from attaining an individuality and an exclusiveness which was most illuminating to Eugene. Her room was done in silver, brown and grey, with a great wax-festooned candlestick fully five feet high standing in one corner and a magnificent carved chest of early Flemish workmanship standing in another. There was a brown combination writing desk and book-shelf which was arrayed with some of the most curious volumes – Pater's "Marius the Epicurean," Daudet's "Wives of Men of Genius," Richard Jefferies' "Story of My Heart," Stevenson's "Aes Triplex," "The Kasidah" of Richard Burton, "The House of Life" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Also sprach Zarathustra" by Friedrich Nietzsche. The fact that they were here, after he had taken one look at the woman and the room, was to Eugene sufficient proof that they were important. He handled them curiously, reading odd paragraphs, nosing about, looking at pictures, and making rapid notes in his mental notebook. This was someone worth knowing, he felt that. He wanted to make a sufficiently favorable impression to be permitted to know her better.

Miriam Finch was at once taken with Eugene. There was such an air of vigor, inquiry, appreciation and understanding about him that she could not help being impressed. He seemed somewhat like a lighted lamp casting a soft, shaded, velvety glow. He went about her room, after his introduction, looking at her pictures, her bronzes and clays, asking after the creator of this, the painter of that, where a third thing came from.

"I never heard of one of these books," he said frankly, when he looked over the small, specially selected collection.

"There are some very interesting things here," she volunteered, coming to his side. His simple confession appealed to her. He was like a breath of fresh air. Richard Wheeler, who had brought him in, made no objection to being neglected. He wanted her to enjoy his find.

"You know," said Eugene, looking up from Burton's "Kasidah" and into her brown eyes, "New York gets me dizzy. It's so wonderful!"

"Just how?" she asked.

"It's so compact of wonderful things. I saw a shop the other day full of old jewelry and ornaments and quaint stones and clothes, and O Heaven! I don't know what all – more things than I had ever seen in my whole life before; and here in this quiet side street and this unpretentious house I find this room. Nothing seems to show on the outside; everything seems crowded to suffocation with luxury or art value on the inside."

"Are you talking about this room?" she ventured.

"Why, yes," he replied.

"Take note, Mr. Wheeler," she called, over her shoulder to her young editor friend. "This is the first time in my life that I have been accused of possessing luxury. When you write me up again I want you to give me credit for luxury. I like it."

"I'll certainly do it," said Wheeler.

"Yes. 'Art values' too."

"Yes. 'Art values.' I have it," said Wheeler.

Eugene smiled. He liked her vivacity. "I know what you mean," she added. "I've felt the same thing about Paris. You go into little unpretentious places there and come across such wonderful things – heaps and heaps of fine clothes, antiques, jewels. Where was it I read such an interesting article about that?"

"Not in *Craft* I hope?" ventured Wheeler.

"No, I don't think so. *Harper's Bazaar*, I believe."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Wheeler. "*Harper's Bazaar!* What rot!"

"But that's just what you ought to have. Why don't you do it – right?"

"I will," he said.

Eugene went to the piano and turned over a pile of music. Again he came across the unfamiliar, the strange, the obviously distinguished – Grieg's "Arabian Dance"; "Es war ein Traum" by Lassen; "Elegie" by Massenet; "Otidi" by Davydoff; "Nymphs and Shepherds" by Purcell – things whose very titles smacked of color and beauty. Gluck, Sgambati, Rossini, Tschaikowsky – the Italian Scarlatti – Eugene marvelled at what he did not know about music.

"Play something," he pleaded, and with a smile Miriam stepped to the piano.

"Do you know 'Es war ein Traum'?" she inquired.

"No," said he.

"That's lovely," put in Wheeler. "Sing it!"

Eugene had thought that possibly she sang, but he was not prepared for the burst of color that came with her voice. It was not a great voice, but sweet and sympathetic, equal to the tasks she set herself. She selected her music as she selected her clothes – to suit her capacity. The poetic, sympathetic reminiscence of the song struck home. Eugene was delighted.

"Oh," he exclaimed, bringing his chair close to the piano and looking into her face, "you sing beautifully."

She gave him a glittering smile.

"Now I'll sing anything you want for you if you go on like that."

"I'm crazy about music," he said; "I don't know anything about it, but I like this sort of thing."

"You like the really good things. I know. So do I."

He felt flattered and grateful. They went through "Otidi," "The Nightingale," "Elegie," "The Last Spring" – music Eugene had never heard before. But he knew at once that he was listening to playing which represented a better intelligence, a keener selective judgment, a finer artistic impulse than anyone he had ever known had possessed. Ruby played and Angela, the latter rather well, but neither had ever heard of these things he was sure. Ruby had only liked popular things; Angela the standard melodies – beautiful but familiar. Here was someone who ignored popular taste – was in advance of it. In all her music he had found nothing he knew. It grew on him as a significant fact. He wanted to be nice to her, to have her like him. So he drew close and smiled and she always smiled back. Like the others she liked his face, his mouth, his eyes, his hair.

"He's charming," she thought, when he eventually left; and his impression of her was of a woman who was notably and significantly distinguished.

CHAPTER XXI

But Miriam Finch's family, of which she seemed so independent, had not been without its influence on her. This family was of Middle West origin, and did not understand or sympathize very much with the artistic temperament. Since her sixteenth year, when Miriam had first begun to exhibit a definite striving toward the artistic, her parents had guarded her jealously against what they considered the corrupting atmosphere of the art world. Her mother had accompanied her from Ohio to New York, and lived with her while she studied art in the art school, chaperoning her everywhere. When it became advisable, as she thought, for Miriam to go abroad, she went with her. Miriam's artistic career was to be properly supervised. When she lived in the Latin Quarter in Paris her mother was with her; when she loitered in the atmosphere of the galleries and palaces in Rome it was with her mother at her side. At Pompeii and Herculaneum – in London and in Berlin – her mother, an iron-willed little woman at forty-five at that time, was with her. She was convinced that she knew exactly what was good for her daughter and had more or less made the girl accept her theories. Later, Miriam's personal judgment began to diverge slightly from that of her mother and then trouble began.

It was vague at first, hardly a definite, tangible thing in the daughter's mind, but later it grew to be a definite feeling that her life was being cramped. She had been warned off from association with this person and that; had been shown the pitfalls that surround the free, untrammelled life of the art studio. Marriage with the average artist was not to be considered. Modelling from the nude, particularly the nude of a man, was to her mother at first most distressing. She insisted on being present and for a long time her daughter thought that was all right. Finally the presence, the viewpoint, the intellectual insistence of her mother, became too irksome, and an open break followed. It was one of those family tragedies which almost kill conservative parents. Mrs. Finch's heart was practically broken.

The trouble with this break was that it came a little too late for Miriam's happiness. In the stress of this insistent chaperonage she had lost her youth – the period during which she felt she should have had her natural freedom. She had lost the interest of several men who in her nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first years had approached her longingly, but who could not stand the criticism of her mother. At twenty-eight when the break came the most delightful love period was over and she felt grieved and resentful.

At that time she had insisted on a complete and radical change for herself. She had managed to get, through one art dealer and another, orders for some of her spirited clay figurines. There was a dancing girl, a visualization of one of the moods of Carmencita, a celebrated dancer of the period, which had caught the public fancy – at least the particular art dealer who was handling her work for her had managed to sell some eighteen replicas of it at $175 each. Miss Finch's share of this was $100, each. There was another little thing, a six-inch bronze called "Sleep," which had sold some twenty replicas at $150 each, and was still selling. "The Wind," a figure crouching and huddling as if from cold, was also selling. It looked as though she might be able to make from three to four thousand dollars a year steadily.

She demanded of her mother at this time the right to a private studio, to go and come when she pleased, to go about alone wherever she wished, to have men and women come to her private apartment, and be entertained by her in her own manner. She objected to supervision in any form, cast aside criticism and declared roundly that she would lead her own life. She realized sadly while she was doing it, however, that the best was gone – that she had not had the wit or the stamina to do as she pleased at the time she most wanted to do so. Now she would be almost automatically conservative. She could not help it.

Eugene when he first met her felt something of this. He felt the subtlety of her temperament, her philosophic conclusions, what might be called her emotional disappointment. She was eager for

life, which seemed to him odd, for she appeared to have so much. By degrees he got it out of her, for they came to be quite friendly and then he understood clearly just how things were.

By the end of three months and before Christina Channing appeared, Eugene had come to the sanest, cleanest understanding with Miss Finch that he had yet reached with any woman. He had dropped into the habit of calling there once and sometimes twice a week. He had learned to understand her point of view, which was detachedly æsthetic and rather removed from the world of the sensuous. Her ideal of a lover had been fixed to a certain extent by statues and poems of Greek youth – Hylas, Adonis, Perseus, and by those men of the Middle Ages painted by Millais, Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. She had hoped for a youth with a classic outline of face, distinction of form, graciousness of demeanor and an appreciative intellect. He must be manly but artistic. It was a rather high ideal, not readily capable of attainment by a woman already turned thirty, but nevertheless worth dreaming about.

Although she had surrounded herself with talented youth as much as possible – both young men and young women – she had not come across *the one*. There had been a number of times when, for a very little while, she had imagined she had found him, but had been compelled to see her fancies fail. All the youths she knew had been inclined to fall in love with girls younger than themselves – some to the interesting maidens she had introduced them to. It is hard to witness an ideal turning from yourself, its spiritual counterpart, and fixing itself upon some mere fleshly vision of beauty which a few years will cause to fade. Such had been her fate, however, and she was at times inclined to despair. When Eugene appeared she had almost concluded that love was not for her, and she did not flatter herself that he would fall in love with her. Nevertheless she could not help but be interested in him and look at times with a longing eye at his interesting face and figure. It was so obvious that if he loved at all it would be dramatically, in all probability, beautifully.

As time went on she took pains to be agreeable to him. He had, as it were, the freedom of her room. She knew of exhibitions, personalities, movements – in religion, art, science, government, literature. She was inclined to take an interest in socialism, and believed in righting the wrongs of the people. Eugene thought he did, but he was so keenly interested in life as a spectacle that he hadn't as much time to sympathize as he thought he ought to have. She took him to see exhibitions, and to meet people, being rather proud of a boy with so much talent; and she was pleased to find that he was so generally acceptable. People, particularly writers, poets, musicians – beginners in every field, were inclined to remember him. He was an easy talker, witty, quick to make himself at home and perfectly natural. He tried to be accurate in his judgments of things, and fair, but he was young and subject to strong prejudices. He appreciated her friendship, and did not seek to make their relationship more intimate. He knew that only a sincere proposal of marriage could have won her, and he did not care enough for her for that. He felt himself bound to Angela and, curiously, he felt Miriam's age as a bar between them. He admired her tremendously and was learning in part through her what his ideal ought to be, but he was not drawn sufficiently to want to make love to her.

