SHERWOOD ANDERSON

WINDY MCPHERSON'S SON

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Содержание

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

At the beginning of the long twilight of a summer evening, Sam McPherson, a tall big-boned boy of thirteen, with brown hair, black eyes, and an amusing little habit of tilting his chin in the air as he walked, came upon the station platform of the little corn-shipping town of Caxton in Iowa. It was a board platform, and the boy walked cautiously, lifting his bare feet and putting them down with extreme deliberateness on the hot, dry, cracked planks. Under one arm he carried a bundle of newspapers. A long black cigar was in his hand.

In front of the station he stopped; and Jerry Donlin, the baggage-man, seeing the cigar in his hand, laughed, and slowly drew the side of his face up into a laboured wink.

“What is the game to-night, Sam?” he asked.

Sam stepped to the baggage-room door, handed him the cigar, and began giving directions, pointing into the baggage-room, intent and business-like in the face of the Irishman’s laughter. Then, turning, he walked across the station platform to the main street of the town, his eyes bent on the ends of his fingers on which he was making computations with his thumb. Jerry looked after him, grinning so that his red gums made a splash of colour on his bearded face. A gleam of paternal pride lit his eyes and he shook his head and muttered admiringly. Then, lighting the cigar, he went down the platform to where a wrapped bundle of newspapers lay against the building, under the window of the telegraph office, and taking it in his arm disappeared, still grinning, into the baggage-room.

Sam McPherson walked down Main Street, past the shoe store, the bakery, and the candy store kept by Penny Hughes, toward a group lounging at the front of Geiger’s drug store. Before the door of the shoe store he paused a moment, and taking a small note-book from his pocket ran his finger down the pages, then shaking his head continued on his way, again absorbed in doing sums on his fingers.

Suddenly, from among the men by the drug store, a roaring song broke the evening quiet of the street, and a voice, huge and guttural, brought a smile to the boy’s lips:

> “He washed the windows and he swept the floor,
> And he polished up the handle of the big front door.
> He polished that handle so carefullee,
> That now he’s the ruler of the queen’s navee.”

The singer, a short man with grotesquely wide shoulders, wore a long flowing moustache, and a black coat, covered with dust, that reached to his knees. He held a smoking briar pipe in his hand, and with it beat time for a row of men sitting on a long stone under the store window and pounding on the sidewalk with their heels to make a chorus for the song. Sam’s smile broadened into a grin as he looked at the singer, Freedom Smith, a buyer of butter and eggs, and past him at John Telfer, the orator, the dandy, the only man in town, except Mike McCarthy, who kept his trousers creased. Among all the men of Caxton, Sam most admired John Telfer and in his admiration had struck upon the town’s high light. Telfer loved good clothes and wore them with an air, and never allowed Caxton to see him shabbily or indifferently dressed, laughingly declaring that it was his mission in life to give tone to the town.

John Telfer had a small income left him by his father, once a banker in the town, and in his youth he had gone to New York to study art, and later to Paris; but lacking ability or industry to get on had come back to Caxton where he had married Eleanor Millis, a prosperous milliner. They were the most successful married pair in Caxton, and after years of life together they were still in love; were never indifferent to each other, and never quarrelled; Telfer treated his wife with as much consideration and respect as though she were a sweetheart, or a guest in his house, and she, unlike most of the wives in Caxton, never ventured to question his goings and comings, but left him free to live his own life in his own way while she attended to the millinery business.

At the age of forty-five John Telfer was a tall, slender, fine looking man, with black hair and a little black pointed beard, and with something lazy and care-free in his every movement and impulse. Dressed in white flannels, with white shoes, a jaunty cap upon his head, eyeglasses hanging from a gold chain, and a cane lightly swinging from his hand, he made a figure that might have passed unnoticed on the promenade before some fashionable summer hotel, but that seemed a breach of the laws of nature when seen on the streets of a corn-shipping town in Iowa. And Telfer was aware of the extraordinary figure he cut; it was a part of his programme of life. Now as Sam approached he laid a hand on Freedom Smith's shoulder to check the song, and, with his eyes twinkling with good-humour, began thrusting with his cane at the boy's feet.

"He will never be ruler of the queen's navee," he declared, laughing and following the dancing boy about in a wide circle. "He is a little mole that works underground intent upon worms. The trick he has of tilting up his nose is only his way of smelling out stray pennies. I have it from Banker Walker that he brings a basket of them into the bank every day. One of these days he will buy the town and put it into his vest pocket."

Circling about on the stone sidewalk and dancing to escape the flying cane, Sam dodged under the arm of Valmore, a huge old blacksmith with shaggy clumps of hair on the back of his hands, and sought refuge between him and Freedom Smith. The blacksmith's hand stole out and lay upon the boy's shoulder. Telfer, his legs spread apart and the cane hooked upon his arm, began rolling a cigarette; Geiger, a yellow skinned man with fat cheeks and with hands clasped over his round paunch, smoked a black cigar, and as he sent each puff into the air, grunted forth his satisfaction with life. He was wishing that Telfer, Freedom Smith, and Valmore, instead of moving on to their nightly nest at the back of Wildman's grocery, would come into his place for the evening. He thought he would like to have the three of them there night after night discussing the doings of the world.

Quiet once more settled down upon the sleepy street. Over Sam's shoulder, Valmore and Freedom Smith talked of the coming corn crop and the growth and prosperity of the country.

"Times are getting better about here, but the wild things are almost gone," said Freedom, who in the winter bought hides and pelts.

The men sitting on the stone beneath the window watched with idle interest Telfer's labours with paper and tobacco. "Young Henry Kerns has got married," observed one of them, striving to make talk. "He has married a girl from over Parkertown way. She gives lessons in painting—china painting—kind of an artist, you know."

An ejaculation of disgust broke from Telfer: his fingers trembled and the tobacco that was to have been the foundation of his evening smoke rained on the sidewalk.

"An artist!" he exclaimed, his voice tense with excitement. "Who said artist? Who called her that?" He glared fiercely about. "Let us have an end to this blatant misuse of fine old words. To say of one that he is an artist is to touch the peak of praise."

Throwing his cigarette paper after the scattered tobacco he thrust one hand into his trouser pocket. With the other he held the cane, emphasising his points by ringing taps upon the pavement. Geiger, taking the cigar between his fingers, listened with open mouth to the outburst that followed. Valmore and Freedom Smith dropped their conversation and with broad smiles upon their faces gave

attention, and Sam McPherson, his eyes round with wonder and admiration, felt again the thrill that always ran through him under the drum beats of Telfer's eloquence.

"An artist is one who hungers and thirsts after perfection, not one who dabs flowers upon plates to choke the gullets of diners," declared Telfer, setting himself for one of the long speeches with which he loved to astonish the men of Caxton, and glaring down at those seated upon the stone. "It is the artist who, among all men, has the divine audacity. Does he not hurl himself into a battle in which is engaged against him all of the accumulative genius of the world?"

Pausing, he looked about for an opponent upon whom he might pour the flood of his eloquence, but on all sides smiles greeted him. Undaunted, he rushed again to the charge.

"A business man—what is he?" he demanded. "He succeeds by outwitting the little minds with which he comes in contact. A scientist is of more account—he pits his brains against the dull unresponsiveness of inanimate matter and a hundredweight of black iron he makes do the work of a hundred housewives. But an artist tests his brains against the greatest brains of all times; he stands upon the peak of life and hurls himself against the world. A girl from Parkertown who paints flowers upon dishes to be called an artist—ugh! Let me spew forth the thought! Let me cleanse my mouth! A man should have a prayer upon his lips who utters the word artist!"

"Well, we can't all be artists and the woman can paint flowers upon dishes for all I care," spoke up Valmore, laughing good naturedly. "We can't all paint pictures and write books."

"We do not want to be artists—we do not dare to be," shouted Telfer, whirling and shaking his cane at Valmore. "You have a misunderstanding of the word."

He straightened his shoulders and threw out his chest and the boy standing beside the blacksmith threw up his chin, unconsciously imitating the swagger of the man.

"I do not paint pictures; I do not write books; yet am I an artist," declared Telfer, proudly. "I am an artist practising the most difficult of all arts—the art of living. Here in this western village I stand and fling my challenge to the world. 'On the lip of not the greatest of you,' I cry, 'has life been more sweet.'"

He turned from Valmore to the men upon the stone.

"Make a study of my life," he commanded. "It will be a revelation to you. With a smile I greet the morning; I swagger in the noontime; and in the evening, like Socrates of old, I gather a little group of you benighted villagers about me and toss wisdom into your teeth, striving to teach you judgment in the use of great words."

"You talk an almighty lot about yourself, John," grumbled Freedom Smith, taking his pipe from his mouth.

"The subject is complex, it is varied, it is full of charm," Telfer answered, laughing.

Taking a fresh supply of tobacco and paper from his pocket, he rolled and lighted a cigarette. His fingers no longer trembled. Flourishing his cane he threw back his head and blew smoke into the air. He thought that in spite of the roar of laughter that had greeted Freedom Smith's comment, he had vindicated the honour of art and the thought made him happy.

To the newsboy, who had been leaning against the storefront lost in admiration, it seemed that he had caught in Telfer's talk an echo of the kind of talk that must go on among men in the big outside world. Had not this Telfer travelled far? Had he not lived in New York and Paris? Without understanding the sense of what had been said, Sam felt that it must be something big and conclusive. When from the distance there came the shriek of a locomotive, he stood unmoved, trying to comprehend the meaning of Telfer's outburst over the lounger's simple statement.

"There's the seven forty-five," cried Telfer, sharply. "Is the war between you and Fatty at an end? Are we going to lose our evening's diversion? Has Fatty bluffed you out or are you growing rich and lazy like Papa Geiger here?"

Springing from his place beside the blacksmith and grasping the bundle of newspapers, Sam ran down the street, Telfer, Valmore, Freedom Smith and the loungers following more slowly.

When the evening train from Des Moines stopped at Caxton, a blue-coated train news merchant leaped hurriedly to the platform and began looking anxiously about.

"Hurry, Fatty," rang out Freedom Smith's huge voice, "Sam's already half through one car."

The young man called "Fatty" ran up and down the station platform. "Where is that bundle of Omaha papers, you Irish loafer?" he shouted, shaking his fist at Jerry Donlin who stood upon a truck at the front of the train, up-ending trunks into the baggage car.

Jerry paused with a trunk dangling in mid-air. "In the baggage-room, of course. Hurry, man. Do you want the kid to work the whole train?"

An air of something impending hung over the idlers upon the platform, the train crew, and even the travelling men who began climbing off the train. The engineer thrust his head out of the cab; the conductor, a dignified looking man with a grey moustache, threw back his head and shook with mirth; a young man with a suit-case in his hand and a long pipe in his mouth ran to the door of the baggage-room, calling, "Hurry! Hurry, Fatty! The kid is working the entire train. You won't be able to sell a paper."

The fat young man ran from the baggage-room to the platform and shouted again to Jerry Donlin, who was now slowly pushing the empty truck along the platform. From the train came a clear voice calling, "Latest Omaha papers! Have your change ready! Fatty, the train newsboy, has fallen down a well! Have your change ready, gentlemen!"

Jerry Donlin, followed by Fatty, again disappeared from sight. The conductor, waving his hand, jumped upon the steps of the train. The engineer pulled in his head and the train began to move.

The fat young man emerged from the baggage-room, swearing revenge upon the head of Jerry Donlin. "There was no need to put it under a mail sack!" he shouted, shaking his fist. "I'll be even with you for this."

Followed by the shouts of the travelling men and the laughter of the idlers upon the platform he climbed upon the moving train and began running from car to car. Off the last car dropped Sam McPherson, a smile upon his lips, the bundle of newspapers gone, his pocket jingling with coins. The evening's entertainment for the town of Caxton was at an end.

John Telfer, standing by the side of Valmore, waved his cane in the air and began talking.

"Beat him again, by Gad!" he exclaimed. "Bully for Sam! Who says the spirit of the old buccaneers is dead? That boy didn't understand what I said about art, but he is an artist just the same!"

CHAPTER II

Windy McPherson, the father of the Caxton newsboy, Sam McPherson, had been war touched. The civilian clothes that he wore caused an itching of the skin. He could not forget that he had once been a sergeant in a regiment of infantry and had commanded a company through a battle fought in ditches along a Virginia country road. He chafed under the fact of his present obscure position in life. Had he been able to replace his regimentals with the robes of a judge, the felt hat of a statesman, or even with the night stick of a village marshal life might have retained something of its sweetness, but to have ended by becoming an obscure housepainter in a village that lived by raising corn and by feeding that corn to red steers—ugh!—the thought made him shudder. He looked with envy at the blue coat and the brass buttons of the railroad agent; he tried vainly to get into the Caxton Cornet Band; he got drunk to forget his humiliation and in the end he fell to loud boasting and to the nursing of a belief within himself that in truth not Lincoln nor Grant but he himself had thrown the winning die in the great struggle. In his cups he said as much and the Caxton corn grower, punching his neighbour in the ribs, shook with delight over the statement.

When Sam was a twelve year old, barefooted boy upon the streets a kind of backwash of the wave of glory that had swept over Windy McPherson in the days of ‘61 lapped upon the shores of the Iowa village. That strange manifestation called the A. P. A. movement brought the old soldier to a position of prominence in the community. He founded a local branch of the organisation; he marched at the head of a procession through the streets; he stood on a corner and pointing a trembling forefinger to where the flag on the schoolhouse waved beside the cross of Rome, shouted hoarsely, “See, the cross rears itself above the flag! We shall end by being murdered in our beds!”

But although some of the hard-headed, money-making men of Caxton joined the movement started by the boasting old soldier and although for the moment they vied with him in stealthy creepings through the streets to secret meetings and in mysterious mutterings behind hands the movement subsided as suddenly as it had begun and only left its leader more desolate.

In the little house at the end of the street by the shores of Squirrel Creek, Sam and his sister Kate regarded their father’s warlike pretensions with scorn. “The butter is low, father’s army leg will ache to-night,” they whispered to each other across the kitchen table.

