

Merwin Samuel

**Henry Is Twenty: A
Further Episodic History of
Henry Calverly, 3rd**



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Merwin S.

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S. Merwin — «Public Domain»,

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OF PATTERNS AND PERSONS

It would be ungracious to let this book go out into a preoccupied world without some word of gratitude to those who have written regarding the young Henry as he has appeared from month to month in a magazine. The letters have been the kindest and most stimulating imaginable; and have surprised me, for I have never found it easy to picture Henry as a popular hero of fiction.

He isn't, of course, a hero at all. His weaknesses are too plain – the little evidences of vanity in him, his selfcentred moments, his errant susceptibilities – and heroes can't have weaknesses. And heroes – in any well-regulated pattern-story – must 'turn out well.' Henry, in this book, doesn't really turn out at all. His success in Episode X is a rather alarming accident. I think he'll do well enough, when he's forty or so. At twenty, no. He has huge doses of life's medicine yet to swallow. And all his problems are complicated by the touch of genius that is in him.

Another thing: there couldn't have been a Mamie Wilcox in our pattern-story. And certainly not a Corinne. Hardly even a Martha. For a 'divided love interest' destroys your pattern. Yet Marthas, Corinnes, Mamies occur everywhere. So I can't very well apologise for their presence here.

We might, of course, have had Henry overthrow the Old Cinch in Sunbury; clean up the town. But he didn't happen to be a St George that summer. And then, so many heroes of pattern-stories, these two decades, have slain municipal dragons!

He might have listened in a deeper humility to the worldly wisdom of Uncle Arthur. But he didn't. He had to live his own life, not Uncle Arthur's. His way was the harder, but he couldn't help that.

I would have liked to pursue further the Mildred-Humphrey romance; including Arthur V. and the curious triangle that resulted; but the crisis didn't come in that year.

And against the temptation to dwell with Madame Watt and her husband I have had, here, to set my face. Though something of that story will be told in a book yet to come, dealing with an older, changed Henry. The richly dramatic career of *Madame* underlay the irony of Henry's marriage; and we shall have to deal with that, or at least with the events that grew out of it.

I have said that Henry would turn out well enough in time. From the angle of the pattern-story this obviously couldn't be. It would be said that if he *was* ever to succeed he should have got started by this time in habits of industry and so forth.

I won't say that this is nonsense, but instead will quote from the autobiography of Charles Francis Adams (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916). Mr Adams, from his fifteenth to his twenty-fifth year, kept a diary. Then he sealed the volumes in a package. Thirty years later he opened the package and read every word. He says: —

'The revelation of myself to myself was positively shocking... It wasn't that the thing was bad or that my record was discreditable; it was worse! It was silly. That it was crude, goes without saying. *That* I didn't mind! But I did blush and groan and swear over its unmistakable, unconscious immaturity and ineptitude, its conceit, its weakness and its cant... As I finished each volume it went into the fire; and I stood over it until the last leaf was ashes... I have never felt the same about myself since. I now humbly thank fortune that I have got almost through life without making a conspicuous ass of myself.'

Mr Adams, immediately after the period covered by the diary, plunged into the Civil War, and emerged with the well-earned brevet rank of brigadier-general. He was later eminent as publicist,

author, administrator, a recognised leader of thought in a troublous time. He became president of the Union Pacific Railroad. And at the last he was the subject of a memorial address by the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge.

As Henry is still several years short of twenty-five perhaps there is hope for him.

Concord, Mass.

S. M

I – THE IRRATIONAL ANIMAL

1

It was late May in Sunbury, Illinois, and twenty minutes past eight in the morning.

The spacious lawns and the wide strips of turf between sidewalk and roadway in every avenue and street were lush with crowding young blades of green. The maples, oaks, and elms were vivid with the exuberant youth of the year.

Throughout the village, brisk young men, care-worn men of middle age, a few elderly men were hurrying toward the old red-brick station whence the eight-twenty-nine would shortly carry them into the dust and sweat and smoke of a business day in Chicago. The swarms of sleepy-eyed clerks, book-keepers, office boys and girl stenographers had gone in on the seven-eleven and the seven-thirty-two.