But in Christina Channing, whom he met shortly afterward, he found a woman of a more sensuous and lovable type, though hardly less artistic. Christina Channing was a singer by profession, living also in New York with her mother, but not, as Miss Finch had been, dominated by her so thoroughly, although she was still at the age when her mother could and did have considerable influence with her. She was twenty-seven years of age and so far, had not yet attained the eminence which subsequently was hers, though she was full of that buoyant self-confidence which makes for eventual triumph. So far she had studied ardently under various teachers, had had several love affairs, none serious enough to win her away from her chosen profession, and had gone through the various experiences of those who begin ignorantly to do something in art and eventually reach experience and understanding of how the world is organized and what they will have to do to succeed.

Although Miss Channing's artistic sense did not rise to that definite artistic expression in her material surroundings which characterized Miss Finch's studio atmosphere, it went much farther

in its expression of her joy in life. Her voice, a rich contralto, deep, full, colorful, had a note of pathos and poignancy which gave a touch of emotion to her gayest songs. She could play well enough to accompany herself with delicacy and emphasis. She was at present one of the soloists with the New York Symphony Orchestra, with the privilege of accepting occasional outside engagements. The following Fall she was preparing to make a final dash to Germany to see if she could not get an engagement with a notable court opera company and so pave the way for a New York success. She was already quite well known in musical circles as a promising operatic candidate and her eventual arrival would be not so much a question of talent as of luck.

While these two women fascinated Eugene for the time being, his feeling for Angela continued unchanged; for though she suffered in an intellectual or artistic comparison, he felt that she was richer emotionally. There was a poignancy in her love letters, an intensity about her personal feelings when in his presence which moved him in spite of himself – an ache went with her which brought a memory of the tales of Sappho and Marguerite Gautier. It occurred to him now that if he flung her aside it might go seriously with her. He did not actually think of doing anything of the sort, but he was realizing that there was a difference between her and intellectual women like Miriam Finch. Besides that, there was a whole constellation of society women swimming into his ken – women whom he only knew, as yet, through the newspapers and the smart weeklies like Town Topics and Vogue, who were presenting still a third order of perfection. Vaguely he was beginning to see that the world was immense and subtle, and that there were many things to learn about women that he had never dreamed of.

Christina Channing was a rival of Angela's in one sense, that of bodily beauty. She had a tall perfectly rounded form, a lovely oval face, a nut brown complexion with the rosy glow of health showing in cheeks and lips, and a mass of blue black hair. Her great brown eyes were lustrous and sympathetic.

Eugene met her through the good offices of Shotmeyer, who had been given by some common friend in Boston a letter of introduction to her. He had spoken of Eugene as being a very brilliant young artist and his friend, and remarked that he would like to bring him up some evening to hear her sing. Miss Channing acquiesced, for she had seen some of his drawings and was struck by the poetic note in them. Shotmeyer, vain of his notable acquaintances – who in fact tolerated him for his amusing gossip – described Miss Channing's voice to Eugene and asked him if he did not want to call on her some evening. "Delighted," said Eugene.

The appointment was made and together they went to Miss Channing's suite in a superior Nineteenth Street boarding house. Miss Channing received them, arrayed in a smooth, close fitting dress of black velvet, touched with red. Eugene was reminded of the first costume in which he had seen Ruby. He was dazzled. As for her, as she told him afterward, she was conscious of a peculiar illogical perturbation.

"When I put on my ribbon that night," she told him, "I was going to put on a dark blue silk one I had just bought and then I thought 'No, he'll like me better in a red one.' Isn't that curious? I just felt as though you were going to like me – as though we might know each other better. That young man – what's his name – described you so accurately." It was months afterward when she confessed that.

When Eugene entered it was with the grand air he had acquired since his life had begun to broaden in the East. He took his relationship with talent, particularly female talent, seriously. He stood up very straight, walked with a noticeable stride, drove an examining glance into the very soul of the person he was looking at. He was quick to get impressions, especially of talent. He could feel ability in another. When he looked at Miss Channing he felt it like a strong wave – the vibrating wave of an intense consciousness.

She greeted him, extending a soft white hand. They spoke of how they had heard of each other. Eugene somehow made her feel his enthusiasm for her art. "Music is the finer thing," he said, when she spoke of his own gift.

Christina's dark brown eyes swept him from head to foot. He was like his pictures, she thought – and as good to look at.

He was introduced to her mother. They sat down, talking, and presently Miss Channing sang – "Che faro senza Euridice." Eugene felt as if she were singing to him. Her cheeks were flushed and her lips red.

Her mother remarked after she had finished, "You're in splendid voice this evening, Christina."

"I feel particularly fit," she replied.

"A wonderful voice – it's like a big red poppy or a great yellow orchid!" cried Eugene.

Christina thrilled. The description caught her fancy. It seemed true. She felt something of that in the sounds to which she gave utterance.

"Please sing 'Who is Sylvia,'" he begged a little later. She complied gladly.

"That was written for you," he said softly as she ceased, for he had come close to the piano. "You image Sylvia for me." Her cheeks colored warmly.

"Thanks," she nodded, and her eyes spoke too. She welcomed his daring and she was glad to let him know it.

CHAPTER XXII

The chief trouble with his present situation, and with the entrance of these two women into his life, and it had begun to be a serious one to him, was that he was not making money. He had been able to earn about $1200 the first year; the second he made a little over two thousand, and this third year he was possibly doing a little better. But in view of what he saw around him and what he now knew of life, it was nothing. New York presented a spectacle of material display such as he had never known existed. The carriages on Fifth Avenue, the dinners at the great hotels, the constant talk of society functions in the newspapers, made his brain dizzy. He was inclined to idle about the streets, to watch the handsomely dressed crowds, to consider the evidences of show and refinement everywhere, and he came to the conclusion that he was not living at all, but existing. Art as he had first dreamed of it, art had seemed not only a road to distinction but also to affluence. Now, as he studied those about him, he found that it was not so. Artists were never tremendously rich, he learned. He remembered reading in Balzac's story "Cousin Betty," of a certain artist of great distinction who had been allowed condescendingly by one of the rich families of Paris to marry a daughter, but it was considered a great come down for her. He had hardly been able to credit the idea at the time, so exalted was his notion of the artist. But now he was beginning to see that it represented the world's treatment of artists. There were in America a few who were very popular – meretriciously so he thought in certain cases – who were said to be earning from ten to fifteen thousand a year. How high would that place them, he asked himself, in that world of real luxury which was made up of the so-called *four hundred*– the people of immense wealth and social position. He had read in the papers that it took from fifteen to twenty-five thousand dollars a year to clothe a débutante. It was nothing uncommon, he heard, for a man to spend from fifteen to twenty dollars on his dinner at the restaurant. The prices he heard that tailors demanded – that dressmakers commanded, the display of jewels and expensive garments at the opera, made the poor little income of an artist look like nothing at all. Miss Finch was constantly telling him of the show and swagger she met with in her circle of acquaintances, for her tact and adaptability had gained her the friendship of a number of society people. Miss Channing, when he came to know her better, made constant references to things she came in contact with – great singers or violinists paid $1000 a night, or the tremendous salaries commanded by the successful opera stars. He began, as he looked at his own meagre little income, to feel shabby again, and run down, much as he had during those first days in Chicago. Why, art, outside the fame, was nothing. It did not make for real living. It made for a kind of mental blooming, which everybody recognized, but you could be a poor, sick, hungry, shabby genius – you actually could. Look at Verlaine, who had recently died in Paris.

A part of this feeling was due to the opening of a golden age of luxury in New York, and the effect the reiterated sight of it was having on Eugene. Huge fortunes had been amassed in the preceding fifty years and now there were thousands of residents in the great new city who were worth anything from one to fifty and in some instances a hundred million dollars. The metropolitan area, particularly Manhattan Island above Fifty-ninth Street, was growing like a weed. Great hotels were being erected in various parts of the so-called "white light" district. There was beginning, just then, the first organized attempt of capital to supply a new need – the modern sumptuous, eight, ten and twelve story apartment house, which was to house the world of newly rich middle class folk who were pouring into New York from every direction. Money was being made in the West, the South and the North, and as soon as those who were making it had sufficient to permit them to live in luxury for the rest of their days they were moving East, occupying these expensive apartments, crowding the great hotels, patronizing the sumptuous restaurants, giving the city its air of spendthrift luxury. All the things which catered to showy material living were beginning to flourish tremendously, art and curio shops, rug shops, decorative companies dealing with the old and the new in hangings, furniture, objects of art; dealers in paintings, jewelry stores, china and glassware houses – anything

and everything which goes to make life comfortable and brilliant. Eugene, as he strolled about the city, saw this, felt the change, realized that the drift was toward greater population, greater luxury, greater beauty. His mind was full of the necessity of living *now*. He was young *now*; he was vigorous *now*; he was keen *now*; in a few years he might not be – seventy years was the allotted span and twenty-five of his had already gone. How would it be if he never came into this luxury, was never allowed to enter society, was never permitted to live as wealth was now living! The thought hurt him. He felt an eager desire to tear wealth and fame from the bosom of the world. Life must give him his share. If it did not he would curse it to his dying day. So he felt when he was approaching twenty-six.

The effect of Christina Channing's friendship for him was particularly to emphasize this. She was not so much older than he, was possessed of very much the same temperament, the same hopes and aspirations, and she discerned almost as clearly as he did the current of events. New York was to witness a golden age of luxury. It was already passing into it. Those who rose to distinction in any field, particularly music or the stage, were likely to share in a most notable spectacle of luxury. Christina hoped to. She was sure she would. After a few conversations with Eugene she was inclined to feel that he would. He was so brilliant, so incisive.

"You have such a way with you," she said the second time he came. "You are so commanding. You make me think you can do almost anything you want to."

"Oh, no," he deprecated. "Not as bad as that. I have just as much trouble as anyone getting what I want."

"Oh, but you will though. You have ideas."

It did not take these two long to reach an understanding. They confided to each other their individual histories, with reservations, of course, at first. Christina told him of her musical history, beginning at Hagerstown, Maryland, and he went back to his earliest days in Alexandria. They discussed the differences in parental control to which they had been subject. He learned of her father's business, which was that of oyster farming, and confessed on his part to being the son of a sewing machine agent. They talked of small town influences, early illusions, the different things they had tried to do. She had sung in the local Methodist church, had once thought she would like to be a milliner, had fallen in the hands of a teacher who tried to get her to marry him and she had been on the verge of consenting. Something happened – she went away for the summer, or something of that sort, and changed her mind.

After an evening at the theatre with her, a late supper one night and a third call, to spend a quiet evening in her room, he took her by the hand. She was standing by the piano and he was looking at her cheeks, her large inquiring eyes, her smooth rounded neck and chin.

"You like me," he said suddenly à propos of nothing save the mutual attraction that was always running strong between them.

Without hesitation she nodded her head, though the bright blood mounted to her neck and cheeks.