Following her mother’s example, Kate, a tall slender girl of sixteen and already a bread winner with a clerkship in Winney’s drygoods store, remained silent under Windy’s boasting, but Sam, striving to emulate them, did not always succeed. There was now and then a rebellious muttering that should have warned Windy. It had once burst into an open quarrel in which the victor of a hundred battles withdrew defeated from the field. Windy, half-drunk, had taken an old account book from a shelf in the kitchen, a relic of his days as a prosperous merchant when he had first come to Caxton, and had begun reading to the little family a list of names of men who, he claimed, had been the cause of his ruin.

“There is Tom Newman, now,” he exclaimed excitedly. “Owns a hundred acres of good corn-growing land and won’t pay for the harness on the backs of his horses or for the ploughs in his barn. The receipt he has from me is forged. I could put him in prison if I chose. To beat an old soldier!—to beat one of the boys of ‘61!—it is shameful!”

“I have heard of what you owed and what men owed you; you had none the worst of it,” Sam protested coldly, while Kate held her breath and Jane McPherson, at work over the ironing board in the corner, half turned and looked silently at the man and the boy, the slightly increased pallor of her long face the only sign that she had heard.

Windy had not pressed the quarrel. Standing for a moment in the middle of the kitchen, holding the book in his hand, he looked from the pale silent mother by the ironing board to the son now

standing and staring at him, and, throwing the book upon the table with a bang, fled the house. “You don’t understand,” he had cried, “you don’t understand the heart of a soldier.”

In a way the man was right. The two children did not understand the blustering, pretending, inefficient old man. Having moved shoulder to shoulder with grim, silent men to the consummation of great deeds Windy could not get the flavour of those days out of his outlook upon life. Walking half drunk in the darkness along the sidewalks of Caxton on the evening of the quarrel the man became inspired. He threw back his shoulders and walked with martial tread; he drew an imaginary sword from its scabbard and waved it aloft; stopping, he aimed carefully at a body of imaginary men who advanced yelling toward him across a wheatfield; he felt that life in making him a housepainter in a farming village in Iowa and in giving him an unappreciative son had been cruelly unfair; he wept at the injustice of it.

The American Civil War was a thing so passionate, so inflaming, so vast, so absorbing, it so touched to the quick the men and women of those pregnant days that but a faint echo of it has been able to penetrate down to our days and to our minds; no real sense of it has as yet crept into the pages of a printed book; it yet wants its Thomas Carlyle; and in the end we are put to the need of listening to old fellows boasting on our village streets to get upon our cheeks the living breath of it. For four years the men of American cities, villages and farms walked across the smoking embers of a burning land, advancing and receding as the flame of that universal, passionate, death-spitting thing swept down upon them or receded toward the smoking sky-line. Is it so strange that they could not come home and begin again peacefully painting houses or mending broken shoes? A something in them cried out. It sent them to bluster and boast upon the street corners. When people passing continued to think only of their brick laying and of their shovelling of corn into cars, when the sons of these war gods walking home at evening and hearing the vain boastings of the fathers began to doubt even the facts of the great struggle, a something snapped in their brains and they fell to chattering and shouting their vain boastings to all as they looked hungrily about for believing eyes.

When our own Thomas Carlyle comes to write of our Civil War he will make much of our Windy McPhersons. He will see something big and pathetic in their hungry search for auditors and in their endless war talk. He will go filled with eager curiosity into little G. A. R. halls in the villages and think of the men who coming there night after night, year after year, told and re-told endlessly, monotonously, their story of battle.

Let us hope that in his fervour for the old fellows he will not fail to treat tenderly the families of those veteran talkers; the families that with their breakfasts and their dinners, by the fire at evening, through fast day and feast day, at weddings and at funerals got again and again endlessly, everlastingly this flow of war words. Let him reflect that peaceful men in corn-growing counties do not by choice sleep among the dogs of war nor wash their linen in the blood of their country’s foe. Let him, in his sympathy with the talkers, remember with kindness the heroism of the listeners.

On a summer day Sam McPherson sat on a box before Wildman’s grocery lost in thought. In his hand he held the little yellow account book and in this he buried himself, striving to wipe from his consciousness a scene being enacted before his eyes upon the street.

The realisation of the fact that his father was a confirmed liar and braggart had for years cast a shadow over his days and the shadow had been made blacker by the fact that in a land where the least fortunate can laugh in the face of want he had more than once stood face to face with poverty. He believed that the logical answer to the situation was money in the bank and with all the ardour of his boy’s heart he strove to realise that answer. He wanted to be a money-maker and the totals at the foot of the pages in the soiled yellow bankbook were the milestones that marked the progress he had already made. They told him that the daily struggles with Fatty, the long tramps through Caxton’s streets on bleak winter evenings, and the never-ending Saturday nights when crowds filled the stores, the sidewalks, and the drinking places, and he worked among them tirelessly and persistently were not without fruit.

Suddenly, above the murmur of men's voices on the street, his father's voice rose loud and insistent. A block further down the street, leaning against the door of Hunter's jewelry store, Windy talked at the top of his lungs, pumping his arms up and down with the air of a man making a stump speech.

"He is making a fool of himself," thought Sam, and returned to his bankbook, striving in the contemplation of the totals at the foot of the pages to shake off the dull anger that had begun to burn in his brain. Glancing up again, he saw that Joe Wildman, son of the grocer and a boy of his own age, had joined the group of men laughing and jeering at Windy. The shadow on Sam's face grew heavier.

Sam had been at Joe Wildman's house; he knew the air of plenty and of comfort that hung over it; the table piled high with meat and potatoes; the group of children laughing and eating to the edge of gluttony; the quiet, gentle father who amid the clamour and the noise did not raise his voice, and the well-dressed, bustling, rosy-cheeked mother. As a contrast to this scene he began to call up in his mind a picture of life in his own home, getting a kind of perverted pleasure out of his dissatisfaction with it. He saw the boasting, incompetent father telling his endless tales of the Civil War and complaining of his wounds; the tall, stoop-shouldered, silent mother with the deep lines in her long face, everlastingly at work over her washtub among the soiled clothes; the silent, hurriedly-eaten meals snatched from the kitchen table; and the long winter days when ice formed upon his mother's skirts and Windy idled about town while the little family subsisted upon bowls of cornmeal mush everlastingly repeated.

Now, even from where he sat, he could see that his father was half gone in drink, and knew that he was boasting of his part in the Civil War. "He is either doing that or telling of his aristocratic family or lying about his birthplace," he thought resentfully, and unable any longer to endure the sight of what seemed to him his own degradation, he got up and went into the grocery where a group of Caxton citizens stood talking to Wildman of a meeting to be held that morning at the town hall.

Caxton was to have a Fourth of July celebration. The idea, born in the heads of the few, had been taken up by the many. Rumours of it had run through the streets late in May. It had been talked of in Geiger's drug store, at the back of Wildman's grocery, and in the street before the New Leland House. John Telfer, the town's one man of leisure, had for weeks been going from place to place discussing the details with prominent men. Now a mass meeting was to be held in the hall over Geiger's drug store and to a man the citizens of Caxton had turned out for the meeting. The housepainter had come down off his ladder, the clerks were locking the doors of the stores, men went along the streets in groups bound for the hall. As they went they shouted to each other. "The old town has woke up," they called.

On a corner by Hunter's jewelry store Windy McPherson leaned against a building and harangued the passing crowd.

"Let the old flag wave," he shouted excitedly, "let the men of Caxton show the true blue and rally to the old standards."

"That's right, Windy, expostulate with them," shouted a wit, and a roar of laughter drowned Windy's reply.

Sam McPherson also went to the meeting in the hall. He came out of the grocery store with Wildman and went along the street looking at the sidewalk and trying not to see the drunken man talking in front of the jewelry store. At the hall other boys stood in the stairway or ran up and down the sidewalk talking excitedly, but Sam was a figure in the town's life and his right to push in among the men was not questioned. He squirmed through the mass of legs and secured a seat in a window ledge where he could watch the men come in and find seats.

As Caxton's one newsboy Sam had got from his newspaper selling both a living and a kind of standing in the town's life. To be a newsboy or a bootblack in a small novel-reading American town is to make a figure in the world. Do not all of the poor newsboys in the books become great men and is not this boy who goes among us so industriously day after day likely to become such a figure? Is it

not a duty we of the town owe to future greatness that we push him forward? So reasoned the men of Caxton and paid a kind of court to the boy who sat on the window ledge of the hall while the other boys of the town waited on the sidewalk below.

John Telfer was chairman of the mass meeting. He was always chairman of public meetings in Caxton. The industrious silent men of position in the town envied his easy, bantering style of public address, while pretending to treat it with scorn. “He talks too much,” they said, making a virtue of their own inability with apt and clever words.

Telfer did not wait to be appointed chairman of the meeting, but went forward, climbed the little raised platform at the end of the hall, and usurped the chairmanship. He walked up and down on the platform bantering with the crowd, answering gibes, calling to well-known men, getting and giving keen satisfaction with his talent. When the hall was filled with men he called the meeting to order, appointed committees and launched into a harangue. He told of plans made to advertise the big day in other towns and to get low railroad rates arranged for excursion parties. The programme, he said, included a musical carnival with brass bands from other towns, a sham battle by the military company at the fairgrounds, horse races, speeches from the steps of the town hall, and fireworks in the evening. “We’ll show them a live town here,” he declared, walking up and down the platform and swinging his cane, while the crowd applauded and shouted its approval.

When a call came for voluntary subscriptions to pay for the fun, the audience quieted down. One or two men got up and started to go out, grumbling that it was a waste of money. The fate of the celebration was on the knees of the gods.

Telfer arose to the occasion. He called out the names of the departing, and made jests at their expense so that they dropped back into their chairs unable to face the roaring laughter of the crowd, and shouted to a man at the back of the hall to close and bolt the door. Men began getting up in various parts of the hall and calling out sums, Telfer repeating the name and the amount in a loud voice to young Tom Jedrow, clerk in the bank, who wrote them down in a book. When the amount subscribed did not meet with his approval, he protested and the crowd backing him up forced the increase he demanded. When a man did not rise, he shouted at him and the man answered back an amount.

Suddenly in the hall a diversion arose. Windy McPherson emerged from the crowd at the back of the hall and walked down the centre aisle to the platform. He walked unsteadily straightening his shoulders and thrusting out his chin. When he got to the front of the hall he took a roll of bills from his pocket and threw it on the platform at the chairman’s feet. “From one of the boys of ‘61,” he announced in a loud voice.

The crowd shouted and clapped its hands with delight as Telfer picked up the bills and ran his finger over them. “Seventeen dollars from our hero, the mighty McPherson,” he shouted while the bank clerk wrote the name and the amount in the book and the crowd continued to make merry over the title given the drunken soldier by the chairman.

The boy on the window ledge slipped to the floor and stood with burning cheeks behind the mass of men. He knew that at home his mother was doing a family washing for Lesley, the shoe merchant, who had given five dollars to the Fourth-of-July fund, and the resentment he had felt on seeing his father talking to the crowd before the jewelry store blazed up anew.

After the taking of subscriptions, men in various parts of the hall began making suggestions for added features for the great day. To some of the speakers the crowd listened respectfully, at others they hooted. An old man with a grey beard told a long rambling story of a Fourth-of-July celebration of his boyhood. When voices interrupted he protested and shook his fist in the air, pale with indignation.

“Oh, sit down, old daddy,” shouted Freedom Smith and a murmur of applause greeted this sensible suggestion.

Another man got up and began to talk. He had an idea. “We will have,” he said, “a bugler mounted on a white horse who will ride through the town at dawn blowing the reveille. At midnight he will stand on the steps of the town hall and blow taps to end the day.”

The crowd applauded. The idea had caught their fancy and had instantly taken a place in their minds as one of the real events of the day.

Again Windy McPherson emerged from the crowd at the back of the hall. Raising his hand for silence he told the crowd that he was a bugler, that he had been a regimental bugler for two years during the Civil War. He said that he would gladly volunteer for the place.

The crowd shouted and John Telfer waved his hand. “The white horse for you, McPherson,” he said.

Sam McPherson wriggled along the wall and out at the now unbolted door. He was filled with astonishment at his father’s folly, and was still more astonished at the folly of these other men in accepting his statement and handing over the important place for the big day. He knew that his father must have had some part in the war as he was a member of the G. A. R., but he had no faith at all in the stories he had heard him relate of his experiences in the war. Sometimes he caught himself wondering if there ever had been such a war and thought that it must be a lie like everything else in the life of Windy McPherson. For years he had wondered why some sensible solid person like Valmore or Wildman did not rise, and in a matter-of-fact way tell the world that no such thing as the Civil War had ever been fought, that it was merely a figment in the minds of pompous old men demanding unearned glory of their fellows. Now hurrying along the street with burning cheeks, he decided that after all there must have been such a war. He had had the same feeling about birthplaces and there could be no doubt that people were born. He had heard his father claim as his birthplace Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, Louisiana and Scotland. The thing had left a kind of defect in his mind. To the end of his life when he heard a man tell the place of his birth he looked up suspiciously, and a shadow of doubt crossed his mind.

From the mass meeting Sam went home to his mother and presented the case bluntly. “The thing will have to be stopped,” he declared, standing with blazing eyes before her washtub. “It is too public. He can’t blow a bugle; I know he can’t. The whole town will have another laugh at our expense.”

Jane McPherson listened in silence to the boy’s outburst, then, turning, went back to rubbing clothes, avoiding his eyes.

With his hands thrust into his trousers pocket Sam stared sullenly at the ground. A sense of justice told him not to press the matter, but as he walked away from the washtub and out at the kitchen door, he hoped there would be plain talk of the matter at supper time. “The old fool!” he protested, addressing the empty street. “He is going to make a show of himself again.”