Along Simpson Street the grocers, in their aprons, already had out their sidewalk racks heaped with seasonable vegetables and fruits (out-of-season delicacies had not then become commonplace of life in Sunbury; strawberries appeared when the local berries were ripe, not sooner). The two butcher shops were decorated with red and buff carcasses hung in rows. A whistling, coatless youth had just swept out Donovan's drug store and was wiping off the marble counter before the marble and glass soda fountain. Through the windows of the Sunbury National Bank Alfred Knight could be seen filling the inkwells and putting out fresh blotters and pens. The neat little restaurant known as 'Stanley's' (the Stanleys were a respectable coloured couple) was still nearly full of men who ate ham and eggs, pounded beefsteak, fried potatoes, and buckwheat cakes, and drank huge cups of gray-brown coffee; with, at the rear tables, two or three family groups. And from numerous boarding-houses and dormitories in the northern section of the overgrown village students of both sexes were converging on the oak-shaded campus by the lake.

All of Sunbury appeared to be up and about the business of the day; all, perhaps, except Henry Calverly, 3rd, who sat, dressed except for his coat, heavy-eyed, a hair brush in either hand, hands resting limp on knees, on the edge of his narrow iron bed. This, in Mrs Wilcox's boardinghouse in Douglass Street, one block south of Simpson; top floor.

If the present reader has, by chance, had earlier acquaintance with Henry, it should be explained that he is now to be pictured not as a youth of eighteen going on nineteen but as a young man of twenty going on twenty-one.

That figure, twenty-one, of significance in the secret thoughts of any growing boy, was of peculiar, stirring significance to the sensitive, imaginative Henry. It marked the beginning of what is sometimes termed Life. It suggested alarming but interesting responsibilities. On that day, beginning with the stroke of the midnight hour, guardians ceased to function and independence set in. One was a citizen. One voted. In Henry's case, the crowning symbol of manhood would be deferred a year, as Election Day was to fall on the fifth of November and his birthday was the seventh; but that so trivial a mere fact bore small weight in the face of potential citizenship might have been indicated by the faint blonde fringe along his upper lip. This fringe was a new venture. He stroked it much of the time, and stole glances at it in mirrors. He could twist it up a little at the ends.

The rest of him indicated a taste that was hardly bent on the inexpensive as such. His duck trousers (this was the middle nineties) were smartly creased and rustled with starch. His white canvas shoes were not 'sneakers' but had heavy soles and half-heels of red rubber. His coat, lying now across the iron tube that marked the foot of the bed, was a double-breasted blue serge, unlined, well-tailored. The hat, hung on a mirror post above the 'golden oak' bureau, was of creamy white felt. He had given up spectacles for nose glasses with a black silk cord.

Nearly two years earlier his mother had died. He had lived on, caught in a drift of time and circumstance, keeping, without any particular plan, this little room with its sloping ceiling. The price was an item, of course – six dollars a week for room and board. You couldn't do better in Sunbury, even then. Memories haunted the place, naturally enough. Loneliness had dwelt close with him.

His mother's picture, in a silver frame, stood at the right of the pincushion; at the left, in hammered brass ('repoussé work') was a 'cabinet size' photograph of Martha Caldwell. A woven-wire rack on the wall held half a hundred snapshots of girls, boys, and groups, in about a third of which figured Martha's smiling, sensible, pleasantly freckled face. A guitar in an old green bag leaned against the wall behind his mother's old trunk; it had not been out of the bag in more than a year. An assortment of neck-ties hung over the gas-jet by the bureau. Tacked about on the wall were six or eight copies of Gibson girls; rather good copies, barring a certain stiffness of line. On the seat in the one dormer window reposed two cushions, one covered with college pennants, the other with cigar bands laboriously cross-stitched together; both from, the hands of Martha.

Henry's little bookcase was not uninteresting. It contained the following books: Daily Strength for Daily Needs, Browning, Trollope, and Hawthorne in sets, Sonnets, from the Portuguese, Words often Mispronounced, Longfellow, complete in one fat volume. Red Line Edition, and Six Thousand Puzzles, all of which had been his mother's; Green's History of the English People, Boswell's Johnson, both largely uncut, and the Discourses of Epictetus, which three had come as Christmas or birthday gifts; and exactly one volume, a work by an obscure author (who was pictured in the frontispiece with a bristling moustache and intensely knit brows) entitled Will Power and Self Mastery, which offered the only clue as to Henry's own taste in book buying.