"You are so lovely to me," he went on, "that words are of no value. I can paint you. Or you can sing me what you are, but mere words won't show it. I have been in love before, but never with anyone like you."

"Are you in love?" she asked naïvely.

"What is this?" he asked and slipped his arms about her, drawing her close.

She turned her head away, leaving her rosy cheek near his lips. He kissed that, then her mouth and her neck. He held her chin and looked into her eyes.

"Be careful," she said, "mamma may come in."

"Hang mamma!" he laughed.

"She'll hang you if she sees you. Mamma would never suspect me of anything like this."

"That shows how little mamma knows of her Christina," he answered.

"She knows enough at that," she confessed gaily. "Oh, if we were only up in the mountains now," she added.

"What mountains," he inquired curiously.

"The Blue Ridge. We have a bungalow up at Florizel. You must come up when we go there next summer."

"Will mamma be there?" he asked.

"And papa," she laughed.

"And I suppose Cousin Annie."

"No, brother George will be."

"Nix for the bungalow," he replied, using a slang word that had become immensely popular.

"Oh, but I know all the country round there. There are some lovely walks and drives." She said this archly, naïvely, suggestively, her bright face lit with an intelligence that seemed perfection.

"Well – such being the case!" he smiled, "and meanwhile – "

"Oh, meanwhile you just have to wait. You see how things are." She nodded her head towards an inside room where Mrs. Channing was lying down with a slight headache. "Mamma doesn't leave me very often."

Eugene did not know exactly how to take Christina. He had never encountered this attitude before. Her directness, in connection with so much talent, such real ability, rather took him by surprise. He did not expect it – did not think she would confess affection for him; did not know just what she meant by speaking in the way she did of the bungalow and Florizel. He was flattered, raised in his own self-esteem. If such a beautiful, talented creature as this could confess her love for him, what a personage he must be. And she was thinking of freer conditions – just what?

He did not want to press the matter too closely then and she was not anxious to have him do so – she preferred to be enigmatic. But there was a light of affection and admiration in her eye which made him very proud and happy with things just as they were.

As she said, there was little chance for love-making under conditions then existing. Her mother was with her most of the time. Christina invited Eugene to come and hear her sing at the Philharmonic Concerts; so once in a great ball-room at the Waldorf-Astoria and again in the imposing auditorium of Carnegie Hall and a third time in the splendid auditorium of the Arion Society, he had the pleasure of seeing her walk briskly to the footlights, the great orchestra waiting, the audience expectant, herself arch, assured – almost defiant, he thought, and so beautiful. When the great house thundered its applause he was basking in one delicious memory of her.

"Last night she had her arms about my neck. Tonight when I call and we are alone she will kiss me. That beautiful, distinguished creature standing there bowing and smiling loves me and no one else. If I were to ask her she would marry me – if I were in a position and had the means."

"If I were in a position – " that thought cut him, for he knew that he was not. He could not marry her. In reality she would not have him knowing how little he made – or would she? He wondered.

CHAPTER XXIII

Towards the end of spring Eugene concluded he would rather go up in the mountains near Christina's bungalow this summer, than back to see Angela. The memory of that precious creature was, under the stress and excitement of metropolitan life, becoming a little tarnished. His recollections of her were as delightful as ever, as redolent of beauty, but he was beginning to wonder. The smart crowd in New York was composed of a different type. Angela was sweet and lovely, but would she fit in?

Meanwhile Miriam Finch with her subtle eclecticism continued her education of Eugene. She was as good as a school. He would sit and listen to her descriptions of plays, her appreciation of books, her summing up of current philosophies, and he would almost feel himself growing. She knew so many people, could tell him where to go to see just such and such an important thing. All the startling personalities, the worth while preachers, the new actors, somehow she knew all about them.

"Now, Eugene," she would exclaim on seeing him, "you positively must go and see Haydon Boyd in 'The Signet,'" or – "see Elmina Deming in her new dances," or – "look at the pictures of Winslow Homer that are being shown at Knoedler's."

She would explain with exactness why she wanted him to see them, what she thought they would do for him. She frankly confessed to him that she considered him a genius and always insisted on knowing what new thing he was doing. When any work of his appeared and she liked it she was swift to tell him. He almost felt as if he owned her room and herself, as if all that she was – her ideas, her friends, her experiences – belonged to him. He could go and draw on them by sitting at her feet or going with her somewhere. When spring came she liked to walk with him, to listen to his comments on nature and life.

"That's splendid!" she would exclaim. "Now, why don't you write that?" or "why don't you paint that?"

He showed her some of his poems once and she had made copies of them and pasted them in a book of what she called exceptional things. So he was coddled by her.

In another way Christina was equally nice. She was fond of telling Eugene how much she thought of him, how nice she thought he was. "You're so big and smarty," she said to him once, affectionately, pinioning his arms and looking into his eyes. "I like the way you part your hair, too! You're kind o' like an artist ought to be!"

"That's the way to spoil me," he replied. "Let me tell you how nice you are. Want to know how nice you are?"

"Uh-uh," she smiled, shaking her head to mean "no."

"Wait till we get to the mountains. I'll tell you." He sealed her lips with his, holding her until her breath was almost gone.

"Oh," she exclaimed; "you're terrible. You're like steel."

"And you're like a big red rose. Kiss me!"

From Christina he learned all about the musical world and musical personalities. He gained an insight into the different forms of music, operatic, symphonic, instrumental. He learned of the different forms of composition, the terminology, the mystery of the vocal cords, the methods of training. He learned of the jealousies within the profession, and what the best musical authorities thought of such and such composers, or singers. He learned how difficult it was to gain a place in the operatic world, how bitterly singers fought each other, how quick the public was to desert a fading star. Christina took it all so unconcernedly that he almost loved her for her courage. She was so wise and so good natured.

"You have to give up a lot of things to be a good artist," she said to Eugene one day. "You can't have the ordinary life, and art too."

"Just what do you mean, Chrissy?" he asked, petting her hand, for they were alone together.

"Why, you can't get married very well and have children, and you can't do much in a social way. Oh, I know they do get married, but sometimes I think it is a mistake. Most of the singers I know don't do so very well tied down by marriage."

"Don't you intend to get married?" asked Eugene curiously.

"I don't know," she replied, realizing what he was driving at. "I'd want to think about that. A woman artist is in a d – of a position anyway," using the letter d only to indicate the word "devil." "She has so many things to think about."

"For instance?"

"Oh, what people think and her family think, and I don't know what all. They ought to get a new sex for artists – like they have for worker bees."

Eugene smiled. He knew what she was driving at. But he did not know how long she had been debating the problem of her virginity as conflicting with her love of distinction in art. She was nearly sure she did not want to complicate her art life with marriage. She was almost positive that success on the operatic stage – particularly the great opportunity for the beginner abroad – was complicated with some liaison. Some escaped, but it was not many. She was wondering in her own mind whether she owed it to current morality to remain absolutely pure. It was assumed generally that girls should remain virtuous and marry, but this did not necessarily apply to her – should it apply to the artistic temperament? Her mother and her family troubled her. She was virtuous, but youth and desire had given her some bitter moments. And here was Eugene to emphasize it.

"It is a difficult problem," he said sympathetically, wondering what she would eventually do. He felt keenly that her attitude in regard to marriage affected his relationship to her. Was she wedded to her art at the expense of love?

"It's a big problem," she said and went to the piano to sing.

He half suspected for a little while after this that she might be contemplating some radical step – what, he did not care to say to himself, but he was intensely interested in her problem. This peculiar freedom of thought astonished him – broadened his horizon. He wondered what his sister Myrtle would think of a girl discussing marriage in this way – the to be or not to be of it – what Sylvia? He wondered if many girls did that. Most of the women he had known seemed to think more logically along these lines than he did. He remembered asking Ruby once whether she didn't think illicit love was wrong and hearing her reply, "No. Some people thought it was wrong, but that didn't make it so to her." Here was another girl with another theory.

They talked more of love, and he wondered why she wanted him to come up to Florizel in the summer. She could not be thinking – no, she was too conservative. He began to suspect, though, that she would not marry him – would not marry anyone at present. She merely wanted to be loved for awhile, no doubt.

May came and with it the end of Christina's concert work and voice study so far as New York was concerned. She had been in and out of the city all the winter – to Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Chicago, St. Paul and now after a winter's hard work retired to Hagerstown with her mother for a few weeks prior to leaving for Florizel.

"You ought to come down here," she wrote to Eugene early in June. "There is a sickle moon that shines in my garden and the roses are in bloom. Oh, the odors are so sweet, and the dew! Some of our windows open out level with the grass and I sing! I sing!! I sing!!!"

He had a notion to run down but restrained himself, for she told him that they were leaving in two weeks for the mountains. He had a set of drawings to complete for a magazine for which they were in a hurry. So he decided to wait till that was done.

In late June he went up to the Blue Ridge, in Southern Pennsylvania, where Florizel was situated. He thought at first he would be invited to stay at the Channing bungalow, but Christina warned him that it would be safer and better for him to stay at one of the adjoining hotels. There were several on

the slope of adjacent hills at prices ranging from five to ten dollars a day. Though this was high for Eugene he decided to go. He wanted to be with this marvellous creature – to see just what she did mean by wishing they were in the mountains together.

He had saved some eight hundred dollars, which was in a savings bank and he withdrew three hundred for his little outing. He took Christina a very handsomely bound copy of Villon, of whom she was fond, and several volumes of new verse. Most of these, chosen according to his most recent mood, were sad in their poetic texture; they all preached the nothingness of life, its sadness, albeit the perfection of its beauty.

At this time Eugene had quite reached the conclusion that there was no hereafter – there was nothing save blind, dark force moving aimlessly – where formerly he had believed vaguely in a heaven and had speculated as to a possible hell. His reading had led him through some main roads and some odd by-paths of logic and philosophy. He was an omnivorous reader now and a fairly logical thinker. He had already tackled Spencer's "First Principles," which had literally torn him up by the roots and set him adrift and from that had gone back to Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Spinoza and Schopenhauer – men who ripped out all his private theories and made him wonder what life really was. He had walked the streets for a long time after reading some of these things, speculating on the play of forces, the decay of matter, the fact that thought-forms had no more stability than cloud-forms. Philosophies came and went, governments came and went, races arose and disappeared. He walked into the great natural history museum of New York once to discover enormous skeletons of prehistoric animals – things said to have lived two, three, five millions of years before his day and he marvelled at the forces which produced them, the indifference, apparently, with which they had been allowed to die. Nature seemed lavish of its types and utterly indifferent to the persistence of anything. He came to the conclusion that he was nothing, a mere shell, a sound, a leaf which had no general significance, and for the time being it almost broke his heart. It tended to smash his egotism, to tear away his intellectual pride. He wandered about dazed, hurt, moody, like a lost child. But he was thinking persistently.