When Windy McPherson came home that evening, something in the eyes of the silent wife, and the sullen face of the boy, startled him. He passed over lightly his wife’s silence but looked closely at his son. He felt that he faced a crisis. In the emergency he was magnificent. With a flourish, he told of the mass meeting, and declared that the citizens of Caxton had arisen as one man to demand that he take the responsible place as official bugler. Then, turning, he glared across the table at his son.

Sam, openly defiant, announced that he did not believe his father capable of blowing a bugle.

Windy roared with amazement. He rose from the table declaring in a loud voice that the boy had wronged him; he swore that he had been for two years bugler on the staff of a colonel, and launched into a long story of a surprise by the enemy while his regiment lay asleep in their tents, and of his standing in the face of a storm of bullets and blowing his comrades to action. Putting one hand on his forehead he rocked back and forth as though about to fall, declaring that he was striving to keep back the tears wrenched from him by the injustice of his son’s insinuation and, shouting so that his voice carried far down the street, he declared with an oath that the town of Caxton should ring and echo with his bugling as the sleeping camp had echoed with it that night in the Virginia wood. Then dropping again into his chair, and resting his head upon his hand, he assumed a look of patient resignation.

Windy McPherson was victorious. In the little house a great stir and bustle of preparation arose. Putting on his white overalls and forgetting for the time his honourable wounds the father went day after day to his work as a housepainter. He dreamed of a new blue uniform for the great day and in the end achieved the realisation of his dreams, not however without material assistance from what was known in the house as “Mother’s Wash Money.” And the boy, convinced by the story of the midnight attack in the woods of Virginia, began against his judgment to build once more an old dream of his father’s reformation. Boylike, the scepticism was thrown to the winds and he entered with zeal into the plans for the great day. As he went through the quiet residence streets delivering the late evening papers, he threw back his head and revelled in the thought of a tall blue-clad figure on a great white horse passing like a knight before the gaping people. In a fervent moment he even drew money from his carefully built-up bank account and sent it to a firm in Chicago to pay for a shining new bugle that would complete the picture he had in his mind. And when the evening papers were distributed he hurried home to sit on the porch before the house discussing with his sister Kate the honours that had alighted upon their family.

With the coming of dawn on the great day the three McPhersons hurried hand in hand toward Main Street. In the street, on all sides of them, they saw people coming out of houses rubbing their eyes and buttoning their coats as they went along the sidewalk. All of Caxton seemed abroad.

In Main Street the people were packed on the sidewalk, and massed on the curb and in the doorways of the stores. Heads appeared at windows, flags waved from roofs or hung from ropes stretched across the street, and a great murmur of voices broke the silence of the dawn.

Sam’s heart beat so that he was hard put to it to keep back the tears from his eyes. He thought with a gasp of the days of anxiety that had passed when the new bugle had not come from the Chicago company, and in retrospect he suffered again the horror of the days of waiting. It had been all important. He could not blame his father for raving and shouting about the house, he himself had felt like raving, and had put another dollar of his savings into telegrams before the treasure was finally in his hands. Now, the thought that it might not have come sickened him, and a little prayer of thankfulness rose from his lips. To be sure one might have been secured from a nearby town, but not a new shining one to go with his father’s new blue uniform.

A cheer broke from the crowd massed along the street. Into the street rode a tall figure seated upon a white horse. The horse was from Culvert’s livery and the boys there had woven ribbons into its mane and tail. Windy McPherson, sitting very straight in the saddle and looking wonderfully striking in the new blue uniform and the broad-brimmed campaign hat, had the air of a conqueror come to receive the homage of the town. He wore a gold band across his chest and against his hip rested the shining bugle. With stern eyes he looked down upon the people.

The lump in the throat of the boy hurt more and more. A great wave of pride ran over him, submerging him. In a moment he forgot all the past humiliations the father had brought upon his family, and understood why his mother remained silent when he, in his blindness, had wanted to protest against her seeming indifference. Glancing furtively up he saw a tear lying upon her cheek and felt that he too would like to sob aloud his pride and happiness.

Slowly and with stately stride the horse walked up the street between the rows of silent waiting people. In front of the town hall the tall military figure, rising in the saddle, took one haughty look at the multitude, and then, putting the bugle to his lips, blew.

Out of the bugle came only a thin piercing shriek followed by a squawk. Again Windy put the bugle to his lips and again the same dismal squawk was his only reward. On his face was a look of helpless boyish astonishment.

And in a moment the people knew. It was only another of Windy McPherson’s pretensions. He couldn’t blow a bugle at all.

A great shout of laughter rolled down the street. Men and women sat on the curbstones and laughed until they were tired. Then, looking at the figure upon the motionless horse, they laughed again.

Windy looked about him with troubled eyes. It is doubtful if he had ever had a bugle to his lips until that moment, but he was filled with wonder and astonishment that the reveille did not roll forth. He had heard the thing a thousand times and had it clearly in his mind; with all his heart he wanted it to roll forth, and could picture the street ringing with it and the applause of the people; the thing, he felt, was in him, and it was only a fatal blunder in nature that it did not come out at the flaring end of the bugle. He was amazed at this dismal end of his great moment—he was always amazed and helpless before facts.

The crowd began gathering about the motionless, astonished figure, laughter continuing to send them off into something near convulsions. Grasping the bridle of the horse, John Telfer began leading it off up the street. Boys whooped and shouted at the rider, “Blow! Blow!”

The three McPhersons stood in a doorway leading into a shoe store. The boy and the mother, white and speechless with humiliation, dared not look at each other. In the flood of shame sweeping over them they stared straight before them with hard, stony eyes.

The procession led by John Telfer at the bridle of the white horse marched down the street. Looking up, the eyes of the laughing, shouting man met those of the boy and a look of pain shot across his face. Dropping the bridle he hurried away through the crowd. The procession moved on, and watching their chance the mother and the two children crept home along side streets, Kate weeping bitterly. Leaving them at the door Sam went straight on down a sandy road toward a small wood. “I’ve got my lesson. I’ve got my lesson,” he muttered over and over as he went.

At the edge of the wood he stopped and leaning on a rail fence watched until he saw his mother come out to the pump in the back yard. She had begun to draw water for the day’s washing. For her also the holiday was at an end. A flood of tears ran down the boy’s cheeks, and he shook his fist in the direction of the town. “You may laugh at that fool Windy, but you shall never laugh at Sam McPherson,” he cried, his voice shaking with excitement.

CHAPTER III

One evening, when he had grown so that he outtopped Windy, Sam McPherson returned from his paper route to find his mother arrayed in her black, church-going dress. An evangelist was at work in Caxton and she had decided to hear him. Sam shuddered. In the house it was an understood thing that when Jane McPherson went to church her son went with her. There was nothing said. Jane McPherson did all things without words, always there was nothing said. Now she stood waiting in her black dress when her son came in at the door and he hurriedly put on his best clothes and went with her to the brick church.

Valmore, John Telfer, and Freedom Smith, who had taken upon themselves a kind of common guardianship of the boy and with whom he spent evening after evening at the back of Wildman's grocery, did not go to church. They talked of religion and seemed singularly curious and interested in what other men thought on the subject but they did not allow themselves to be coaxed into a house of worship. To the boy, who had become a fourth member of the evening gatherings at the back of the grocery store, they would not talk of God, answering the direct questions he sometimes asked by changing the subject. Once Telfer, the reader of poetry, answered the boy. "Sell papers and fill your pockets with money but let your soul sleep," he said sharply.

In the absence of the others Wildman talked more freely. He was a spiritualist and tried to make Sam see the beauties of that faith. On long summer afternoons the grocer and the boy spent hours driving through the streets in a rattling old delivery wagon, the man striving earnestly to make clear to the boy the shadowy ideas of God that were in his mind.

Although Windy McPherson had been the leader of a Bible class in his youth, and had been a moving spirit at revival meetings during his early days in Caxton, he no longer went to church and his wife did not ask him to go. On Sunday mornings he lay abed. If there was work to be done about the house or yard he complained of his wounds. He complained of his wounds when the rent fell due, and when there was a shortage of food in the house. Later in his life and after the death of Jane McPherson the old soldier married the widow of a farmer by whom he had four children and with whom he went to church twice on Sunday. Kate wrote Sam one of her infrequent letters about it. "He has met his match," she said, and was tremendously pleased.

In church on Sunday mornings Sam went regularly to sleep, putting his head on his mother's arm and sleeping throughout the service. Jane McPherson loved to have the boy there beside her. It was the one thing in life they did together and she did not mind his sleeping the time away. Knowing how late he had been upon the streets at the paper selling on Saturday evenings, she looked at him with eyes filled with tenderness and sympathy. Once the minister, a man with brown beard and hard, tightly-closed mouth, spoke to her. "Can't you keep him awake?" he asked impatiently. "He needs the sleep," she said and hurried past the minister and out of the church, looking ahead of her and frowning.

The evening of the evangelist meeting was a summer evening fallen on a winter month. All day the warm winds had come up from the southwest. Mud lay soft and deep in the streets and among the little pools of water on the sidewalks were dry spots from which steam arose. Nature had forgotten herself. A day that should have sent old fellows to their nests behind stoves in stores sent them forth to loaf in the sun. The night fell warm and cloudy. A thunder storm threatened in the month of February.

Sam walked along the sidewalk with his mother bound for the brick church, wearing a new grey overcoat. The night did not demand the overcoat but Sam wore it out of an excess of pride in its possession. The overcoat had an air. It had been made by Gunther the tailor after a design sketched on the back of a piece of wrapping paper by John Telfer and had been paid for out of the newsboy's savings. The little German tailor, after a talk with Valmore and Telfer, had made it at a marvellously low price. Sam swaggered as he walked.

He did not sleep in church that evening; indeed he found the quiet church filled with a medley of strange noises. Folding carefully the new coat and laying it beside him on the seat he looked with interest at the people, feeling within him something of the nervous excitement with which the air was charged. The evangelist, a short, athletic-looking man in a grey business suit, seemed to the boy out of place in the church. He had the assured business-like air of the travelling men who come to the New Leland House, and Sam thought he looked like a man who had goods to be sold. He did not stand quietly back of the pulpit giving out the text as did the brown-bearded minister, nor did he sit with closed eyes and clasped hands waiting for the choir to finish singing. While the choir sang he ran up and down the platform waving his arms and shouting excitedly to the people on the church benches, “Sing! Sing! Sing! For the glory of God, sing!”

When the song was finished, he began talking, quietly at first, of life in the town. As he talked he grew more and more excited. “The town is a cesspool of vice!” he shouted. “It reeks with evil! The devil counts it a suburb of hell!”

His voice rose, and sweat ran off his face. A sort of frenzy seized him. He pulled off his coat and throwing it over a chair ran up and down the platform and into the aisles among the people, shouting, threatening, pleading. People began to stir uneasily in their seats. Jane McPherson stared stonily at the back of the woman in front of her. Sam was horribly frightened.

The newsboy of Caxton was not without a hunger for religion. Like all boys he thought much and often of death. In the night he sometimes awakened cold with fear, thinking that death must be just without the door of his room waiting for him. When in the winter he had a cold and coughed, he trembled at the thought of tuberculosis. Once, when he was taken with a fever, he fell asleep and dreamed that he had died and was walking on the trunk of a fallen tree over a ravine filled with lost souls that shrieked with terror. When he awoke he prayed. Had some one come into his room and heard his prayer he would have been ashamed.

On winter evenings as he walked through the dark streets with the papers under his arm he thought of his soul. As he thought a tenderness came over him; a lump came into his throat and he pitied himself; he felt that there was something missing in his life, something he wanted very badly.

Under John Telfer’s influence, the boy, who had quit school to devote himself to money making, read Walt Whitman and had a season of admiring his own body with its straight white legs, and the head that was poised so jauntily on the body. Sometimes he would awaken on summer nights and be so filled with strange longing that he would creep out of bed and, pushing open the window, sit upon the floor, his bare legs sticking out beyond his white nightgown, and, thus sitting, yearn eagerly toward some fine impulse, some call, some sense of bigness and of leadership that was absent from the necessities of the life he led. He looked at the stars and listened to the night noises, so filled with longing that the tears sprang to his eyes.

Once, after the affair of the bugle, Jane McPherson had been ill—and the first touch of the finger of death reaching out to her—had sat with her son in the warm darkness in the little grass plot at the front of the house. It was a clear, warm, starlit evening without a moon, and as the two sat closely together a sense of the coming of death crept over the mother.

At the evening meal Windy McPherson had talked voluminously, ranting and shouting about the house. He said that a housepainter who had a real sense of colour had no business trying to work in a hole like Caxton. He had been in trouble with a housewife about a colour he had mixed for painting a porch floor and at his own table he raved about the woman and what he declared her lack of even a primitive sense of colour. “I am sick of it all,” he shouted, going out of the house and up the street with uncertain steps. His wife had been unmoved by his outburst, but in the presence of the quiet boy whose chair touched her own she trembled with a strange new fear and began to talk of the life after death, making effort after effort to get at what she wanted to say, and only succeeding in finding expression for her thoughts in little sentences broken by long painful pauses. She told the

boy she had no doubt at all that there was some kind of future life and that she believed she should see and live with him again after they had finished with this world.

One day the minister who had been annoyed because he had slept in his church, stopped Sam on the street to talk to him of his soul. He said that the boy should be thinking of making himself one of the brothers in Christ by joining the church. Sam listened silently to the talk of the man, whom he instinctively disliked, but in his silence felt there was something insincere. With all his heart he wanted to repeat a sentence he had heard from the lips of grey-haired, big-fisted Valmore—"How can they believe and not lead a life of simple, fervent devotion to their belief?" He thought himself superior to the thin-lipped man who talked with him and had he been able to express what was in his heart he might have said, "Look here, man! I am made of different stuff from all the people there at the church. I am new clay to be moulded into a new man. Not even my mother is like me. I do not accept your ideas of life just because you say they are good any more than I accept Windy McPherson just because he happens to be my father."

During one winter Sam spent evening after evening reading the Bible in his room. It was after Kate's marriage—she had got into an affair with a young farmer that had kept her name upon the tongues of whisperers for months but was now a housewife on a farm at the edge of a village some miles from Caxton, and the mother was again at her endless task among the soiled clothes in the kitchen and Windy McPherson off drinking and boasting about town. Sam read the book in secret. He had a lamp on a little stand beside his bed and a novel, lent him by John Telfer, beside it. When his mother came up the stairway he slipped the Bible under the cover of the bed and became absorbed in the novel. He thought it something not quite in keeping with his aims as a business man and a money getter to be concerned about his soul. He wanted to conceal his concern but with all his heart wanted to get hold of the message of the strange book, about which men wrangled hour after hour on winter evenings in the store.

He did not get it; and after a time he stopped reading the book. Left to himself he might have sensed its meaning, but on all sides of him were the voices of the men—the men at Wildman's who owned to no faith and yet were filled with dogmatisms as they talked behind the stove in the grocery; the brown-bearded, thin-lipped minister in the brick church; the shouting, pleading evangelists who came to visit the town in the winter; the gentle old grocer who talked vaguely of the spirit world,—all these voices were at the mind of the boy pleading, insisting, demanding, not that Christ's simple message that men love one another to the end, that they work together for the common good, be accepted, but that their own complex interpretation of his word be taken to the end that souls be saved.

In the end the boy of Caxton got to the place where he had a dread of the word soul. It seemed to him that the mention of the word in conversation was something shameful and to think of the word or the shadowy something for which the word stood an act of cowardice. In his mind the soul became a thing to be hidden away, covered up, not thought of. One might be allowed to speak of the matter at the moment of death, but for the healthy man or boy to have the thought of his soul in his mind or word of it on his lips—one might better become blatantly profane and go to the devil with a swagger. With delight he imagined himself as dying and with his last breath tossing a round oath into the air of his death chamber.

In the meantime Sam continued to have inexplicable longings and hopes. He kept surprising himself by the changing aspect of his own viewpoint of life. He found himself indulging in the most petty meannesses, and following these with flashes of a kind of loftiness of mind. Looking at a girl passing in the street, he had unbelievably mean thoughts; and the next day, passing the same girl, a line caught from the babbling of John Telfer came to his lips and he went his way muttering, "June's twice June since she breathed it with me."

And then into the complex nature of this boy came the sex motive. Already he dreamed of having women in his arms. He looked shyly at the ankles of women crossing the street, and listened eagerly when the crowd about the stove in Wildman's fell to telling smutty stories. He sank to

unbelievable depths of triviality in sordidness, looking shyly into dictionaries for words that appealed to the animal lust in his queerly perverted mind and, when he came across it, lost entirely the beauty of the old Bible tale of Ruth in the suggestion of intimacy between man and woman that it brought to him. And yet Sam McPherson was no evil-minded boy. He had, as a matter of fact, a quality of intellectual honesty that appealed strongly to the clean-minded, simple-hearted old blacksmith Valmore; he had awakened something like love in the hearts of the women school teachers in the Caxton schools, at least one of whom continued to interest herself in him, taking him with her on walks along country roads, and talking to him constantly of the development of his mind; and he was the friend and boon companion of Telfer, the dandy, the reader of poems, the keen lover of life. The boy was struggling to find himself. One night when the sex call kept him awake he got up and dressed, and went and stood in the rain by the creek in Miller's pasture. The wind swept the rain across the face of the water and a sentence flashed through his mind: "The little feet of the rain run on the water." There was a quality of almost lyrical beauty in the Iowa boy.

And this boy, who couldn't get hold of his impulse toward God, whose sex impulses made him at times mean, at times full of beauty, and who had decided that the impulse toward bargaining and money getting was the impulse in him most worth cherishing, now sat beside his mother in church and watched with wide-open eyes the man who took off his coat, who sweated profusely, and who called the town in which he lived a cesspool of vice and its citizens wards of the devil.

The evangelist from talking of the town began talking instead of heaven and hell and his earnestness caught the attention of the listening boy who began seeing pictures.

Into his mind there came a picture of a burning pit of fire in which great flames leaped about the heads of the people who writhed in the pit. "Art Sherman would be there," thought Sam, materialising the picture he saw; "nothing can save him; he keeps a saloon."

Filled with pity for the man he saw in the picture of the burning pit, his mind centered on the person of Art Sherman. He liked Art Sherman. More than once he had felt the touch of human kindness in the man. The roaring, blustering saloonkeeper had helped the boy sell and collect for newspapers. "Pay the kid or get out of the place," the red-faced man roared at drunken men leaning on the bar.

And then, looking into the burning pit, Sam thought of Mike McCarthy, for whom he had at that moment a kind of passion akin to a young girl's blind devotion to her lover. With a shudder he realised that Mike also would go into the pit, for he had heard Mike laughing at churches and declaring there was no God.

The evangelist ran upon the platform and called to the people demanding that they stand upon their feet. "Stand up for Jesus," he shouted; "stand up and be counted among the host of the Lord God."

In the church people began getting to their feet. Jane McPherson stood with the others. Sam did not stand. He crept behind his mother's dress, hoping to pass through the storm unnoticed. The call to the faithful to stand was a thing to be complied with or resisted as the people might wish; it was something entirely outside of himself. It did not occur to him to count himself among either the lost or the saved.

Again the choir began singing and a businesslike movement began among the people. Men and women went up and down the aisles clasping the hands of people in the pews, talking and praying aloud. "Welcome among us," they said to certain ones who stood upon their feet. "It gladdens our hearts to see you among us. We are happy at seeing you in the fold among the saved. It is good to confess Jesus."

Suddenly a voice from the bench back of him struck terror to Sam's heart. Jim Williams, who worked in Sawyer's barber shop, was upon his knees and in a loud voice was praying for the soul of Sam McPherson. "Lord, help this erring boy who goes up and down in the company of sinners and publicans," he shouted.

In a moment the terror of death and the fiery pit that had possessed him passed, and Sam was filled instead with blind, dumb rage. He remembered that this same Jim Williams had treated lightly the honour of his sister at the time of her disappearance, and he wanted to get upon his feet and pour out his wrath on the head of the man, who, he felt, had betrayed him. “They would not have seen me,” he thought; “this is a fine trick Jim Williams has played me. I shall be even with him for this.”

He got to his feet and stood beside his mother. He had no qualms about passing himself off as one of the lambs safely within the fold. His mind was bent upon quieting Jim Williams’ prayers and avoiding the attention of the people.

The minister began calling on the standing people to testify of their salvation. From various parts of the church the people spoke out, some loudly and boldly and with a ring of confidence in their voices, some tremblingly and hesitatingly. One woman wept loudly shouting between the paroxysms of sobbing that seized her, “The weight of my sins is heavy on my soul.” Girls and young men when called on by the minister responded with shamed, hesitating voices asking that a verse of some hymn be sung, or quoting a line of scripture.

At the back of the church the evangelist with one of the deacons and two or three women had gathered about a small, black-haired woman, the wife of a baker to whom Sam delivered papers. They were urging her to rise and get within the fold, and Sam turned and watched her curiously, his sympathy going out to her. With all his heart he hoped that she would continue doggedly shaking her head.

Suddenly the irrepressible Jim Williams broke forth again. A quiver ran over Sam’s body and the blood rose to his cheeks. “Here is another sinner saved,” shouted Jim, pointing to the standing boy. “Count this boy, Sam McPherson, in the fold among the lambs.”

On the platform the brown-bearded minister stood upon a chair and looked over the heads of the people. An ingratiating smile played about his lips. “Let us hear from the young man, Sam McPherson,” he said, raising his hand for silence, and, then, encouragingly, “Sam, what have you to say for the Lord?”

Become the centre for the attention of the people in the church Sam was terror-stricken. The rage against Jim Williams was forgotten in the spasm of fear that seized him. He looked over his shoulder to the door at the back of the church and thought longingly of the quiet street outside. He hesitated, stammered, grew more red and uncertain, and finally burst out: “The Lord,” he said, and then looked about hopelessly, “the Lord maketh me to lie out in green pastures.”

In the seats behind him a titter arose. A young woman sitting among the singers in the choir put her handkerchief to her face and throwing back her head rocked back and forth. A man near the door guffawed loudly and went hurriedly out. All over the church people began laughing.

Sam turned his eyes upon his mother. She was staring straight ahead of her, and her face was red. “I’m going out of this place and I’m never coming back again,” he whispered, and, stepping into the aisle, walked boldly toward the door. He had made up his mind that if the evangelist tried to stop him he would fight. At his back he felt the rows of people looking at him and smiling. The laughter continued.

In the street he hurried along consumed with indignation. “I’ll never go into any church again,” he swore, shaking his fist in the air. The public avowals he had heard in the church seemed to him cheap and unworthy. He wondered why his mother stayed in there. With a sweep of his arm he dismissed all the people in the church. “It is a place to make public asses of the people,” he thought.

Sam McPherson wandered through Main Street, dreading to meet Valmore and John Telfer. Finding the chairs back of the stove in Wildman’s grocery deserted, he hurried past the grocer and hid in a corner. Tears of wrath stood in his eyes. He had been made a fool of. He imagined the scene that would go on when he came upon the street with the papers the next morning. Freedom Smith would be there sitting in the old worn buggy and roaring so that all the street would listen and laugh. “Going to lie out in any green pastures to-night, Sam?” he would shout. “Ain’t you afraid you’ll take

cold?" By Geiger's drug store would stand Valmore and Telfer, eager to join in the fun at his expense. Telfer would pound on the side of the building with his cane and roar with laughter. Valmore would make a trumpet of his hands and shout after the fleeing boy. "Do you sleep out alone in them green pastures?" Freedom Smith would roar again.

Sam got up and went out of the grocery. As he hurried along, blind with wrath, he felt he would like a stand-up fight with some one. And, then, hurrying and avoiding the people, he merged with the crowd on the street and became a witness to the strange thing that happened that night in Caxton.

In Main Street hushed people stood about in groups talking. The air was heavy with excitement. Solitary figures went from group to group whispering hoarsely. Mike McCarthy, the man who had denied God and who had won a place for himself in the affection of the newsboy, had assaulted a man with a pocket knife and had left him bleeding and wounded beside a country road. Something big and sensational had happened in the life of the town.

Mike McCarthy and Sam were friends. For years the man had idled upon the streets of the town, loitering about, boasting and talking. He had sat for hours in a chair under a tree before the New Leland House, reading books, doing tricks with cards, engaging in long discussions with John Telfer or any who would stand up to him.

Mike McCarthy got into trouble in a fight over a woman. A young farmer living at the edge of Caxton had come home from the fields to find his wife in the bold Irishman's arms and the two men had gone out of the house together to fight in the road. The woman, weeping in the house, followed to ask forgiveness of her husband. Running in the gathering darkness along the road she had found him cut and bleeding terribly, lying in a ditch under a hedge. On down the road she ran and appeared at the door of a neighbour, screaming and calling for help.

The story of the fight in the road got to Caxton just as Sam came out of the corner, back of the stove in Wildman's and appeared on the street. Men ran from store to store and from group to group along the street saying that the young farmer had died and that murder had been done. On a street corner Windy McPherson harangued the crowd declaring that the men of Caxton should arise in the defence of their homes and string the murderer to a lamp post. Hop Higgins, driving a horse from Culvert's livery, appeared on Main Street. "He will be at the McCarthy farm," he shouted. When several men, coming out of Geiger's drug store, stopped the marshal's horse, saying, "You will have trouble out there; you had better take help," the little red-faced marshal with the crippled leg laughed. "What trouble?" he asked—"To get Mike McCarthy? I shall ask him to come and he will come. The rest of that lot won't cut any figure. Mike can wrap the entire McCarthy family around his finger."

There were six of the McCarthy men, all, except Mike, silent, sullen men who only talked when they were in liquor. Mike furnished the town's social touch with the family. It was a strange family to live there in that fat, corn-growing country, a family with something savage and primitive about it, one that belonged among western mining camps or among the half savage dwellers in deep alleys in cities, and the fact that it lived on a corn farm in Iowa was, in the words of John Telfer, "something monstrous in Nature."

The McCarthy farm, lying some four miles east of Caxton, had once contained a thousand acres of good corn-growing land. Lem McCarthy, the father of the family, had inherited it from a brother, a gold miner, a forty-niner, a sport owning fast horses, who planned to breed race horses on the Iowa land. Lem had come out of the back streets of an eastern city, bringing his brood of tall, silent, savage boys to live upon the land and, like the forty-niner, to be a sport. Thinking the wealth that had come to him vast beyond spending, he had plunged into horse racing and gambling. When, within two years, five hundred acres of the farm had to be sold to pay gambling debts, and the wide acres lay covered with weeds, Lem became alarmed, and settled down to hard work, the boys working all day in the field and at long intervals coming into town at night to get into trouble. Having no mother or sister, and knowing that no Caxton woman could be hired to go upon the place, they did their own housework; and on rainy days sat about the old farmhouse playing cards and fighting. On other days

they would stand around the bar in Art Sherman's saloon in Piety Hollow drinking until they had lost their savage silence and had become loud and quarrelsome, going from there upon the streets to seek trouble. Once, going into Hayner's restaurant, they took stacks of plates from shelves back of the counter and, standing in the doorway, threw them at people passing in the street, the crash of the breaking crockery accompanying their roaring laughter. When they had driven the people to cover they got upon their horses and with wild shouts raced up and down Main Street between the rows of tied horses until Hop Higgins, the town marshal, appeared, when they rode off into the country awakening the farmers along the darkened road as they fled, shouting and singing, toward home.

When the McCarthy boys got into trouble in Caxton, old Lem McCarthy drove into town and got them out of it, paying for the damage done and going about declaring the boys meant no harm. When told to keep them out of town he shook his head and said he would try.