Then came Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Lubbock – a whole string of British thinkers who fortified the original conclusions of the others, but showed him a beauty, a formality, a lavishness of form and idea in nature's methods which fairly transfixed him. He was still reading – poets, naturalists, essayists, but he was still gloomy. Life was nothing save dark forces moving aimlessly.

The manner in which he applied this thinking to his life was characteristic and individual. To think that beauty should blossom for a little while and disappear for ever seemed sad. To think that his life should endure but for seventy years and then be no more was terrible. He and Angela were chance acquaintances – chemical affinities – never to meet again in all time. He and Christina, he and Ruby – he and anyone – a few bright hours were all they could have together, and then would come the great silence, dissolution, and he would never be anymore. It hurt him to think of this, but it made him all the more eager to live, to be loved while he was here. If he could only have a lovely girl's arms to shut him in safely always!

It was while he was in this mood that he reached Florizel after a long night's ride, and Christina who was a good deal of a philosopher and thinker herself at times was quick to notice it. She was waiting at the depot with a dainty little trap of her own to take him for a drive.

The trap rolled out along the soft, yellow, dusty roads. The mountain dew was still in the earth though and the dust was heavy with damp and not flying. Green branches of trees hung low over them, charming vistas came into view at every turn. Eugene kissed her, for there was no one to see, twisting her head to kiss her lips at leisure.

"It's a blessed thing this horse is tame or we'd be in for some accident. What makes you so moody?" she said.

"I'm not moody – or am I? I've been thinking a lot of things of late – of you principally."

"Do I make you sad?"

"From one point of view, yes."

"And what is that, sir?" she asked with an assumption of severity.

"You are so beautiful, so wonderful, and life is so short."

"You have only fifty years to love me in," she laughed, calculating his age. "Oh, Eugene, what a boy you are! – Wait a minute," she added after a pause, drawing the horse to a stop under some trees. "Hold these," she said, offering him the reins. He took them and she put her arms about his neck. "Now, you silly," she exclaimed, "I love you, love you, love you! There was never anyone quite like you. Will that help you?" she smiled into his eyes.

"Yes," he answered, "but it isn't enough. Seventy years isn't enough. Eternity isn't enough of life as it is now."

"As it is now," she echoed and then took the reins, for she felt what he felt, the need of persistent youth and persistent beauty to keep it as it should be, and these things would not stay.

CHAPTER XXIV

The days spent in the mountains were seventeen exactly, and during that time with Christina, Eugene reached a curious exaltation of spirit different from anything he had experienced before. In the first place he had never known a girl like Christina, so beautiful, so perfect physically, so incisive mentally, so full of a fine artistic perception. She was so quick to perceive exactly what he meant. She was so suggestive to him in her own thoughts and feelings. The mysteries of life employed her mind quite as fully as they did his. She thought much of the subtlety of the human body, of its mysterious emotions, of its conscious and subconscious activities and relationships. The passions, the desires, the necessities of life, were as a fine tapestry for her mind to contemplate. She had no time to sit down and formulate her thoughts; she did not want to write – but she worked out through her emotions and through her singing the beautiful and pathetic things she felt. And she could talk in a fine, poetic melancholy vein on occasion, though there was so much courage and strength in her young blood that she was not afraid of any phase of life or what nature might do with the little substance which she called herself, when it should dissolve. "Time and change happeneth to us all," she would quote to Eugene and he would gravely nod his head.

The hotel where he stopped was more pretentious than any he had been previously acquainted with. He had never had so much money in his life before, nor had he ever felt called upon to spend it lavishly. The room he took was – because of what Christina might think – one of the best. He took Christina's suggestion and invited her, her mother and her brother to dinner on several occasions; the remainder of the family had not arrived yet. In return he was invited to breakfast, to lunch and dinner at the bungalow.

Christina showed on his arrival that she had planned to be with him alone as much as possible, for she suggested that they make expeditions to High Hill, to Bold Face, and The Chimney – three surrounding mountains. She knew of good hotels at seven, ten, fifteen miles distance to which they could go by train, or else they drive and return by moonlight. She had selected two or three secluded spots in thickets and groves where the trees gave way to little open spaces of grass, and in these they would string a hammock, scatter their books of verse about and sit down to enjoy the delights of talk and love-making.

Under the influence of this companionship, under cloudless skies and in the heart of the June weather, Christina finally yielded to an arrangement which brought Eugene into a relationship which he had never dreamed possible with her. They had progressed by degrees through all the subtleties of courtship. They had come to discuss the nature of passion and emotion, and had swept aside as negligible the conviction that there was any inherent evil in the most intimate relationship. At last Christina said frankly:

"I don't want to be married. It isn't for me – not until I've thoroughly succeeded, anyhow. I'd rather wait – If I could just have you and singleness too."

"Why do you want to yield yourself to me?" Eugene asked curiously.

"I don't know that I exactly want to. I could do with just your love – if you were satisfied. It's you that I want to make happy. I want to give you anything you want."

"Curious girl," observed her lover, smoothing her high forehead with his hand. "I don't understand you, Christina. I don't know how your mind works. Why should you? You have everything to lose if worst came to worst."

"Oh, no," she smiled. "I'd marry you then."

"But to do this out of hand, because you love me, because you want me to be happy!" he paused.

"I don't understand it either, honey boy," she offered, "I just do."

"But why, if you are willing to do this, you wouldn't prefer to live with me, is what I don't understand."

She took his face between her hands. "I think I understand you better than you do yourself. I don't think you'd be happy married. You might not always love me. I might not always love you. You might come to regret. If we could be happy now you might reach the point where you wouldn't care any more. Then you see I wouldn't be remorseful thinking that we had never known happiness."

"What logic!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say you wouldn't care any more?"

"Oh, I'd care, but not in the same way. Don't you see, Eugene, I would have the satisfaction of knowing that even if we did separate you had had the best of me."

It seemed astounding to Eugene that she should talk in this way – reason this way. What a curious, sacrificial, fatalistic turn of mind. Could a young, beautiful, talented girl really be like this? Would anybody on earth really believe it if they knew? He looked at her and shook his head sorrowfully.

"To think that the quintessence of life should not stay with us always." He sighed.

"No, honey boy," she replied, "you want too much. You think you want it to stay, but you don't. You want it to go. You wouldn't be satisfied to live with me always, I know it. Take what the gods provide and have no regrets. Refuse to think; you can, you know."

Eugene gathered her up in his arms. He kissed her over and over, forgetting in her embrace all the loves he had ever known. She yielded herself to him gladly, joyously, telling him over and over that it made her happy.

"If you could only see how nice you are to me you wouldn't wonder," she explained.

He concluded she was the most wonderful being he had ever known. No woman had ever revealed herself to him so unselfishly in love. No woman he had ever known appeared to have the courage and the insight to go thus simply and directly to what she desired. To hear an artist of her power, a girl of her beauty, discussing calmly whether she should sacrifice her virtue to love; whether marriage in the customary form was good for her art; whether she should take him now when they were young or bow to the conventions and let youth pass, was enough to shock his still trammelled soul. For after all, and despite his desire for personal freedom, his intellectual doubts and mental exceptions, he still had a profound reverence for a home such as that maintained by Jotham Blue and his wife, and for its results in the form of normal, healthy, dutiful children. Nature had no doubt attained to this standard through a long series of difficulties and experiments, and she would not readily relinquish it. Was it really necessary to abandon it entirely? Did he want to see a world in which a woman would take him for a little while as Christina was doing now, and then leave him? His experience here was making him think, throwing his theories and ideas up in the air, making a mess of all the notions he had ever formed about things. He racked his brain over the intricacies of sex and life, sitting on the great verandas of the hotel and wondering over and over just what the answer was, and why he could not like other men be faithful to one woman and be happy. He wondered whether this was really so, and whether he could not. It seemed to him then that he might. He knew that he did not understand himself very clearly; that he had no grasp on himself at all as yet – his tendencies, his possibilities.

These days, under such halcyon conditions, made a profound impression on him. He was struck with the perfection life could reach at odd moments. These great quiet hills, so uniform in their roundness, so green, so peaceful, rested his soul. He and Christina climbed, one day, two thousand feet to a ledge which jutted out over a valley and commanded what seemed to him the kingdoms and the powers of the earth – vast stretches of green land and subdivided fields, little cottage settlements and towns, great hills that stood up like friendly brothers to this one in the distance.

"See that man down in that yard," said Christina, pointing to a speck of a being chopping wood in a front space serving as a garden to a country cottage fully a mile distant.

"Where?" asked Eugene.

"See where that red barn is, just this side of that clump of trees? – don't you see? there, where the cows are in that field."

"I don't see any cows."

"Oh, Eugene, what's the matter with your eyes?"

"Oh, now I see," he replied, squeezing her fingers. "He looks like a cockroach, doesn't he?"

"Yes," she laughed.

"How wide the earth is and how small we are. Now think of that speck with all his hopes and ambitions – all the machinery of his brain and nerves and tell me whether any God can care. How can He, Christina?"

"He can't care for any one particular speck much, sweet. He might care for the idea of man or a race of men as a whole. Still, I'm not sure, honey. All I know is that I'm happy now."

"And I," he echoed.

Still they dug at this problem, the question of the origin of life – its why. The tremendous and wearisome age of the earth; the veritable storms of birth and death that seemed to have raged at different periods, held them in discussion.

"We can't solve it, Eugenio mio," she laughed. "We might as well go home. Poor, dear mamma will be wondering where her Christina is. You know I think she suspects that I'm falling in love with you. She doesn't care how many men fall in love with me, but if I show the least sign of a strong preference she begins to worry."

"Have there been many preferences?" he inquired.

"No, but don't ask. What difference does it make? Oh, Eugene, what difference does it make? I love you now."

"I don't know what difference it makes," he replied, "only there is an ache that goes with the thought of previous experience. I can't tell you why it is. It just is."

She looked thoughtfully away.

"Anyhow, no man ever was to me before what you have been. Isn't that enough? Doesn't that speak?"

"Yes, yes, sweet, it does. Oh, yes it does. Forgive me. I won't grieve any more."

"Don't, please," she said, "you hurt me as much as you hurt yourself."

There were evenings when he sat on some one of the great verandas and watched them trim and string the interspaces between the columns with soft, glowing, Chinese lanterns, preparatory to the evening's dancing. He loved to see the girls and men of the summer colony arrive, the former treading the soft grass in filmy white gowns and white slippers, the latter in white ducks and flannels, gaily chatting as they came. Christina would come to these affairs with her mother and brother, beautifully clad in white linen or lawns and laces, and he would be beside himself with chagrin that he had not practised dancing to the perfection of the art. He could dance now, but not like her brother or scores of men he saw upon the waxen floor. It hurt him. At times he would sit all alone after his splendid evenings with his love, dreaming of the beauty of it all. The stars would be as a great wealth of diamond seed flung from the lavish hand of an aimless sower. The hills would loom dark and tall. There was peace and quiet everywhere.