Mike McCarthy did not ride swearing and singing with the five brothers along the dark road. He did not work all day in the hot corn fields. He was the family gentleman, and, wearing good clothes, strolled instead upon the street or loitered in the shade before the New Leland House. Mike had been educated. For some years he had attended a college in Indiana from which he was expelled for an affair with a woman. After his return from college he stayed in Caxton, living at the hotel and making a pretence of studying law in the office of old Judge Reynolds. He paid slight attention to the study of law, but with infinite patience had so trained his hands that he became wonderfully dexterous with coins and cards, plucking them out of the air and making them appear in the shoes, the hats, and even in the mouths, of bystanders. During the day he walked the streets looking at the girl clerks in the stores, or stood upon the station platform waving his hand to women passengers on passing trains. He told John Telfer that the flattery of women was a lost art that he intended to restore. Mike McCarthy carried in his pockets books which he read sitting in a chair before the hotel or on the stones before store windows. When on Saturdays the streets were filled with people, he stood on the corners giving gratuitous performances of his magical art with cards and coins, and eyeing country girls in the crowd. Once, a woman, the town stationer's wife, shouted at him, calling him a lazy lout, whereupon he threw a coin in the air, and when it did not come down rushed toward her shouting, "She has it in her stocking." When the stationer's wife ran into her shop and banged the door the crowd laughed and shouted with delight.

Telfer had a liking for the tall, grey-eyed, loitering McCarthy and sometimes sat with him discussing a novel or a poem; Sam in the background listened eagerly. Valmore did not care for the man, shaking his head and declaring that such a fellow could come to no good end.

The rest of the town agreed with Valmore, and McCarthy, knowing this, sunned himself in the town's displeasure. For the sake of the public furor it brought down upon his head he proclaimed himself a socialist, an anarchist, an atheist, a pagan. Among all the McCarthy boys he alone cared greatly about women, and he made public and open declarations of his passion for them. Before the men gathered about the stove in Wildman's grocery store he would stand whipping them into a frenzy by declaring for free love, and vowing that he would have the best of any woman who gave him the chance.

For this man the frugal, hard working newsboy had conceived a regard amounting to a passion. As he listened to McCarthy he got continuous delightful little thrills. "There is nothing he would not dare," thought the boy. "He is the freest, the boldest, the bravest man in town." When the young Irishman, seeing the admiration in his eyes, flung him a silver dollar saying, "That is for your fine brown eyes, my boy; it I had them I would have half the women in town after me," Sam kept the dollar in his pocket and counted it a kind of treasure like the rose given a lover by his sweetheart.

It was past eleven o'clock when Hop Higgins returned to town with McCarthy, driving quietly along the street and through an alley at the back of the town hall. The crowd upon the street had broken up. Sam had gone from one to another of the muttering groups, his heart quaking with fear. Now he stood at the back of the mass of men gathered at the jail door. An oil lamp, burning at the

top of the post above the door, threw dancing, flickering lights on the faces of the men before him. The thunder storm that had threatened had not come, but the unnatural warm wind continued and the sky overhead was inky black.

Through the alley, to the jail door, drove the town marshal, the young McCarthy sitting in the buggy beside him. A man rushed forward to hold the horse. McCarthy's face was chalky white. He laughed and shouted, raising his hand toward the sky.

"I am Michael, son of God. I have cut a man with a knife so that his red blood ran upon the ground. I am the son of God and this filthy jail shall be my sanctuary. In there I shall talk aloud with my Father," he roared hoarsely, shaking his fist at the crowd. "Sons of this cesspool of respectability, stay and hear! Send for your females and let them stand in the presence of a man!"

Taking the white, wild-eyed man by the arm Marshal Higgins led him into the jail, the clank of locks, the low murmur of the voice of Higgins and the wild laughter of McCarthy floating out to the group of silent men standing in the mud of the alley.

Sam McPherson ran past the group of men to the side of the jail and finding John Telfer and Valmore leaning silently against the wall of Tom Folger's wagon shop slipped between them. Telfer put out his arm and laid it upon the boy's shoulder. Hop Higgins, coming out of the jail, addressed the crowd. "Don't answer if he talks," he said; "he is as crazy as a loon."

Sam moved closer to Telfer. The voice of the imprisoned man, loud, and filled with a startling boldness, rolled out of the jail. He began praying.

"Hear me, Father Almighty, who has permitted this town of Caxton to exist and has let me, Thy son, grow to manhood. I am Michael, Thy son. They have put me in this jail where rats run across the floor and they stand in the mud outside as I talk with Thee. Are you there, old Truepenny?"

A breath of cold air blew up the alley followed by a flaw of rain. The group under the flickering lamp by the jail entrance drew back against the walls of the building. Sam could see them dimly, pressing closely against the wall. The man in the jail laughed loudly.

"I have had a philosophy of life, O Father," he shouted. "I have seen men and women here living year after year without children. I have seen them hoarding pennies and denying Thee new life on which to work Thy will. To these women I have gone secretly talking of carnal love. With them I have been gentle and kind; them I have flattered."

A roaring laugh broke from the lips of the imprisoned man. "Are you there, oh dwellers in the cesspool of respectability?" he shouted. "Do you stand in the mud with cold feet listening? I have been with your wives. Eleven Caxton wives without babes have I been with and it has been fruitless. The twelfth woman I have just left, leaving her man in the road a bleeding sacrifice to thee. I shall call out the names of the eleven. I shall have revenge also upon the husbands of the women, some of whom wait with the others in the mud outside."

He began calling off the names of Caxton wives. A shudder ran through the body of the boy, sensitised by the new chill in the air and by the excitement of the night. Among the men standing along the wall of the jail a murmur arose. Again they grouped themselves under the flickering light by the jail door, disregarding the rain. Valmore, stumbling out of the darkness beside Sam, stood before Telfer. "The boy should be going home," he said; "this isn't fit for him to hear."

Telfer laughed and drew Sam closer to him. "He has heard enough lies in this town," he said. "Truth won't hurt him. I would not go myself, nor would you, and the boy shall not go. This McCarthy has a brain. Although he is half insane now he is trying to work something out. The boy and I will stay to hear."

The voice from the jail continued calling out the names of Caxton wives. Voices in the group before the jail door began shouting: "This should be stopped. Let us tear down the jail."

McCarthy laughed aloud. "They squirm, oh Father, they squirm; I have them in the pit and I torture them," he cried.

An ugly feeling of satisfaction came over Sam. He had a sense of the fact that the names shouted from the jail would be repeated over and over through the town. One of the women whose names had been called out had stood with the evangelist at the back of the church trying to induce the wife of the baker to rise and be counted in the fold with the lambs.

The rain, falling on the shoulders of the men by the jail door, changed to hail, the air grew colder and the hailstones rattled on the roofs of buildings. Some of the men joined Telfer and Valmore, talking in low, excited voices. “And Mary McKane, too, the hypocrite,” Sam heard one of them say.

The voice inside the jail changed. Still praying, Mike McCarthy seemed also to be talking to the group in the darkness outside.

“I am sick of my life. I have sought leadership and have not found it. Oh Father! Send down to men a new Christ, one to get hold of us, a modern Christ with a pipe in his mouth who will swear and knock us about so that we vermin who pretend to be made in Thy image will understand. Let him go into churches and into courthouses, into cities, and into towns like this, shouting, ‘Be ashamed! Be ashamed of your cowardly concern over your snivelling souls!’ Let him tell us that never will our lives, so miserably lived, be repeated after our bodies lie rotting in the grave.”

A sob broke from his lips and a lump came into Sam’s throat.

“Oh Father! help us men of Caxton to understand that we have only this, our lives, this life so warm and hopeful and laughing in the sun, this life with its awkward boys full of strange possibilities, and its girls with their long legs and freckles on their noses, that are meant to carry life within themselves, new life, kicking and stirring, and waking them at night.”

The voice of the prayer broke. Wild sobs took the place of speech. “Father!” shouted the broken voice, “I have taken a life, a man that moved and talked and whistled in the sunshine on winter mornings; I have killed.”

The voice inside the jail became inaudible. Silence, broken by low sobs from the jail, fell on the little dark alley and the listening men began going silently away. The lump in Sam’s throat grew larger. Tears stood in his eyes. He went with Telfer and Valmore out of the alley and into the street, the two men walking in silence. The rain had ceased and a cold wind blew.

The boy felt that he had been shriven. His mind, his heart, even his tired body seemed strangely cleansed. He felt a new affection for Telfer and Valmore. When Telfer began talking he listened eagerly, thinking that at last he understood him and knew why men like Valmore, Wildman, Freedom Smith, and Telfer loved each other and went on being friends year after year in the face of difficulties and misunderstandings. He thought that he had got hold of the idea of brotherhood that John Telfer talked of so often and so eloquently. “Mike McCarthy is only a brother who has gone the dark road,” he thought and felt a glow of pride in the thought and in the apt expression of it in his mind.

John Telfer, forgetting the boy, talked soberly to Valmore, the two men stumbling along in the darkness intent upon their own thoughts.

“It is an odd thought,” said Telfer and his voice seemed far away and unnatural like the voice from the jail; “it is an odd thought that but for a quirk in the brain this Mike McCarthy might himself have been a kind of Christ with a pipe in his mouth.”

Valmore stumbled and half fell in the darkness at a street crossing. Telfer went on talking.

“The world will some day grope its way into some kind of an understanding of its extraordinary men. Now they suffer terribly. In success or in such failures as has come to this imaginative, strangely perverted Irishman their lot is pitiful. It is only the common, the plain, unthinking man who slides peacefully through this troubled world.”

At the house Jane McPherson sat waiting for her boy. She was thinking of the scene in the church and a hard light was in her eyes. Sam went past the sleeping room of his parents, where Windy McPherson snored peacefully, and up the stairway to his own room. He undressed and, putting out the light, knelt upon the floor. From the wild ravings of the man in the jail he had got hold of something. In the midst of the blasphemy of Mike McCarthy he had sensed a deep and abiding love of life.

Where the church had failed the bold sensualist succeeded. Sam felt that he could have prayed in the presence of the entire town.

"Oh, Father!" he cried, sending up his voice in the silence of the little room, "make me stick to the thought that the right living of this, my life, is my duty to you."

By the door below, while Valmore waited on the sidewalk, Telfer talked to Jane McPherson.

"I wanted Sam to hear," he explained. "He needs a religion. All young men need a religion. I wanted him to hear how even a man like Mike McCarthy keeps instinctively trying to justify himself before God."

CHAPTER IV

John Telfer's friendship was a formative influence upon Sam McPherson. His father's worthlessness and the growing realisation of the hardship of his mother's position had given life a bitter taste in his mouth, and Telfer sweetened it. He entered with zeal into Sam's thoughts and dreams, and tried valiantly to arouse in the quiet, industrious, money-making boy some of his own love of life and beauty. At night, as the two walked down country roads, the man would stop and, waving his arms about, quote Poe or Browning or, in another mood, would compel Sam's attention to the rare smell of a hayfield or to a moonlit stretch of meadow.

Before people gathered on the streets he teased the boy, calling him a little money grubber and saying, "He is like a little mole that works underground. As the mole goes for a worm so this boy goes for a five-cent piece. I have watched him. A travelling man goes out of town leaving a stray dime or nickel here and within an hour it is in this boy's pocket. I have talked to banker Walker of him. He trembles lest his vaults become too small to hold the wealth of this young Croesus. The day will come when he will buy the town and put it into his vest pocket."

For all his public teasing of the boy Telfer had the genius to adopt a different attitude when they were alone together. Then he talked to him openly and freely as he talked to Valmore and Freedom Smith and to other cronies of his on the streets of Caxton. Walking along the road he would point with his cane to the town and say, "You and that mother of yours have more of the real stuff in you than the rest of the boys and mothers of the town put together."

In all Caxton Telfer was the only man who knew books and who took them seriously. Sam sometimes found his attitude toward them puzzling and would stand with open mouth listening as Telfer swore or laughed at a book as he did at Valmore or Freedom Smith. He had a fine portrait of Browning which he kept hung in the stable and before this he would stand, his legs spread apart, and his head tilted to one side, talking.

"A rich old sport you are, eh?" he would say, grinning. "Getting yourself discussed by women and college professors in clubs, eh? You old fraud!"

Toward Mary Underwood, the school teacher who had become Sam's friend and with whom the boy sometimes walked and talked, Telfer had no charity. Mary Underwood was a sort of cinder in the eyes of Caxton. She was the only child of Silas Underwood, the town harness maker, who once had worked in a shop belonging to Windy McPherson. After the business failure of Windy he had started independently and for a time did well, sending his daughter to a school in Massachusetts. Mary did not understand the people of Caxton and the people misunderstood and distrusted her. Taking no part in the life of the town and keeping to herself and to her books she awoke a kind of fear in others. Because she did not join them at church suppers, or go from porch to porch gossiping with other women through the long summer evenings, they thought her something abnormal. On Sundays she sat alone in her pew at church and on Saturday afternoons, come storm, come sunshine, she walked on country roads and through the woods accompanied by a collie dog. She was a small woman with a straight, slender figure and had fine blue eyes filled with changing lights, hidden by the eye-glasses she almost constantly wore. Her lips were very full and red, and she sat with them parted so that the edges of her fine teeth showed. Her nose was large, and a fine reddish-brown colour glowed in her cheeks. Though different, she had, like Jane McPherson, a habit of silence; and under her silence, she, like Sam's mother, possessed an unusually strong and vigorous mind.

As a child she was a sort of half invalid and had not been on friendly footing with other children. It was then that her habit of silence and reticence had been established. The years in the school in Massachusetts restored her health but did not break this habit. She came home and took the place in the schools to earn money with which to take her back East, dreaming of a position as instructor in an eastern college. She was that rare thing, a woman scholar, loving scholarship for its own sake.

Mary Underwood's position in the town and in the schools was insecure. Out of her silent, independent way of life had sprung a misunderstanding that, at least once, had taken definite form and had come near driving her from the town and schools. That she did not succumb to the storm of criticism that for some weeks beat about her head was due to her habit of silence and to a determination to get her own way in the face of everything.

It was a suggestion of scandal that had put the grey hairs upon her head. The scandal had blown over before the time of her friendship for Sam, but he had known of it. In those days he knew of everything that went on in the town—his quick ears and eyes missed nothing. More than once he had heard the men waiting to be shaved in Sawyer's barber shop speak of her.