"Why may not life be always like this?" he would ask, and then he would answer himself out of his philosophy that it would become deadly after awhile, as does all unchanging beauty. The call of the soul is for motion, not peace. Peace after activity for a little while, then activity again. So must it be. He understood that.

Just before he left for New York, Christina said to him:

"Now, when you see me again I will be Miss Channing of New York. You will be Mr. Witla. We will almost forget that we were ever here together. We will scarcely believe that we have seen what we have seen and done what we have done."

"But, Christina, you talk as though everything were over. It isn't, is it?"

"We can't do anything like this in New York," she sighed. "I haven't time and you must work."

There was a shade of finality in her tone.

"Oh, Christina, don't talk so. I can't think that way. Please don't."

"I won't," she said. "We'll see. Wait till I get back."

He kissed her a dozen farewells and at the door held her close once more.

"Will you forsake me?" he asked.

"No, you will forsake me. But remember, dear! Don't you see? You've had all. Let me be your wood nymph. The rest is commonplace."

He went back to his hotel with an ache in his heart, for he knew they had gone through all they ever would. She had had her summer with him. She had given him of herself fully. She wanted to be free to work now. He could not understand it, but he knew it to be so.

CHAPTER XXV

It is a rather dreary thing to come back into the hot city in the summer after a period of beauty in the mountains. The quiet of the hills was in Eugene's mind, the glisten and babble of mountain streams, the soar and poise of hawks and buzzards and eagles sailing the crystal blue. He felt lonely and sick for awhile, out of touch with work and with practical life generally. There were little souvenirs of his recent happiness in the shape of letters and notes from Christina, but he was full of the premonition of the end which had troubled him on leaving.

He must write to Angela. He had not thought of her all the time he had been gone. He had been in the habit of writing to her every third or fourth day at least; while of late his letters had been less passionate they had remained fairly regular. But now this sudden break coming – it was fully three weeks – made her think he must be ill, although she had begun to feel also that he might be changing. His letters had grown steadily less reminiscent of the joys they had experienced together and of the happiness they were anticipating, and more inclined to deal with the color and character of city life and of what he hoped to achieve. Angela was inclined to excuse much of this on the grounds of the special effort he was making to achieve distinction and a living income for themselves. But it was hard to explain three weeks of silence without something quite serious having happened.

Eugene understood this. He tried to explain it on the grounds of illness, stating that he was now up and feeling much better. But when his explanation came, it had the hollow ring of insincerity. Angela wondered what the truth could be. Was he yielding to the temptation of that looser life that all artists were supposed to lead? She wondered and worried, for time was slipping away and he was setting no definite date for their much discussed nuptials.

The trouble with Angela's position was that the delay involved practically everything which was important in her life. She was five years older than Eugene. She had long since lost that atmosphere of youth and buoyancy which is so characteristic of a girl between eighteen and twenty-two. Those few short years following, when the body of maidenhood blooms like a rose and there is about it the freshness and color of all rich, new, lush life, were behind her. Ahead was that persistent decline towards something harder, shrewder and less beautiful. In the case of some persons the decline is slow and the fragrance of youth lingers for years, the artifices of the dressmaker, the chemist, and the jeweller being but little needed. In others it is fast and no contrivance will stay the ravages of a restless, eager, dissatisfied soul. Sometimes art combines with slowness of decay to make a woman of almost perennial charm, loveliness of mind matching loveliness of body, and taste and tact supplementing both. Angela was fortunate in being slow to fade and she had a loveliness of imagination and emotion to sustain her; but she had also a restless, anxious disposition of mind which, if it had not been stayed by the kindly color of her home life and by the fortunate or unfortunate intervention of Eugene at a time when she considered her ideal of love to have fairly passed out of the range of possibility, would already have set on her face the signs of old maidenhood. She was not of the newer order of femininity, eager to get out in the world and follow some individual line of self-development and interest. Rather was she a home woman wanting some one man to look after and love. The wonder and beauty of her dream of happiness with Eugene now made the danger of its loss and the possible compulsory continuance of a humdrum, underpaid, backwoods existence, heart-sickening.

Meanwhile, as the summer passed, Eugene was casually enlarging his acquaintance with women. MacHugh and Smite had gone back home for the summer, and it was a relief from his loneliness to encounter one day in an editorial office, Norma Whitmore, a dark, keen, temperamental and moody but brilliant writer and editor who, like others before her, took a fancy to Eugene. She was introduced to him by Jans Jansen, Art Director of the paper, and after some light banter she offered to show him her office.

She led the way to a little room no larger than six by eight where she had her desk. Eugene noticed that she was lean and sallow, about his own age or older, and brilliant and vivacious. Her hands took his attention for they were thin, shapely and artistic. Her eyes burned with a peculiar lustre and her loose-fitting clothes were draped artistically about her. A conversation sprang up as to his work, which she knew and admired, and he was invited to her apartment. He looked at Norma with an unconsciously speculative eye.

Christina was out of the city, but the memory of her made it impossible for him to write to Angela in his old vein of devotion. Nevertheless he still thought of her as charming. He thought that he ought to write more regularly. He thought that he ought pretty soon to go back and marry her. He was approaching the point where he could support her in a studio if they lived economically. But he did not want to exactly.

He had known her now for three years. It was fully a year and a half since he had seen her last. In the last year his letters had been less and less about themselves and more and more about everything else. He was finding the conventional love letters difficult. But he did not permit himself to realize just what that meant – to take careful stock of his emotions. That would have compelled him to the painful course of deciding that he could not marry her, and asking her to be released from his promise. He did not want to do that. Instead he parleyed, held by pity for her passing youth and her undeniable affection for him, by his sense of the unfairness of having taken up so much of her time to the exclusion of every other person who might have proposed to her, by sorrow for the cruelty of her position in being left to explain to her family that she had been jilted. He hated to hurt any person's feelings. He did not want to be conscious of the grief of any person who had come to suffering through him and he could not make them suffer very well and not be conscious. He was too tender hearted. He had pledged himself to Angela, giving her a ring, begging her to wait, writing her fulsome letters of protest and desire. Now, after three years, to shame her before her charming family – old Jotham, her mother, her sisters and brothers – it seemed a cruel thing to do, and he did not care to contemplate it.

Angela, with her morbid, passionate, apprehensive nature, did not fail to see disaster looming in the distance. She loved Eugene passionately and the pent-up fires of her nature had been waiting all these years the warrant to express their ardor which marriage alone could confer. Eugene, by the charm of his manner and person, no less than by the sensuous character of some of his moods and the subtleties and refinements of his references to the ties of sex, had stirred her to anticipate a perfect fruition of her dreams, and she was now eager for that fruition almost to the point of being willing to sacrifice virginity itself. The remembrance of the one significant scene between her and Eugene tormented her. She felt that if his love was to terminate in indifference now it would have been better to have yielded then. She wished that she had not tried to save herself. Perhaps there would have been a child, and he would have been true to her out of a sense of sympathy and duty. At least she would have had that crowning glory of womanhood, ardent union with her lover, and if worst had come to worst she could have died.

She thought of the quiet little lake near her home, its glassy bosom a mirror to the sky, and how, in case of failure, she would have looked lying on its sandy bottom, her pale hair diffused by some aimless motion of the water, her eyes sealed by the end of consciousness, her hands folded. Her fancy outran her daring. She would not have done this, but she could dream about it, and it made her distress all the more intense.

As time went by and Eugene's ardor did not revive, this problem of her love became more harrassing and she began to wonder seriously what she could do to win him back to her. He had expressed such a violent desire for her on his last visit, had painted his love in such glowing terms that she felt convinced he must love her still, though absence and the excitements of city life had dimmed the memory of her temporarily. She remembered a line in a comic opera which she and Eugene had seen together: "Absence is the dark room in which lovers develop negatives" and this seemed a case

in point. If she could get him back, if he could be near her again, his old fever would develop and she would then find some way of making him take her, perhaps. It did not occur to her quite clearly just how this could be done at this time but some vague notion of self-immolation was already stirring vaguely and disturbingly in her brain.

The trying and in a way disheartening conditions of her home went some way to sustain this notion. Her sister Marietta was surrounded by a score of suitors who were as eager for her love as a bee is for the honey of a flower, and Angela could see that they were already looking upon herself as an elderly chaperon. Her mother and father watched her going about her work and grieved because so good a girl should be made to suffer for want of a proper understanding. She could not conceal her feelings entirely and they could see at times that she was unhappy. She could see that they saw it. It was hard to have to explain to her sisters and brothers, who occasionally asked after Eugene, that he was doing all right, and never be able to say that he was coming for her some day soon.

At first Marietta had been envious of her. She thought she would like to win Eugene for herself, and only consideration for Angela's age and the fact that she had not been so much sought after had deterred her. Now that Eugene was obviously neglecting her, or at least delaying beyond any reasonable period, she was deeply sorry. Once, before she had grown into the age of courtship, she had said to Angela: "I'm going to be nice to the men. You're too cold. You'll never get married." And Angela had realized that it was not a matter of "too cold," but an innate prejudice against most of the types she met. And then the average man did not take to her. She could not spur herself to pleasure in their company. It took a fire like Eugene's to stir her mightily, and once having known that she could brook no other. Marietta realized this too. Now because of these three years she had cut herself off from other men, particularly the one who had been most attentive to her – faithful Victor Dean. The one thing that might save Angela from being completely ignored was a spirit of romance which kept her young in looks as in feelings.

With the fear of desertion in her mind Angela began to hint in her letters to Eugene that he should come back to see her, to express the hope in her letters that their marriage need not – because of any difficulty of establishing himself – be postponed much longer. She said to him over and over that she could be happy with him in a cottage and that she so longed to see him again. Eugene began to ask himself what he wanted to do.

The fact that on the passional side Angela appealed to him more than any woman he had ever known was a saving point in her favor at this juncture. There was a note in her make-up which was stronger, deeper, more suggestive of joy to come than anything he had found elsewhere. He remembered keenly the wonderful days he had spent with her – the one significant night when she begged him to save her against herself. All the beauty of the season with which she was surrounded at that time; the charm of her family, the odor of flowers and the shade of trees served to make a setting for her delightfulness which still endured with him as fresh as yesterday. Now, without having completed that romance – a very perfect flower – could he cast it aside?

At this time he was not entangled with any woman. Miriam Finch was too conservative and intellectual; Norma Whitmore not attractive enough. As for some other charming examples of femininity whom he had met here and there, he had not been drawn to them or they to him. Emotionally he was lonely and this for him was always a very susceptible mood. He could not make up his mind that the end had come with Angela.