The tale ran that she had been involved in an affair with a real estate agent who had afterward left town. It was said that the man, a tall, fine-looking fellow, had been in love with Mary and had wanted to desert his wife and go away with her. One night he had driven to Mary's house in a closed buggy and the two had driven into the country. They had sat for hours in the covered buggy at the side of the road and talked, and people driving past had seen them there talking together.

And then she had got out of the buggy and walked home alone through snow drifts. The next day she was at school as usual. When told of it the school superintendent, a puttering old fellow with vacant eyes, had shaken his head in alarm and declared that it must be looked into. He called Mary into his little narrow office in the school building, but lost courage when she sat before him, and said nothing. The man in the barber shop, who repeated the tale, said that the real estate man drove on to a distant station and took a train to the city, and that some days later he came back to Caxton and moved his family out of town.

Sam dismissed the story from his mind. Having begun a friendship for Mary he put the man in the barber shop into a class with Windy McPherson and thought of him as a pretender and liar who talked for the sake of talk. He remembered with a shock the crude levity with which the loafers in the shop had greeted the repetition of the tale. Their comments had come back to his mind as he walked through the streets with his newspapers and had given him a kind of jolt. He went along under the trees thinking of the sunlight falling upon the grey hair as they walked together on summer afternoons, and bit his lip and opened and closed his fist convulsively.

During Mary's second year in the Caxton schools her mother died, and at the end of another year, her father, failing in the harness business, Mary became a fixture in the schools. The house at the edge of the town, the property of her mother, had come down to her and she lived there with an old aunt. After the passing of the wind of scandal concerning the real estate man the town lost interest in her. She was thirty-six at the time of her first friendship with Sam and lived alone among her books.

Sam had been deeply moved by her friendship. It had seemed to him something significant that grown people with affairs of their own should be so in earnest about his future as she and Telfer were. Boylike, he counted it a tribute to himself rather than to the winsome youth in him, and was made proud by it. Having no real feeling for books, and only pretending to have out of a desire to please, he sometimes went from one to the other of his two friends, passing off their opinions as his own.

At this trick Telfer invariably caught him. "That is not your notion," he would shout, "you have it from that school teacher. It is the opinion of a woman. Their opinions, like the books they sometimes write, are founded on nothing. They are not the real things. Women know nothing. Men only care for them because they have not had what they want from them. No woman is really big—except maybe my woman, Eleanor."

When Sam continued to be much in the company of Mary, Telfer grew more bitter.

"I would have you observe women's minds and avoid letting them influence your own," he told the boy. "They live in a world of unrealities. They like even vulgar people in books, but shrink from the simple, earthy folk about them. That school teacher is so. Is she like me? Does she, while loving books, love also the very smell of human life?"

In a way Telfer's attitude toward the kindly little school teacher became Sam's attitude. Although they walked and talked together the course of study she had planned for him he never took up and as he grew to know her better, the books she read and the ideas she advanced appealed to him less and less. He thought that she, as Telfer held, lived in a world of illusion and unreality and said so. When she lent him books, he put them in his pocket and did not read them. When he did read, he thought the books reminded him of something that hurt him. They were in some way false and pretentious. He thought they were like his father. One day he tried reading aloud to Telfer from a book Mary Underwood had lent him.

The story was one of a poetic man with long, unclean fingernails who went among people preaching the doctrine of beauty. It began with a scene on a hillside in a rainstorm where the poetic man sat under a tent writing a letter to his sweetheart.

Telfer was beside himself. Jumping from his seat under a tree by the roadside he waved his arms and shouted:

"Stop! Stop it! Do not go on with it. The story lies. A man could not write love letters under the circumstances and he was a fool to pitch his tent on a hillside. A man in a tent on a hillside in a storm would be cold and wet and getting the rheumatism. To be writing letters he would need to be an unspeakable ass. He had better be out digging a trench to keep the water from running through his tent."

Waving his arms, Telfer went off up the road and Sam followed thinking him altogether right, and, if later in life he learned that there are men who could write love letters on a piece of housetop in a flood, he did not know it then and the least suggestion of windiness or pretence lay heavy in his stomach.

Telfer had a vast enthusiasm for Bellamy's "Looking Backward," and read it aloud to his wife on Sunday afternoons, sitting under the apple trees in the garden. They had a fund of little personal jokes and sayings that they were forever laughing over, and she had infinite delight in his comments on the life and people of Caxton, but did not share his love of books. When she sometimes went to sleep in her chair during the Sunday afternoon readings he poked her with his cane and laughingly told her to wake up and listen to the dream of a great dreamer. Among Browning's verses his favourites were "A Light Woman" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," and he would recite these aloud with great gusto. He declared Mark Twain the greatest man in the world and in certain moods he would walk the road beside Sam reciting over and over one or two lines of verse, often this from Poe:

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like some Nicean bark of yore.

Then, stopping and turning upon the boy, he would demand whether or not the writing of such lines wasn't worth living a life for.

Telfer had a pack of dogs that always went with them on their walks at night and he had for them long Latin names that Sam could never remember. One summer be bought a trotting mare from Lem McCarthy and gave great attention to the colt, which he named Bellamy Boy, trotting him up and down a little driveway by the side of his house for hours at a time and declaring he would be a great trotting horse. He could recite the colt's pedigree with great gusto and when he had been talking to Sam of some book he would repay the boy's attention by saying, "You, my boy, are as far superior to the run of boys about town as the colt, Bellamy Boy, is superior to the farm horses that are hitched along Main Street on Saturday afternoons." And then, with a wave of his hand and a look of much seriousness on his face, he would add, "And for the same reason. You have been, like him, under a master trainer of youth."

One evening Sam, now grown to man's stature and full of the awkwardness and self-consciousness of his new growth, was sitting on a cracker barrel at the back of Wildman's grocery. It

was a summer evening and a breeze blew through the open doors swaying the hanging oil lamps that burned and sputtered overhead. As usual he was listening in silence to the talk that went on among the men.

Standing with legs wide apart and from time to time jabbing with his cane at Sam's legs, John Telfer held forth on the subject of love.

"It is a theme that poets do well to write of," he declared. "In writing of it they avoid the necessity of embracing it. In trying for a well-turned line they forget to look at well-turned ankles. He who sings most passionately of love has been in love the least; he woos the goddess of poesy and only gets into trouble when he, like John Keats, turns to the daughter of a villager and tries to live the lines he has written."

"Stuff and nonsense," roared Freedom Smith, who had been sitting tilted far back in a chair with his feet against the cold stove, smoking a short, black pipe, and who now brought his feet down upon the floor with a bang. Admiring Telfer's flow of words he pretended to be filled with scorn. "The night is too hot for eloquence," he bellowed. "If you must be eloquent talk of ice cream or mint juleps or recite a verse about the old swimming pool."

Telfer, wetting his finger, thrust it into the air.

"The wind is in the north-west; the beasts roar; we will have a storm," he said, winking at Valmore.

Banker Walker came into the store, followed by his daughter. She was a small, dark-skinned girl with black, quick eyes. Seeing Sam sitting with swinging legs upon the cracker barrel she spoke to her father and went out of the store. At the sidewalk she stopped and, turning, made a quick motion with her hand.

Sam jumped off the cracker barrel and strolled toward the street door. A flush was on his cheeks. His mouth felt hot and dry. He went with extreme deliberateness, stopping to bow to the banker, and for a moment lingering to read a newspaper that lay upon the cigar case, to avoid the comments he feared his going might excite among the men by the stove. In his heart he trembled lest the girl should have disappeared down the street, and with his eyes, he looked guiltily at the banker, who had joined the group at the back of the store and who now stood listening to the talk, while he read from a list held in his hand and Wildman went here and there doing up packages and repeating aloud the names of articles called off by the banker.

At the end of the lighted business section of Main Street, Sam found the girl waiting for him. She began to tell of the subterfuge by which she had escaped her father.

"I told him I would go home with my sister," she said, tossing her head.

Taking hold of the boy's hand, she led him along the shaded street. For the first time Sam walked in the company of one of the strange beings that had begun to bring him uneasy nights, and overcome with the wonder of it the blood climbed through his body and made his head reel so that he walked in silence unable to understand his own emotions. He felt the soft hand of the girl with delight; his heart pounded against the walls of his chest and a choking sensation gripped at his throat.

Walking along the street, past lighted residences where the low voices of women in talk greeted his ears, Sam was inordinately proud. He thought that he should like to turn and walk with this girl through the lighted Main Street. Had she not chosen him from among all the boys of the town; had she not, with a flutter of her little, white hand, called to him with a call that he wondered the men upon the cracker barrels had not heard? Her boldness and his own took his breath away. He could not talk. His tongue seemed paralysed.

Down the street went the boy and girl, loitering in the shadows, hurrying past the dim oil lamps at street crossings, getting from each other wave after wave of exquisite little thrills. Neither spoke. They were beyond words. Had they not together done this daring thing?

In the shadow of a tree they stopped and stood facing each other; the girl looked at the ground and stood facing the boy. Putting out his hand he laid it upon her shoulder. In the darkness on the

other side of the street a man stumbled homeward along a board sidewalk. The lights of Main Street glowed in the distance. Sam drew the girl toward him. She raised her head. Their lips met, and then, throwing her arms about his neck, she kissed him again and again eagerly.

Sam's return to Wildman's was marked by extreme caution. Although he had been absent but fifteen minutes it seemed to him that hours must have passed and he would not have been surprised to see the stores locked and darkness settled down on Main Street. It was inconceivable that the grocer could still be wrapping packages for banker Walker. Worlds had been remade. Manhood had come to him. Why! the man should have wrapped the entire store, package after package, and sent it to the ends of the earth. He lingered in the shadows at the first of the store lights where ages before he had gone, a mere boy, to meet her, a mere girl, and looked with wonder at the lighted way before him.

Sam crossed the street and, from the front of Sawyer's barber shop, looked into Wildman's. He felt like a spy looking into the camp of an enemy. There before him sat the men into whose midst he had it in his power to cast a thunderbolt. He might walk to the door and say, truthfully enough, "Here before you is a boy that by the flutter of a white hand has been made into a man; here is one who has wrung the heart of womankind and eaten his fill at the tree of the knowledge of life."

In the grocery the talk still continued among the men upon the cracker barrels who seemed unconscious of the boy's slinking entrance. Indeed, their talk had sunk. From talking of love and of poets they talked of corn and of steers. Banker Walker, his packages of groceries lying on the counter, smoked a cigar.

"You can fairly hear the corn growing to-night," he said. "It wants but another shower or two and we shall have a record crop. I plan to feed a hundred steers at my farm out Rabbit Road this winter."

The boy climbed again upon a cracker barrel and tried to look unconcerned and interested in the talk. Still his heart thumped; still a throbbing went on in his wrists. He turned and looked at the floor hoping his agitation would pass unnoticed.

The banker, taking up the packages, walked out at the door. Valmore and Freedom Smith went over to the livery barn for a game of pinochle. And John Telfer, twirling his cane and calling to a troup of dogs that loitered in an alley back of the store, took Sam for a walk into the country.

"I will continue this talk of love," said Telfer, striking at weeds along the road with his cane and from time to time calling sharply to the dogs that, filled with delight at being abroad, ran growling and tumbling over each other in the dusty road.

"That Freedom Smith is a sample of life in this town. At the word love he drops his feet upon the floor and pretends to be filled with disgust. He will talk of corn or steers or of the stinking hides that he buys, but at the mention of the word love he is like a hen that has seen a hawk in the sky. He runs about in circles making a fuss. 'Here! Here! Here!' he cries, 'you are making public something that should be kept hidden. You are doing in the light of day what should only be done with a shamed face in a darkened room.' Why, boy, if I were a woman in this town I would not stand it—I would go to New York, to France, to Paris—To be wooed for but a passing moment by a shame-faced yokel without art—uh—it is unthinkable."

The man and the boy walked in silence. The dogs, scenting a rabbit, disappeared across a long pasture, their master letting them go. From time to time he threw back his head and took long breaths of the night air.

"I am not like banker Walker," he declared. "He thinks of the growing corn in terms of fat steers feeding on the Rabbit Run farm; I think of it as something majestic. I see the long corn rows with the men and the horses half hidden, hot and breathless, and I think of a vast river of life. I catch a breath of the flame that was in the mind of the man who said, 'The land is flowing with milk and honey.' I am made happy by my thoughts not by the dollars clinking in my pocket.

"And then in the fall when the corn stands shocked I see another picture. Here and there in companies stand the armies of the corn. It puts a ring in my voice to look at them. 'These orderly armies has mankind brought out of chaos,' I say to myself. 'On a smoking black ball flung by the

hand of God out of illimitable space has man stood up these armies to defend his home against the grim attacking armies of want.'"

Telfer stopped and stood in the road with his legs spread apart. He took off his hat and throwing back his head laughed up at the stars.

"Freedom Smith should hear me now," he cried, rocking back and forth with laughter and switching his cane at the boy's legs so that Sam had to hop merrily about in the road to avoid it. "Flung by the hand of God out of illimitable space—eh! not bad, eh! I should be in Congress. I am wasted here. I am throwing priceless eloquence to dogs who prefer to chase rabbits and to a boy who is the worst little money grubber in the town."

The midsummer madness that had seized Telfer passed and for a time he walked in silence. Suddenly, putting his arm on the boy's shoulder, he stopped and pointed to where a faint light in the sky marked the lighted town.

"They are good people," he said, "but their ways are not my ways or your ways. You will go out of the town. You have genius. You will be a man of finance. I have watched you. You are not niggardly and you do not cheat and lie—result—you will not be a little business man. What have you? You have the gift of seeing dollars where the rest of the boys of the town see nothing and you are tireless after those dollars—you will be a big man of dollars, it is plain." Into his voice came a touch of bitterness. "I also was marked out. Why do I carry a cane? why do I not buy a farm and raise steers? I am the most worthless thing alive. I have the touch of genius without the energy to make it count."

Sam's mind that had been inflamed by the kiss of the girl cooled in the presence of Telfer. In the summer madness of the talking man there was something soothing to the fever in his blood. He followed the words eagerly, seeing pictures, getting thrills, filled with happiness.

At the edge of town a buggy passed the walking pair. In the buggy sat a young farmer, his arm about the waist of a girl, her head upon his shoulder. Far in the distance sounded the faint call of the dogs. Sam and Telfer sat down on a grassy bank under a tree while Telfer rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"As I promised, I will talk to you of love," he said, making a wide sweep with his arm each time as he put his cigarette into his mouth.

The grassy bank on which they lay had the rich, burned smell of the hot days. A wind rustled the standing corn that formed a kind of wall behind them. The moon was in the sky and shone down across bank after bank of serried clouds. The grandiloquence went out of the voice of Telfer and his face became serious.

"My foolishness is more than half earnest," he said. "I think that a man or boy who has set for himself a task had better let women and girls alone. If he be a man of genius, he has a purpose independent of all the world, and should cut and slash and pound his way toward his mark, forgetting every one, particularly the woman that would come to grips with him. She also has a mark toward which she goes. She is at war with him and has a purpose that is not his purpose. She believes that the pursuit of women is an end for a life. For all they now condemn Mike McCarthy who went to the asylum because of them and who, while loving life, came near to taking life, the women of Caxton do not condemn his madness for themselves; they do not blame him for loitering away his good years or for making an abortive mess of his good brain. While he made an art of the pursuit of women they applauded secretly. Did not twelve of them accept the challenge thrown out by his eyes as he loitered in the streets?"

The man, who had begun talking quietly and seriously, raised his voice and waved the lighted cigarette in the air and the boy who had begun to think again of the dark-skinned daughter of banker Walker listened attentively. The barking of the dogs grew nearer.

"If you as a boy can get from me, a grown man, an understanding of the purpose of women you will not have lived in this town for nothing. Set your mark at money making if you will, but drive at that. Let yourself but go and a sweet wistful pair of eyes seen in a street crowd or a pair of little feet running over a dance floor will retard your growth for years. No man or boy can grow toward

the purpose of a life while he thinks of women. Let him try it and he will be undone. What is to him a passing humour is to them an end. They are diabolically clever. They will run and stop and run and stop again, keeping just without his reach. He sees them here and there about him. His mind is filled with vague, delicious thoughts that come out of the very air; before he realises what he has done he has spent his years in vain pursuit and turning finds himself old and undone."

Telfer began jabbing at the ground with his stick.

"I had my chance. In New York I had money to live on and time to have made an artist of myself. I won prize after prize. The master, walking up and down back of us, lingered longest over my easel. There was a fellow sat beside me who had nothing. I made sport of him and called him Sleepy Jock after a dog we used to have about our house here in Caxton. Now I am here idly waiting for death and that Jock, where is he? Only last week I saw in a paper that he had won a place among the world's great artists by a picture he has painted. In the school I watched for a look in the eyes of the girl students and went about with them night after night winning, like Mike McCarthy, fruitless victories. Sleepy Jock had the best of it. He did not look about with open eyes but kept peering instead at the face of the master. My days were full of small successes. I could wear clothes. I could make soft-eyed girls turn to look at me in a dance hall. I remember a night. We students gave a dance and Sleepy Jock came. He went about asking for dances and the girls laughed and told him they had none to give, that the dances were taken. I followed him and had my ears filled with flattery and my card with names. In riding the wave of small success I got the habit of small success. When I could not catch the line I wanted to make a drawing live, I dropped my pencil and, taking a girl upon my arm, went for a day in the country. Once, sitting in a restaurant, I overheard two women talking of the beauty of my eyes and was made happy for a week."

Telfer threw up his hands in disgust.

"My flow of words, my ready trick of talking; to what does it bring me? Let me tell you. It has brought me to this—that at fifty I, who might have been an artist fixing the minds of thousands upon some thing of beauty or of truth, have become a village cut-up, a pot-house wit, a flinger of idle words into the air of a village intent upon raising corn.

"If you ask me why, I tell you that my mind was paralysed by small success and if you ask me where I got the taste for that, I tell you that I got it when I saw it lurking in a woman's eyes and heard the pleasant little songs that lull to sleep upon a woman's lips."

The boy, sitting upon the grassy bank beside Telfer, began thinking of life in Caxton. The man smoking the cigarette fell into one of his rare silences. The boy thought of girls that had come into his mind at night, of how he had been thrilled by a glance from the eyes of a little blue-eyed school girl who had once visited at Freedom Smith's home and of how he had gone at night to stand under her window.

In Caxton adolescent love had about it a virility befitting a land that raised so many bushels of yellow corn and drove so many fat steers through the streets to be loaded upon cars. Men and women went their ways believing, with characteristic American what-boots-it attitude toward the needs of childhood, that it was well for growing boys and girls to be much alone together. To leave them alone together was a principle with them. When a young man called upon his sweetheart, her parents sat in the presence of the two with apologetic eyes and presently disappeared leaving them alone together. When boys' and girls' parties were given in Caxton houses, parents went away leaving the children to shift for themselves.

"Now have a good time and don't tear the house down," they said, going off upstairs.

Left to themselves the children played kissing games and young men and tall half-formed girls sat on the front porches in the darkness, thrilled and half frightened, getting through their instincts, crudely and without guidance, their first peep at the mystery of life. They kissed passionately and the young men, walking home, lay upon their beds fevered and unnaturally aroused, thinking thoughts.

Young men went into the company of girls time and again without knowing aught of them except that they caused a stirring of their whole being, a kind of riot of the senses to which they returned on other evenings as a drunkard to his cups. After such an evening they found themselves, on the next morning, confused and filled with vague longings. They had lost their keenness for fun, they heard without hearing the talk of the men about the station and in the stores, they went slinking through the streets in groups and people seeing them nodded their heads and said, “It is the loutish age.”

If Sam did not have a loutish age it was due to his tireless struggle to increase the totals at the foot of the pages in the yellow bankbook, to the growing ill health of his mother that had begun to frighten him, and to the society of Valmore, Wildman, Freedom Smith, and the man who now sat musing beside him. He began to think he would have nothing more to do with the Walker girl. He remembered his sister’s affair with a young farmer and shuddered at the crude vulgarity of it. He looked over the shoulder of the man sitting beside him absorbed in thought, and saw the rolling fields stretched away in the moonlight and into his mind came Telfer’s speech. So vivid, so moving, seemed the picture of the armies of standing corn which men had set up in the fields to protect themselves against the march of pitiless Nature, and Sam, holding the picture in his mind as he followed the sense of Telfer’s talk, thought that all society had resolved itself into a few sturdy souls who went on and on regardless, and a hunger to make of himself such another arose engulfing him. The desire within him seemed so compelling that he turned and haltingly tried to express what was in his mind.

“I will try,” he stammered, “I will try to be a man. I will try to not have anything to do with them—with women. I will work and make money—and—and–”

Speech left him. He rolled over and lying on his stomach looked at the ground.

“To Hell with women and girls,” he burst forth as though throwing something distasteful out of his throat.

In the road a clamour arose. The dogs, giving up the pursuit of rabbits, came barking and growling into sight and scampered up the grassy bank, covering the man and the boy. Shaking off the reaction upon his sensitive nature of the emotions of the boy Telfer arose. His *sang froid* had returned to him. Cutting right and left with his stick at the dogs he cried joyfully, “We have had enough of eloquence from man, boy, and dog. We will be on our way. We will get this boy Sam home and tucked into bed.”

CHAPTER V

Sam was a half-grown man of fifteen when the call of the city came to him. For six years he had been upon the streets. He had seen the sun come up hot and red over the corn fields, and had stumbled through the streets in the bleak darkness of winter mornings, when the trains from the north came into Caxton covered with ice, and the trainmen stood on the deserted little platform whipping their arms and calling to Jerry Donlin to hurry with his work that they might get back into the warm stale air of the smoking car.

In the six years the boy had grown more and more determined to become a man of money. Fed by banker Walker, the silent mother, and in some subtle way by the very air he breathed, the belief within him that to make money and to have money would in some way make up for the old half-forgotten humiliations in the life of the McPherson family and would set it on a more secure foundation than the wobbly Windy had provided, grew and influenced his thoughts and his acts. Tirelessly he kept at his efforts to get ahead. In his bed at night he dreamed of dollars. Jane McPherson had herself a passion for frugality. In spite of Windy's incompetence and her own growing ill health, she would not permit the family to go into debt, and although, in the long hard winters, Sam sometimes ate cornmeal mush until his mind revolted at the thought of a corn field, yet was the rent of the little house paid on the scratch, and her boy fairly driven to increase the totals in the yellow bankbook. Even Valmore, who since the death of his wife had lived in a loft above his shop and who was a blacksmith of the old days, a workman first and a money maker later, did not despise the thought of gain.

"It is money makes the mare go," he said with a kind of reverence as banker Walker, fat, sleek, and prosperous, walked pompously out of Wildman's grocery.

Of John Telfer's attitude toward money-making, the boy was uncertain. The man followed with joyous abandonment the impulse of the moment.

"That's right," he cried impatiently when Sam, who had begun to express opinions at the gatherings in the grocery, pointed out hesitatingly that the papers took account of men of wealth no matter what their achievements, "Make money! Cheat! Lie! Be one of the men of the big world! Get your name up for a modern, high-class American!"

And in the next breath, turning upon Freedom Smith who had begun to berate the boy for not sticking to the schools and who predicted that the day would come when Sam would regret his lack of book learning, he shouted, "Let the schools go! They are but musty beds in which old clerkliness lies asleep!"

Among the travelling men who came to Caxton to sell goods, the boy, who had continued the paper selling even after attaining the stature of a man, was a favourite. Sitting in chairs before the New Leland House they talked to him of the city and of the money to be made there.

"It is the place for a live young man," they said.

Sam had a talent for drawing people into talk of themselves and of their affairs and began to cultivate travelling men. From them, he got into his nostrils a whiff of the city and, listening to them, he saw the great ways filled with hurrying people, the tall buildings touching the sky, the men running about intent upon money-making, and the clerks going on year after year on small salaries getting nowhere, a part of, and yet not understanding, the impulses and motives of the enterprises that supported them.

In this picture Sam thought he saw a place for himself. He conceived of life in the city as a great game in which he believed he could play a sterling part. Had he not in Caxton brought something out of nothing, had he not systematised and monopolised the selling of papers, had he not introduced the vending of popcorn and peanuts from baskets to the Saturday night crowds? Already boys went out in his employ, already the totals in the bank book had crept to more than seven hundred dollars. He felt within him a glow of pride at the thought of what he had done and would do.

"I will be richer than any man in town here," he declared in his pride. "I will be richer than Ed Walker."

Saturday night was the great night in Caxton life. For it the clerks in the stores prepared, for it Sam sent forth his peanut and popcorn venders, for it Art Sherman rolled up his sleeves and put the glasses close by the beer tap under the bar, and for it the mechanics, the farmers, and the labourers dressed in their Sunday best and came forth to mingle with their fellows. On Main Street crowds packed the stores, the sidewalks, and drinking places, and men stood about in groups talking while young girls with their lovers walked up and down. In the hall over Geiger's drug store a dance went on and the voice of the caller-off rose above the clatter of voices and the stamping of horses in the street. Now and then a fight broke out among the roisterers in Piety Hollow. Once a young farm hand was killed with a knife.

In and out through the crowd Sam went, pressing his wares.

"Remember the long quiet Sunday afternoon," he said, pushing a paper into the hands of a slow-thinking farmer. "Recipes for cooking new dishes," he urged to the farmer's wife. "There is a page of new fashions in dress," he told the young girl.

Not until the last light was out in the last saloon in Piety Hollow, and the last roisterer had driven off into the darkness carrying a Saturday paper in his pocket, did Sam close the day's business.

And it was on a Saturday night that he decided to drop paper selling.

"I will take you into business with me," announced Freedom Smith, stopping him as he hurried by. "You are getting too old to sell papers and you know too much."

Sam, still intent upon the money to be made on that particular Saturday night, did not stop to discuss the matter with Freedom, but for a year he had been looking quietly about for something to go into and now he nodded his head as he hurried away.

"It is the end of romance," shouted Telfer, who stood beside Freedom Smith before Geiger's drug store and who had heard the offer. "A boy, who has seen the secret workings of my mind, who has heard me spout Poe and Browning, will become a merchant, dealing in stinking hides. I am overcome by the thought."

The next day, sitting in the garden back of his house, Telfer talked to Sam of the matter at length.

"For you, my boy, I put the matter of money in the first place," he declared, leaning back in his chair, smoking a cigarette and from time to time tapping Eleanor on the shoulder with his cane. "For any boy I put money-making in the first place. It is only women and fools who despise money-making. Look at Eleanor here. The time and thought she puts into the selling of hats would be the death of me, but it has been the making of her. See how fine and purposeful she has become. Without the millinery business she would be a purposeless fool intent upon clothes and with it she is all a woman should be. It is like a child to her."

Eleanor, who had turned to laugh at her husband, looked instead at the ground and a shadow crossed her face. Telfer, who had begun talking thoughtlessly, out of his excess of words, glanced from the woman to the boy. He knew that the suggestion regarding a child had touched a secret regret in Eleanor, and began trying to efface the shadow on her face by throwing himself into the subject that chanced to be on his tongue, making the words roll and tumble from his lips.

"No matter what may come in the future, in our day money-making precedes many virtues that are forever on men's lips," he declared fiercely as though trying to down an opponent. "It is one of the virtues that proves man not a savage. It has lifted him up—not money-making, but the power to make money. Money makes life livable. It gives freedom and destroys fear. Having it means sanitary houses and well-made clothes. It brings into men's lives beauty and the love of beauty. It enables a man to go adventuring after the stuff of life as I have done.