It so happened that Marietta, after watching her sister's love affair some time, reached the conclusion that she ought to try to help her. Angela was obviously concealing a weariness of heart which was telling on her peace of mind and her sweetness of disposition. She was unhappy and it grieved her sister greatly. The latter loved her in a whole-hearted way, in spite of the fact that their affections might possibly have clashed over Eugene, and she thought once of writing in a sweet way and telling him how things were. She thought he was good and kind, that he loved Angela, that perhaps he was delaying as her sister said until he should have sufficient means to marry well, and that if the

right word were said now he would cease chasing a phantom fortune long enough to realize that it were better to take Angela while they were still young, than to wait until they were so old that the romance of marriage would for them be over. She revolved this in her mind a long time, picturing to herself how sweet Angela really was, and finally nerved herself to pen the following letter, which she sent.

> Dear Eugene:
>
> You will be surprised to get a letter from me and I want you to promise me that you will never say anything about it to anyone – above all never to Angela. Eugene, I have been watching her for a long time now and I know she is not happy. She is so desperately in love with you. I notice when a letter does not come promptly she is downcast and I can't help seeing that she is longing to have you here with her. Eugene, why don't you marry Angela? She is lovely and attractive now and she is as good as she is beautiful. She doesn't want to wait for a fine house and luxuries – no girl wants to do that, Eugene, when she loves as I know Angela does you. She would rather have you now when you are both young and can enjoy life than any fine house or nice things you might give her later. Now, I haven't talked to her at all, Eugene – never one word – and I know it would hurt her terribly if she thought I had written to you. She would never forgive me. But I can't help it. I can't bear to see her grieving and longing, and I know that when you know you will come and get her. Don't ever indicate in any way, please, that I wrote to you. Don't write to me unless you want to very much. I would rather you didn't. And tear up this letter. But do come for her soon, Eugene, please do. She wants you. And she will make you a perfectly wonderful wife for she is a wonderful girl. We all love her so – papa and mamma and all. I hope you will forgive me. I can't help it.
>
> "With love I am yours,
>
> "Marietta."

When Eugene received this letter he was surprised and astonished, but also distressed for himself and Angela and Marietta and the whole situation. The tragedy of this situation appealed to him perhaps as much from the dramatic as from the personal point of view. Little Angela, with her yellow hair and classic face. What a shame that they could not be together as she wished; as really, in a way, he wished. She was beautiful – no doubt of that. And there was a charm about her which was as alluring as that of any girl barring the intellectually exceptional. Her emotions in a way were deeper than those of Miriam Finch and Christina Channing. She could not reason about them – that was all. She just felt them. He saw all the phases of her anguish – the probable attitude of her parents, her own feelings at being looked at by them, the way her friends wondered. It was a shame, no doubt of that – a cruel situation. Perhaps he had better go back. He could be happy with her. They could live in a studio and no doubt things would work out all right. Had he better be cruel and not go? He hated to think of it.

Anyhow he did not answer Marietta's letter, and he did tear it up into a thousand bits, as she requested. "If Angela knew no doubt she would feel wretched," he thought.

In the meanwhile Angela was thinking, and her brooding led her to the conclusion that it might be advisable, if ever her lover came back, to yield herself in order that he might feel compelled to take her. She was no reasoner about life in any big sense. Her judgment of affairs was more confused at this time than at a later period. She had no clear conception of how foolish any trickery of this sort would be. She loved Eugene, felt that she must have him, felt that she would be willing to die rather than lose him and the thought of trickery came only as a last resource. If he refused her she was determined on one thing – the lake. She would quit this dreary world where love was crossed with despair in its finest moments; she would forget it all. If only there were rest and silence on the other side that would be enough.

The year moved on toward spring and because of some note of this, reiterated in pathetic phrases, he came to feel that he must go back. Marietta's letter preyed on his mind. The intensity of Angela's attitude made him feel that something desperate would happen. He could not, in cold blood, sit down and write her that he would not see her any more. The impressions of Blackwood were too fresh in his mind – the summer incense and green beauty of the world in which she lived. He wrote in April that he would come again in June, and Angela was beside herself with joy.

One of the things which helped Eugene to this conclusion was the fact that Christina Channing was not coming back from Europe that year. She had written a few times during the winter, but very guardedly. A casual reader could not have drawn from what she said that there had ever been anything between them. He had written much more ardently, of course, but she had chosen to ignore his eager references, making him feel by degrees that he was not to know much of her in the future. They were going to be good friends, but not necessarily lovers nor eventually husband and wife. It irritated him to think she could be so calm about a thing which to him seemed so important. It hurt his pride to think she could so deliberately throw him over. Finally he began to be incensed, and then Angela's fidelity appeared in a much finer light. There was a girl who would not treat him so. She really loved him. She was faithful and true. So his promised trip began to look much more attractive, and by June he was in a fever to see her.

CHAPTER XXVI

The beautiful June weather arrived and with it Eugene took his departure once more for Blackwood. He was in a peculiar mood, for while he was anxious to see Angela again it was with the thought that perhaps he was making a mistake. A notion of fatality was beginning to run through his mind. Perhaps he was destined to take her! and yet, could anything be more ridiculous? He could decide. He had deliberately decided to go back there – or had he? He admitted to himself that his passion was drawing him – in fact he could not see that there was anything much in love outside of passion. Desire! Wasn't that all that pulled two people together? There was some little charm of personality above that, but desire was the keynote. And if the physical attraction were strong enough, wasn't that sufficient to hold two people together? Did you really need so much more? It was logic based on youth, enthusiasm and inexperience, but it was enough to hold him for the time being – to soothe him. To Angela he was not drawn by any of the things which drew him to Miriam Finch and Norma Whitmore, nor was there the wonderful art of Christina Channing. Still he was going.

His interest in Norma Whitmore had increased greatly as the winter passed. In this woman he had found an intellect as broadening and refining as any he had encountered. Her taste for the exceptional in literature and art was as great as that of anyone he had ever known and it was just as individual. She ran to impressive realistic fiction in literature and to the kind of fresh-from-the-soil art which Eugene represented. Her sense of just how big and fresh was the thing he was trying to do was very encouraging, and she was carrying the word about town to all her friends that he was doing it. She had even gone so far as to speak to two different art dealers asking them why they had not looked into what seemed to her his perfectly wonderful drawings.

"Why, they're astonishing in their newness," she told Eberhard Zang, one of the important picture dealers on Fifth Avenue. She knew him from having gone there to borrow pictures for reproduction.

"Witla! Witla!" he commented in his conservative German way, rubbing his chin, "I doand remember seeing anything by him."

"Of course you don't," replied Norma persistently. "He's new, I tell you. He hasn't been here so very long. You get *Truth* for some week in last month – I forget which one – and see that picture of Greeley Square. It will show you what I mean."

"Witla! Witla!" repeated Zang, much as a parrot might fix a sound in its memory. "Tell him to come in here and see me some day. I should like to see some of his things."

"I will," said Norma, genially. She was anxious to have Eugene go, but he was more anxious to get a lot of things done before he had an exhibition. He did not want to risk an impression with anything short of a rather extensive series. And his collection of views was not complete at that time. Besides he had a much more significant art dealer in mind.

He and Norma had reached the point by this time where they were like brother and sister, or better yet, two good men friends. He would slip his arm about her waist when entering her rooms and was free to hold her hands or pat her on the arm or shoulder. There was nothing more than strong good feeling on his part, while on hers a burning affection might have been inspired, but his genial, brotherly attitude convinced her that it was useless. He had never told her of any of his other women friends and he was wondering as he rode west how she and Miriam Finch would take his marriage with Angela, supposing that he ever did marry her. As for Christina Channing, he did not want to think – really did not dare to think of her very much. Some sense of lost beauty came to him out of that experience – a touch of memory that had a pang in it.

Chicago in June was just a little dreary to him with its hurry of life, its breath of past experience, the Art Institute, the *Daily Globe* building, the street and house in which Ruby had lived. He wondered about her (as he had before) the moment he neared the city, and had a strong desire to go and look

her up. Then he visited the *Globe* offices, but Mathews had gone. Genial, cheerful Jerry had moved to Philadelphia recently, taking a position on the Philadelphia *North American*, leaving Howe alone, more finicky and picayune than ever. Goldfarb, of course, was gone and Eugene felt out of it. He was glad to take the train for Blackwood, for he felt lonesome. He left the city with quite an ache for old times in his heart and the feeling that life was a jumble of meaningless, strange and pathetic things.

"To think that we should grow old," he pondered, "that things that were as real as these things were to me, should become mere memories."

The time just before he reached Blackwood was one of great emotional stress for Angela. Now she was to learn whether he really loved her as much as he had. She was to feel the joy of his presence, the subtle influence of his attitude. She was to find whether she could hold him or not. Marietta, who on hearing that he was coming, had rather plumed herself that her letter had had something to do with it, was afraid that her sister would not make good use of this opportune occasion. She was anxious that Angela should look her best, and made suggestions as to things she might wear, games she might play (they had installed tennis and croquet as part of the home pleasures since he had been there last) and places they might go to. Marietta was convinced that Angela was not artful enough – not sufficiently subtle in her presentation of her charms. He could be made to feel very keen about her if she dressed right and showed herself to the best advantage. Marietta herself intended to keep out of the way as much as possible when Eugene arrived, and to appear at great disadvantage in the matter of dress and appearance when seen; for she had become a perfect beauty and was a breaker of hearts without conscious effort.

"You know that string of coral beads I have, Angel Face," she asked Angela one morning some ten days before Eugene arrived. "Wear them with that tan linen dress of mine and your tan shoes some day for Eugene. You'll look stunning in those things and he'll like you. Why don't you take the new buggy and drive over to Blackwood to meet him? That's it. You must meet him."

"Oh, I don't think I want to, Babyette," she replied. She was afraid of this first impression. She did not want to appear to run after him. Babyette was a nickname which had been applied to Marietta in childhood and had never been dropped.

"Oh, pshaw, Angel Face, don't be so backward! You're the shyest thing I know. Why that's nothing. He'll like you all the better for treating him just a little smartly. You do that now, will you?"

"I can't," replied Angela. "I can't do it that way. Let him come over here first; then I'll drive him over some afternoon."

"Oh, Angel Face! Well, anyhow, when he comes you must wear that little rose flowered house dress and put a wreath of green leaves in your hair."

"Oh, I won't do anything of the sort, Babyette," exclaimed Angela.

"Yes, you will," replied her sister. "Now you just have to do what I tell you for once. That dress looks beautiful on you and the wreath will make it perfect."

"It isn't the dress. I know that's nice. It's the wreath."

Marietta was incensed by this bit of pointless reserve.

"Oh, Angela," she exclaimed, "don't be so silly. You're older than I am, but I know more about men in a minute than you'll ever know. Don't you want him to like you? You'll have to be more daring – goodness! Lots of girls would go a lot farther than that."

She caught her sister about the waist and looked into her eyes. "Now you've got to wear it," she added finally, and Angela understood that Marietta wanted her to entice Eugene by any means in her power to make him declare himself finally and set a definite date or take her back to New York with him.

There were other conversations in which a trip to the lake was suggested, games of tennis, with Angela wearing her white tennis suit and shoes, a country dance which might be got up – there were rumors of one to be given in the new barn of a farmer some seven miles away. Marietta

was determined that Angela should appear youthful, gay, active, just the things which she knew instinctively would fascinate Eugene.