"Writers are fond of telling stories of the crude excesses of great wealth," he went on hurriedly, glancing again at Eleanor. "No doubt the things they tell of do happen. Money, and not the ability and

the instinct to make money, is at fault. And what of the cruder excesses of poverty, the drunken men who beat and starve their families, the grim silences of the crowded, unsanitary houses of the poor, the inefficient, and the defeated? Go sit around the lounging room of the most vapid rich man's city club as I have done, and then sit among the workers of a factory at the noon hour. Virtue, you will find, is no fonder of poverty than you and I, and the man who has merely learned to be industrious, and who has not acquired that eager hunger and shrewdness that enables him to get on, may build up a strong dexterous body while his mind is diseased and decaying."

Grasping his cane and beginning to be carried away by the wind of his eloquence Telfer forgot Eleanor and talked for his love of talking.

"The mind that has in it the love of the beautiful, that stuff that makes our poets, artists, musicians, and actors, needs this turn for shrewd money getting or it will destroy itself," he declared. "And the really great artists have it. In books and stories the great men starve in garrets. In real life they are more likely to ride in carriages on Fifth Avenue and have country places on the Hudson. Go, see for yourself. Visit the starving genius in his garret. It is a hundred to one that you will find him not only incapable in money getting but also incapable in the very art for which he starves."

After the hurried word from Freedom Smith, Sam began looking for a buyer for the paper business. The place offered appealed to him and he wanted a chance at it. In the buying of potatoes, butter, eggs, apples, and hides he thought he could make money, also, he knew that the dogged persistency with which he had kept at the putting of money in the bank had caught Freedom's imagination, and he wanted to take advantage of the fact.

Within a few days the deal was made. Sam got three hundred and fifty dollars for the list of newspaper customers, the peanut and popcorn business and the transfer of the exclusive agencies he had arranged with the dailies of Des Moines and St. Louis. Two boys bought the business, backed by their fathers. A talk in the back room of the bank, with the cashier telling of Sam's record as a depositor, and the seven hundred dollars surplus clinched the deal. When it came to the deal with Freedom, Sam took him into the back room at the bank and showed his savings as he had shown them to the fathers of the two boys. Freedom was impressed. He thought the boy would make money for him. Twice within a week Sam had seen the silent suggestive power of cash.

The deal Sam made with Freedom included a fair weekly wage, enough to more than take care of all his wants, and in addition he was to have two-thirds of all he saved Freedom in the buying. Freedom on the other hand was to furnish horse, vehicle, and keep for the horse, while Sam was to take care of the horse. The prices to be paid for the things bought were to be fixed each morning by Freedom, and if Sam bought at less than the prices named two-thirds of the savings went to him. The arrangement was suggested by Sam, who thought he would make more from the saving than from the wage.

Freedom Smith discussed even the most trivial matter in a loud voice, roaring and shouting in the store and on the streets. He was a great inventor of descriptive names, having a name of his own for every man, woman and child he knew and liked. "Old Maybe-Not" he called Windy McPherson and would roar at him in the grocery asking him not to shed rebel blood in the sugar barrel. He drove about the country in a low phaeton buggy that rattled and squeaked enormously and had a wide rip in the top. To Sam's knowledge neither the buggy nor Freedom were washed during his stay with the man. He had a method of his own in buying. Stopping in front of a farm house he would sit in his buggy and roar until the farmer came out of the field or the house to talk with him. And then haggling and shouting he would make his deal or drive on his way while the farmer, leaning on the fence, laughed as at a wayward child.

Freedom lived in a large old brick house facing one of Caxton's best streets. His house and yard were an eyesore to his neighbours who liked him personally. He knew this and would stand on his front porch laughing and roaring about it. "Good morning, Mary," he would shout at the neat German

woman across the street. “Wait and you’ll see me clean up about here. I’m going at it right now. I’m going to brush the flies off the fence first.”

Once he ran for a county office and got practically every vote in the county.

Freedom had a passion for buying up old half-worn buggies and agricultural implements, bringing them home to stand in the yard, gathering rust and decay, and swearing they were as good as new. In the lot were a half dozen buggies and a family carriage or two, a traction engine, a mowing machine, several farm wagons and other farm tools gone beyond naming. Every few days he came home bringing a new prize. They overflowed the yard and crept onto the porch. Sam never knew him to sell any of this stuff. He had at one time sixteen sets of harness all broken and unrepaired in the barn and in a shed back of the house. A great flock of chickens and two or three pigs wandered about among this junk and all the children of the neighbourhood joined Freedom’s four and ran howling and shouting over and under the mass.

Freedom’s wife, a pale, silent woman, rarely came out of the house. She had a liking for the industrious, hard-working Sam and occasionally stood at the back door and talked with him in a low, even voice at evening as he stood unhitching his horse after a day on the road. Both she and Freedom treated him with great respect.

As a buyer Sam was even more successful than at the paper selling. He was a buyer by instinct, working a wide stretch of country very systematically and within a year more than doubling the bulk of Freedom’s purchases.

There is a little of Windy McPherson’s grotesque pretentiousness in every man and his son soon learned to look for and to take advantage of it. He let men talk until they had exaggerated or overstated the value of their goods, then called them sharply to accounts, and before they had recovered from their confusion drove home the bargain. In Sam’s day, farmers did not watch the daily market reports, in fact, the markets were not systematised and regulated as they were later, and the skill of the buyer was of the first importance. Having the skill, Sam used it constantly to put money into his pockets, but in some way kept the confidence and respect of the men with whom he traded.

The noisy, blustering Freedom was as proud as a father of the trading ability that developed in the boy and roared his name up and down the streets and in the stores, declaring him the smartest boy in Iowa.

“Mighty little of old Maybe-Not in that boy,” he would shout to the loafers in the store.

Although Sam had an almost painful desire for order and system in his own affairs, he did not try to bring these influences into Freedom’s affairs, but kept his own records carefully and bought potatoes and apples, butter and eggs, furs and hides, with untiring zeal, working always to swell his commissions. Freedom took the risks in the business and many times profited little, but the two liked and respected each other and it was through Freedom’s efforts that Sam finally got out of Caxton and into larger affairs.

One evening in the late fall Freedom came into the stable where Sam stood taking the harness off his horse.

“Here is a chance for you, my boy,” he said, putting his hand affectionately on Sam’s shoulder. There was a note of tenderness in his voice. He had written to the Chicago firm to whom he sold most of the things he bought, telling of Sam and his ability, and the firm had replied making an offer that Sam thought far beyond anything he might hope for in Caxton. In his hand he held this offer.

When Sam read the letter his heart jumped. He thought that it opened for him a wide new field of effort and of money making. He thought that at last he had come to the end of his boyhood and was to have his chance in the city. Only that morning old Doctor Harkness had stopped him at the door as he set out for work and, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb to where in the house his mother lay, wasted and asleep, had told him that in another week she would be gone, and Sam, heavy of heart and filled with uneasy longing, had walked through the streets to Freedom’s stable wishing that he also might be gone.

Now he walked across the stable floor and hung the harness he had taken from the horse upon a peg in the wall.

“I will be glad to go,” he said heavily.

Freedom walked out of the stable door beside the young McPherson who had come to him as a boy and was now a broad-shouldered young man of eighteen. He did not want to lose Sam. He had written the Chicago company because of his affection for the boy and because he believed him capable of something more than Caxton offered. Now he walked in silence holding the lantern aloft and guiding the way among the wreckage in the yard, filled with regrets.

By the back door of the house stood the pale, tired-looking wife who, putting out her hand, took the hand of the boy. There were tears in her eyes. And then saying nothing Sam turned and hurried off up the street, Freedom and his wife walked to the front gate and watched him go. From a street corner, where he stopped in the shadow of a tree, Sam could see them there, the wind swinging the lantern in Freedom’s hand and the slender little old wife making a white blotch against the darkness.

CHAPTER VI

Sam went along the board sidewalk homeward bound, hurried by the driving March wind that had sent the lantern swinging in Freedom's hand. At the front of a white frame residence a grey-haired old man stood leaning on the gate and looking at the sky.

"We shall have a rain," he said in a quavering voice, as though giving a decision in the matter, and then turned and without waiting for an answer went along a narrow path into the house.

The incident brought a smile to Sam's lips followed by a kind of weariness of mind. Since the beginning of his work with Freedom he had, day after day, come upon Henry Kimball standing by his gate and looking at the sky. The man was one of Sam's old newspaper customers who stood as a kind of figure in the town. It was said of him that in his youth he had been a gambler on the Mississippi River and that he had taken part in more than one wild adventure in the old days. After the Civil War he had come to end his days in Caxton, living alone and occupying himself by keeping year after year a carefully tabulated record of weather variations. Once or twice a month during the warm season he stumbled into Wildman's and, sitting by the stove, talked boastfully of the accuracy of his records and the doings of a mangy dog that trotted at his heels. In his present mood the endless sameness and uneventfulness of the man's life seemed to Sam amusing and in some way sad.

"To depend upon going to the gate and looking at the sky to give point to a day—to look forward to and depend upon that—what deadliness!" he thought, and, thrusting his hand into his pocket, felt with pleasure the letter from the Chicago company that was to open so much of the big outside world to him.

In spite of the shock of unexpected sadness that had come with what he felt was almost a definite parting with Freedom, and the sadness brought on by his mother's approaching death, Sam felt a strong thrill of confidence in his own future that made his homeward walk almost cheerful. The thrill got from reading the letter handed him by Freedom was renewed by the sight of old Henry Kimball at the gate, looking at the sky.

"I shall never be like that, sitting in a corner of the world watching a mangy dog chase a ball and peering day after day at a thermometer," he thought.

The three years in Freedom Smith's service had taught Sam not to doubt his ability to cope with such business problems as might come in his way. He knew that he had become what he wanted to be, a good business man, one of the men who direct and control the affairs in which they are concerned because of a quality in them called Business Sense. He recalled with pleasure the fact that the men of Caxton had stopped calling him a bright boy and now spoke of him as a good business man.

At the gate before his own house he stopped and stood thinking of these things and of the dying woman within. Back into his mind came the old man he had seen at the gate and with him the thought that his mother's life had been as barren as that of the man who depended for companionship upon a dog and a thermometer.

"Indeed," he said to himself, pursuing the thought, "it has been worse. She has not had a fortune on which to live in peace nor has she had the remembrance of youthful days of wild adventure that must comfort the last days of the old man. Instead she has been watching me as the old man watches his thermometer and Father has been the dog in her house chasing playthings." The figure pleased him. He stood at the gate, the wind singing in the trees along the street and driving an occasional drop of rain against his cheek, and thought of it and of his life with his mother. During the last two or three years he had been trying to make things up to her. After the sale of the newspaper business and the beginning of his success with Freedom he had driven her from the washtub and since the beginning of her ill health he had spent evening after evening with her instead of going to Wildman's to sit with the four friends and hear the talk that went on among them. No more did he walk with

Telfer or Mary Underwood on country roads but sat, instead, by the bedside of the sick woman or, the night falling fair, helped her to an arm chair upon the grass plot at the front of the house.

The years, Sam felt, had been good years. They had brought him an understanding of his mother and had given a seriousness and purpose to the ambitious plans he continued to make for himself. Alone together, the mother and he had talked little, the habit of a lifetime making much speech impossible to her and the growing understanding of her making it unnecessary to him. Now in the darkness, before the house, he thought of the evenings he had spent with her and of the pitiful waste that had been made of her fine life. Things that had hurt him and against which he had been bitter and unforgiving became of small import, even the doings of the pretentious Windy, who in the face of Jane's illness continued to go off after pension day for long periods of drunkenness, and who only came home to weep and wail through the house, when the pension money was gone, regretting, Sam tried in fairness to think, the loss of both the washwoman and the wife.

"She has been the most wonderful woman in the world," he told himself and tears of happiness came into his eyes at the thought of his friend, John Telfer, who in bygone days had praised the mother to the newsboy trotting beside him on moonlit roads. Into his mind came a picture of her long gaunt face, ghastly now against the white of the pillows. A picture of George Eliot, tacked to the wall behind a broken harness in the kitchen of Freedom Smith's house, had caught his eye some days before, and in the darkness he took it from his pocket and put it to his lips, realising that in some indescribable way it was like his mother as she had been before her illness. Freedom's wife had given him the picture and he had been carrying it, taking it out of his pocket on lonely stretches of road as he went about his work.

Sam went quietly around the house and stood by an old shed, a relic of an attempt by Windy to embark in raising chickens. He wanted to continue the thoughts of his mother. He began recalling her youth and the details of a long talk they had held together on the lawn before the house. It was extraordinarily vivid in his mind. He thought that even now he could remember every word that had been said. The sick woman had talked of her youth in Ohio, and as she talked pictures had come into the boy's mind. She had told him of her days as a bound girl in the family of a thin-lipped, hard-fisted New Englander, who had come West to take a farm, and of her struggles to obtain an education, of the pennies saved to buy books, of her joy when she had passed examinations and become a school teacher, and of her marriage to Windy—then John McPherson.

Into the Ohio village the young McPherson had come, to cut a figure in the town's life. Sam had smiled at the picture she drew of the young man who walked up and down the village street with girls on his arms, and who taught a Bible class in the Sunday school.

When Windy proposed to the young school teacher she had accepted him eagerly, thinking it unbelievably romantic that so dashing a man should have chosen so obscure a figure among all the women of the town.

"And even now I am not sorry although it has meant nothing but labour and unhappiness for me," the sick woman had told her son.

After marriage to the young dandy, Jane had come with him to Caxton where he bought a store and where, within three years, he had put the store into the sheriff's hands and his wife into the position of town laundress.

In the darkness a grim smile, half scorn, half amusement, had flitted across the face of the dying woman as she told of a winter when Windy and another young fellow went, from schoolhouse to schoolhouse, over the state giving a show. The ex-soldier had become a singer of comic songs and had written letter after letter to the young wife telling of the applause that greeted his efforts. Sam could picture the performances, the little dimly-lighted schoolhouses with the weatherbeaten faces shining in the light of the leaky magic lantern, and the delighted Windy running here and there, talking the jargon of stageland, arraying himself in his motley and strutting upon the little stage.

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