Finally Eugene came. He arrived at Blackwood at noon. Despite her objections Angela met him, dressed smartly and, as urged by Marietta, carrying herself with an air. She hoped to impress Eugene with a sense of independence, but when she saw him stepping down from the train in belted corduroy travelling suit with a grey English travelling cap, carrying a green leather bag of the latest design, her heart misgave her. He was so worldly now, so experienced. You could see by his manner that this country place meant little or nothing to him. He had tasted of the world at large.

Angela had stayed in her buggy at the end of the depot platform and she soon caught Eugene's eye and waved to him. He came briskly forward.

"Why, sweet," he exclaimed, "here you are. How nice you look!" He jumped up beside her, surveying her critically and she could feel his examining glance. After the first pleasant impression he sensed the difference between his new world and hers and was a little depressed by it. She was a little older, no doubt of that. You cannot hope and yearn and worry for three years and not show it. And yet she was fine and tender and sympathetic and emotional. He felt all this. It hurt him a little for her sake and his too.

"Well, how have you been?" he asked. They were in the confines of the village and no demonstration could be made. Until the quiet of a country road could be reached all had to be formal.

"Oh, just the same, Eugene, longing to see you."

She looked into his eyes and he felt the impact of that emotional force which governed her when she was near him. There was something in the chemistry of her being which roused to blazing the ordinarily dormant forces of his sympathies. She tried to conceal her real feeling – to pretend gaiety and enthusiasm, but her eyes betrayed her. Something roused in him now at her look – a combined sense of emotion and desire.

"It's so fine to be out in the country again," he said, pressing her hand, for he was letting her drive. "After the city, to see you and the green fields!" He looked about at the little one-storey cottages, each with a small plot of grass, a few trees, a neat confining fence. After New York and Chicago, a village like this was quaint.

"Do you love me just as much as ever?"

She nodded her head. They reached a strip of yellow road, he asking after her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters, and when he saw that they were unobserved he slipped his arm about her and drew her head to him.

"Now we can," he said.

She felt the force of his desire but she missed that note of adoration which had seemed to characterize his first lovemaking. How true it was he had changed! He must have. The city had made her seem less significant. It hurt her to think that life should treat her so. But perhaps she could win him back – could hold him anyhow.

They drove over toward Okoonee, a little crossroads settlement, near a small lake of the same name, a place which was close to the Blue house, and which the Blue's were wont to speak of as "home." On the way Eugene learned that her youngest brother David was a cadet at West Point now and doing splendidly. Samuel had become western freight agent of the Great Northern and was on the way to desirable promotion. Benjamin had completed his law studies and was practising in Racine. He was interested in politics and was going to run for the state legislature. Marietta was still the gay carefree girl she had always been, not at all inclined to choose yet among her many anxious suitors. Eugene thought of her letter to him – wondered if she would look her thoughts into his eyes when he saw her.

"Oh, Marietta," Angela replied when Eugene asked after her, "she's just as dangerous as ever. She makes all the men make love to her."

Eugene smiled. Marietta was always a pleasing thought to him. He wished for the moment that it was Marietta instead of Angela that he was coming to see.

She was as shrewd as she was kind in this instance. Her appearance on meeting Eugene was purposely indifferent and her attitude anything but coaxing and gay. At the same time she suffered a genuine pang of feeling, for Eugene appealed to her. If it were anybody but Angela, she thought, how she would dress and how quickly she would be coquetting with him. Then his love would be won by her and she felt that she could hold it. She had great confidence in her ability to keep any man, and Eugene was a man she would have delighted to hold. As it was she kept out of his way, took sly glances at him here and there, wondered if Angela would truly win him. She was so anxious for Angela's sake. Never, never, she told herself, would she cross her sister's path.

At the Blue homestead he was received as cordially as before. After an hour it quite brought back the feeling of three years before. These open fields, this old house and its lovely lawn, all served to awaken the most poignant sensations. One of Marietta's beaux, over from Waukesha, appeared after Eugene had greeted Mrs. Blue and Marietta, and the latter persuaded him to play a game of tennis with Angela. She invited Eugene to make it a four with her, but not knowing how he refused.

Angela changed to her tennis suit and Eugene opened his eyes to her charms. She was very attractive on the court, quick, flushed, laughing. And when she laughed she had a charming way of showing her even, small, white teeth. She quite awakened a feeling of interest – she looked so dainty and frail. When he saw her afterward in the dark, quiet parlor, he gathered her to his heart with much of the old ardour. She felt the quick change of feeling. Marietta was right. Eugene loved gaiety and color. Although on the way home she had despaired this was much more promising.

Eugene rarely entered on anything half heartedly. If interested at all he was greatly interested. He could so yield himself to the glamour of a situation as to come finally to believe that he was something which he was not. Thus, now he was beginning to accept this situation as Angela and Marietta wished he should, and to see her in somewhat the old light. He overlooked things which in his New York studio, surrounded by the influences which there modified his judgment, he would have seen. Angela was not young enough for him. She was not liberal in her views. She was charming, no doubt of that, but he could not bring her to an understanding of his casual acceptance of life. She knew nothing of his real disposition and he did not tell her. He played the part of a seemingly single-minded Romeo, and as such he was from a woman's point of view beautiful to contemplate. In his own mind he was coming to see that he was fickle but he still did not want to admit it to himself.

There was a night of stars after an evening of June perfection. At five old Jotham came in from the fields, as dignified and patriarchal as ever. He greeted Eugene with a hearty handshake, for he admired him. "I see some of your work now and then," he said, "in these monthly magazines. It's fine. There's a young minister down here near the lake that's very anxious to meet you. He likes to get hold of anything you do, and I always send the books down as soon as Angela gets through with them."

He used the words books and magazines interchangeably, and spoke as though they were not much more important to him than the leaves of the trees, as indeed, they were not. To a mind used to contemplating the succession of crops and seasons, all life with its multitudinous interplay of shapes and forms seemed passing shadows. Even men were like leaves that fall.

Eugene was drawn to old Jotham as a filing to a magnet. His was just the type of mind that appealed to him, and Angela gained by the radiated glory of her father. If he was so wonderful she must be something above the average of womanhood. Such a man could not help but produce exceptional children.

Left alone together it was hardly possible for Angela and Eugene not to renew the old relationship on the old basis. Having gone as far as he had the first time it was natural that he should wish to go as far again and further. After dinner, when she turned to him from her room, arrayed in a soft evening dress of clinging texture – somewhat low in the neck by request of Marietta, who had helped her to dress – Eugene was conscious of her emotional perturbation. He himself was distraught,

for he did not know what he would do – how far he would dare to trust himself. He was always troubled when dealing with his physical passion, for it was a raging lion at times. It seemed to overcome him quite as a drug might or a soporific fume. He would mentally resolve to control himself, but unless he instantly fled there was no hope, and he did not seem able to run away. He would linger and parley, and in a few moments it was master and he was following its behest blindly, desperately, to the point almost of exposure and destruction.

Tonight when Angela came back he was cogitating, wondering what it might mean. Should he? Would he marry her? Could he escape? They sat down to talk, but presently he drew her to him. It was the old story – moment after moment of increasing feeling. Presently she, from the excess of longing and waiting was lost to all sense of consideration. And he —

"I shall have to go away, Eugene," she pleaded, when he carried her recklessly into his room, "if anything happens. I cannot stay here."

"Don't talk," he said. "You can come to me."

"You mean it, Eugene, surely?" she begged.

"As sure as I'm holding you here," he replied.

At midnight Angela lifted frightened, wondering, doubting eyes, feeling herself the most depraved creature. Two pictures were in her mind alternately and with pendulum-like reiteration. One was a composite of a marriage altar and a charming New York studio with friends coming in to see them much as he had often described to her. The other was of the still blue waters of Okoonee with herself lying there pale and still. Yes, she would die if he did not marry her now. Life would not be worth while. She would not force him. She would slip out some night when it was too late and all hope had been abandoned – when exposure was near – and the next day they would find her.

Little Marietta how she would cry. And old Jotham – she could see him, but he would never be really sure of the truth. And her mother. "Oh God in heaven," she thought, "how hard life is! How terrible it can be."

CHAPTER XXVII

The atmosphere of the house after this night seemed charged with reproach to Eugene, although it took on no semblance of reality in either look or word. When he awoke in the morning and looked through the half closed shutters to the green world outside he felt a sense of freshness and of shame. It was cruel to come into such a home as this and do a thing as mean as he had done. After all, philosophy or no philosophy, didn't a fine old citizen like Jotham, honest, upright, genuine in his moral point of view and his observance of the golden rule, didn't he deserve better from a man whom he so sincerely admired? Jotham had been so nice to him. Their conversations together were so kindly and sympathetic. Eugene felt that Jotham believed him to be an honest man. He knew he had that appearance. He was frank, genial, considerate, not willing to condemn anyone – but this sex question – that was where he was weak. And was not the whole world keyed to that? Did not the decencies and the sanities of life depend on right moral conduct? Was not the world dependent on how the homes were run? How could anyone be good if his mother and father had not been good before him? How could the children of the world expect to be anything if people rushed here and there holding illicit relations? Take his sister Myrtle, now – would he have wanted her rifled in this manner? In the face of this question he was not ready to say exactly what he wanted or was willing to countenance. Myrtle was a free agent, as was every other girl. She could do as she pleased. It might not please him exactly but – he went round and round from one problem to another, trying to untie this Gordian knot. One thing, this home had appeared sweet and clean when he came into it; now it was just a little tarnished, and by him! Or was it? His mind was always asking this question. There was nothing that he was actually accepting as true any more. He was going round in a ring asking questions of this proposition and that. Are you true? And are you true? And are you true? And all the while he was apparently not getting anywhere. It puzzled him, this life. Sometimes it shamed him. This deed shamed him. And he asked himself whether he was wrong to be ashamed or not. Perhaps he was just foolish. Was not life made for living, not worrying? He had not created his passions and desires.

He threw open the shutters and there was the bright day. Everything was so green outside, the flowers in bloom, the trees casting a cool, lovely shade, the birds twittering. Bees were humming. He could smell the lilacs. "Dear God," he exclaimed, throwing his arms above his head, "How lovely life is! How beautiful! Oh!" He drew in a deep breath of the flower and privet laden air. If only he could live always like this – for ever and ever.

When he had sponged himself with cold water and dressed, putting on a soft negligée shirt with turn-down collar and dark flowing tie, he issued forth clean and fresh. Angela was there to greet him. Her face was pale but she looked intensely sweet because of her sadness.

"There, there," he said, touching her chin, "less of that now!"

"I told them that I had a headache," she said. "So I have. Do you understand?"

"I understand your headache," he laughed. "But everything is all right – very much all right. Isn't this a lovely day!"

"Beautiful," replied Angela sadly.

"Cheer up," he insisted. "Don't worry. Everything is coming out fine." He walked to the window and stared out.

"I'll have your breakfast ready in a minute," she said, and, pressing his hand, left him.

Eugene went out to the hammock. He was so deliciously contented and joyous now that he saw the green world about him, that he felt that everything was all right again. The vigorous blooming forces of nature everywhere present belied the sense of evil and decay to which mortality is so readily subject. He felt that everything was justified in youth and love, particularly where mutual affection reigned. Why should he not take Angela? Why should they not be together? He went in to breakfast at her call, eating comfortably of the things she provided. He felt the easy familiarity and graciousness

of the conqueror. Angela on her part felt the fear and uncertainty of one who has embarked upon a dangerous voyage. She had set sail – whither? At what port would she land? Was it the lake or his studio? Would she live and be happy or would she die to face a black uncertainty? Was there a hell as some preachers insisted? Was there a gloomy place of lost souls such as the poets described? She looked into the face of this same world which Eugene found so beautiful and its very beauty trembled with forebodings of danger.

And there were days and days yet to be lived of this. For all her fear, once having tasted of the forbidden fruit, it was sweet and inviting. She could not go near Eugene, nor he near her but this flush of emotion would return.

In the daylight she was too fearful, but when the night came with its stars, its fresh winds, its urge to desire, her fears could not stand in their way. Eugene was insatiable and she was yearning. The slightest touch was as fire to tow. She yielded saying she would not yield.

The Blue family were of course blissfully ignorant of what was happening. It seemed so astonishing to Angela at first that the very air did not register her actions in some visible way. That they should be able thus to be alone was not so remarkable, seeing that Eugene's courtship was being aided and abetted, for her sake, but that her lapse should not be exposed by some sinister influence seemed strange – accidental and subtly ominous. Something would happen – that was her fear. She had not the courage of her desire or need.

By the end of the week, though Eugene was less ardent and more or less oppressed by the seeming completeness with which he had conquered, he was not ready to leave. He was sorry to go, for it ended a honeymoon of sweetness and beauty – all the more wonderful and enchanting because so clandestine – yet he was beginning to be aware that he had bound himself in chains of duty and responsibility. Angela had thrown herself on his mercy and his sense of honor to begin with. She had exacted a promise of marriage – not urgently, and as one who sought to entrap him, but with the explanation that otherwise life must end in disaster for her. Eugene could look in her face and see that it would. And now that he had had his way and plumbed the depths of her emotions and desires he had a higher estimate of her personality. Despite the fact that she was older than he, there was a breath of youth and beauty here that held him. Her body was exquisite. Her feeling about life and love was tender and beautiful. He wished he could make true her dreams of bliss without injury to himself.

It so turned out that as his visit was drawing to a close Angela decided that she ought to go to Chicago, for there were purchases which must be made. Her mother wanted her to go and she decided that she would go with Eugene. This made the separation easier, gave them more time to talk. Her usual plan was to stay with her aunt and she was going there now.

On the way she asked over and over what he would think of her in the future; whether what had passed would not lower her in his eyes. He did not feel that it would. Once she said to him sadly – "only death or marriage can help me now."

"What do you mean?" he asked, her yellow head pillowed on his shoulder, her dark blue eyes looking sadly into his.

"That if you don't marry me I'll have to kill myself. I can't stay at home."

He thought of her with her beautiful body, her mass of soft hair all tarnished in death.

"You wouldn't do that?" he asked unbelievingly.

"Yes, I would," she said sadly. "I must, I will."

"Hush, Angel Face," he pleaded. "You won't do anything like that. You won't have to. I'll marry you – How would you do it?"

"Oh, I've thought it all out," she continued gloomily. "You know that little lake. I'd drown myself."

"Don't, sweetheart," he pleaded. "Don't talk that way. It's terrible. You won't have to do anything like that."

To think of her under the waters of little Okoonee, with its green banks, and yellow sandy shores. All her love come to this! All her passion! Her death would be upon his head and he could not stand the thought of that. It frightened him. Such tragedies occasionally appeared in the papers with all the pathetic details convincingly set forth, but this should not enter his life. He would marry her. She was lovely after all. He would have to. He might as well make up his mind to that now. He began to speculate how soon it might be. For the sake of her family she wanted no secret marriage but one which, if they could not be present at it, they could at least know was taking place. She was willing to come East – that could be arranged. But they must be married. Eugene realized the depth of her conventional feeling so keenly that it never occurred to him to suggest an alternative. She would not consent, would scorn him for it. The only alternative, she appeared to believe, was death.

One evening – the last – when it was necessary for her to return to Blackwood, and he had seen her off on the train, her face a study in sadness, he rode out gloomily to Jackson Park where he had once seen a beautiful lake in the moonlight. When he reached there the waters of the lake were still suffused and tinged with lovely suggestions of lavender, pink and silver, for this was near the twenty-first of June. The trees to the east and west were dark. The sky showed a last blush of orange. Odours were about – warm June fragrance. He thought now, as he walked about the quiet paths where the sand and pebbles crunched lightly beneath his feet, of all the glory of this wonderful week. How dramatic was life; how full of romance. This love of Angela's, how beautiful. Youth was with him – love. Would he go on to greater days of beauty or would he stumble, idling his time, wasting his substance in riotous living? Was this riotous living? Would there be evil fruition of his deeds? Would he really love Angela after he married her? Would they be happy?

Thus he stood by the bank of this still lake, studying the water, marvelling at the subtleties of reflected radiance, feeling the artist's joy in perfect natural beauty, twining and intertwining it all with love, death, failure, fame. It was romantic to think that in such a lake, if he were unkind, would Angela be found. By such a dark as was now descending would all her bright dreams be submerged. It would be beautiful as romance. He could imagine a great artist like Daudet or Balzac making a great story out of it. It was even a subject for some form of romantic expression in art. Poor Angela! If he were a great portrait painter he would paint her. He thought of some treatment of her in the nude with that mass of hair of hers falling about her neck and breasts. It would be beautiful. Should he marry her? Yes, though he was not sure of the outcome, he must. It might be a mistake but —

He stared at the fading surface of the lake, silver, lavender, leaden gray. Overhead a vivid star was already shining. How would it be with her if she were really below those still waters? How would it be with him? It would be too desperate, too regretful. No, he must marry her. It was in this mood that he returned to the city, the ache of life in his heart. It was in this mood that he secured his grip from the hotel and sought the midnight train for New York. For once Ruby, Miriam, Christina, were forgotten. He was involved in a love drama which meant life or death to Angela, peace or reproach of conscience to himself in the future. He could not guess what the outcome would be, but he felt that he must marry her – how soon he could not say. Circumstances would dictate that. From present appearances it must be immediately. He must see about a studio, announce the news of his departure to Smite and MacHugh; make a special effort to further his art ambitions so that he and Angela would have enough to live on. He had talked so glowingly of his art life that now, when the necessity for demonstrating it was at hand, he was troubled as to what the showing might be. The studio had to be attractive. He would need to introduce his friends. All the way back to New York he turned this over in his mind – Smite, MacHugh, Miriam, Norma, Wheeler, Christina – what would Christina think if she ever returned to New York and found him married? There was no question but that there was a difference between Angela and these. It was something – a matter of courage – more soul, more daring, more awareness, perhaps – something. When they saw her would they think he had made a mistake, would they put him down as a fool? MacHugh was going with a girl, but she was a different

type – intellectual, smart. He thought and thought, but he came back to the same conclusion always. He would have to marry her. There was no way out. He would have to.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The studio of Messrs. Smite, MacHugh and Witla in Waverley Place was concerned the following October with a rather picturesque event. Even in the city the time when the leaves begin to yellow and fall brings a sense of melancholy, augmented by those preliminaries of winter, gray, lowery days, with scraps of paper, straws, bits of wood blown about by gusty currents of air through the streets, making it almost disagreeable to be abroad. The fear of cold and storm and suffering among those who have little was already apparent. Apparent too was the air of renewed vitality common to those who have spent an idle summer and are anxious to work again. Shopping and marketing and barter and sale were at high key. The art world, the social world, the manufacturing world, the professional worlds of law, medicine, finance, literature, were bubbling with a feeling of the necessity to do and achieve. The whole city, stung by the apprehension of winter, had an atmosphere of emprise and energy.

In this atmosphere, with a fairly clear comprehension of the elements which were at work making the colour of the life about him, was Eugene, digging away at the task he had set himself. Since leaving Angela he had come to the conclusion that he must complete the jointings for the exhibition which had been running in his mind during the last two years. There was no other way for him to make a notable impression – he saw that. Since he had returned he had gone through various experiences: the experience of having Angela tell him that she was sure there was something wrong with her; an impression sincere enough, but based on an excited and overwrought imagination of evil to follow, and having no foundation in fact. Eugene was as yet, despite his several experiences, not sufficiently informed in such affairs to know. His lack of courage would have delayed him from asking if he had known. In the next place, facing this crisis, he had declared that he would marry her, and because of her distressed condition he thought he might as well do it now. He had wanted time to do some of the pictures he was working on, to take in a little money for drawing, to find a suitable place to live in. He had looked at various studios in various sections of the city and had found nothing, as yet, which answered to his taste or his purse. Anything with a proper light, a bath, a suitable sleeping room, and an inconspicuous chamber which might be turned into a kitchen, was difficult to find. Prices were high, ranging from fifty to one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and fifty a month. There were some new studios being erected for the rich loungers and idlers which commanded, so he understood, three or four thousand dollars a year. He wondered if he should ever attain to any such magnificence through his art.

Again, in taking a studio for Angela and himself there was the matter of furniture. The studio he had with Smite and MacHugh was more or less of a camp. The work room was bare of carpets or rugs. The two folding beds and the cot which graced their individual chambers were heirlooms from ancient predecessors – substantial but shabby. Beyond various drawings, three easels, and a chest of drawers for each, there was no suitable household equipment. A woman came twice a week to clean, send out the linen, and make up the beds.

To live with Angela required, in his judgment, many and much more significant things. His idea of a studio was some such one as that now occupied by Miriam Finch or Norma Whitmore. There ought to be furniture of a period – old Flemish or Colonial, Heppelwhite or Chippendale or Sheraton, such as he saw occasionally knocking about in curio shops and second hand stores. It could be picked up if he had time. He was satisfied that Angela knew nothing of these things. There ought to be rugs, hangings of tapestry, bits of brass, pewter, copper, old silver, if he could afford it. He had an idea of some day obtaining a figure of the Christ in brass or plaster, hung upon a rough cross of walnut or teak, which he could hang or stand in some corner as one might a shrine and place before it two great candlesticks with immense candles smoked and dripping with wax. These lighted in a dark studio, with the outlines of the Christ flickering in the shadows behind would give the desired

atmosphere to his studio. Such an equipment as he dreamed of would have cost in the neighborhood of two thousand dollars.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.