His taste in reading was another matter. The novels and romances he had devoured during certain periods of his teens had mostly come from the Sunbury Free Public Library. Lately, however, apart from thrilling moments with *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *Under the Red Rose*, and *The Princess Aline*, he had found difficulty in reading at all. Something was stirring within him, something restlessly positive, an impulse to give out rather than take in. Though he had, at intervals, lunged with determination at the Green and the Boswell. This effort, indeed, had been repeated so many times that he occasionally caught himself speaking of these authors as if he had read them exhaustively.

The bottom drawer of the bureau was a third full of unfinished manuscripts – attempts at novels, short stories, poems, plays – each faithfully reflecting its immediate source of inspiration. There were paragraphs that might have been written by a little Dickens; there were thinly diluted specimens of Dumas, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Richard Harding Davis, Thackeray. The rest was all Kipling, prose and verse. Everybody was writing Kipling then.

A step sounded in the hall. The knob turned softly; the door opened a little way; and the thinnish, moderately pretty face of Mamie Wilcox appeared – pale blue eyes with the beginnings of hollows beneath them, fair skin, straight hay-coloured hair, wisps of it straying down across forehead and cheek, thin nose, soft but rather sulky mouth. She was probably twenty-two or twenty-three at this time.

All she said was, 'Oh!' – very low.

'Wonder you wouldn't knock!' said he.

'Wonder you wouldn't get up before noon!' she responded smartly, but still in that cautious voice; then added, 'Here, I'll leave the towels, and come back.' And she slipped into the room, a heavier and more shapely figure of a girl than was suggested by the face, a girl in a full-length gingham apron and little shoes with unexpectedly high heels; not 'French' heels, but the sloping style known then as 'military.'

2

Henry's colour was rising a little. He cleared his throat, and said, mumbling, 'Leave anything you like.'

'I'll do just that,' – she turned, with a flirt of her apron and stood, between washstand and door, surveying him – 'what I like, and nothing more.'... Her eyes wandered now from him to the picture at the left of the pincushion, then to the snapshots on the wall, and she smiled, very self-contained, very knowing, with the expression that the young call 'sarcastic.' The adjective came to mind. Henry's colour was mounting higher.

'Pretty snappy to-day, ain't we?' said he.

'Yes, when we're snapped at,' said she.

There was a silence that ran on into seconds and tens of seconds.

Then, acting on an impulse of astonishing suddenness, he sprang toward her.

With almost equal agility she stepped away. But he caught one hand.

She had the door-knob in her other hand. She drew the door open, then, indecisively, pushed it nearly to.

'Be careful!' she whispered. 'They'll hear!'

She made a small effort to free her hand. For a moment they stood tugging at each other.

When Henry spoke, in an effort to appear the off-hand man of the world he assuredly was not, his voice sounded weak and husky.

'Whew – strong!'

'Suppose I slapped.'

'Slap all you like.'

'What would Martha Caldwell say?'

There was a gloomy sort of anger on Henry's red face. He jerked her violently toward him.

'Stop! You're hurting my wrist!' With which she yielded a little. He found himself about to take her in his arms. He heard her whispering – 'For Heaven's sake be careful! They'll surely hear!'

He was most unhappy. He pushed her roughly away, and rushed to the window.,

He knew from the silence that she was lingering. He hated her. And himself.

She said: 'Well, you needn't get mad.'

Then, slowly, cautiously, she let herself out. He heard her moving composedly along the hall.

He felt weak. And deeply guilty. For a long time this moment had been a possibility; now it had taken place. What if some one had seen her come in! What if she should come again! What if she should tell!..

He found one hair brush on the floor, the other on the bed, and brushed his hair; donned his coat, buttoning it and smoothing it down about his shapely torso with a momentary touch of complacency; glanced at the mirror; twisted up his moustache; then stood waiting for his colour to go down.

Suddenly, with one of his quick impulses, he sprang at the bookcase, drew out the *Epictetus*– it was a little book, bound in 'ooze' calf of an olive-green colour – and read these words (the book opened there): —

'To the rational animal only is the irrational intolerable.

He lowered the book and repeated the phrase aloud.

3

A little later – red about the ears, and given to sudden starts when the swinging pantry doors opened to let a student waiter in or out – he sat, quite erect, in the dining room and bolted a boarding-house breakfast of stewed prunes, oatmeal, fried steak, fried potatoes, fried mush swimming in brown sugar syrup, and coffee. The *Discourses of Epictetus* lay at his elbow.

After this he walked – stiffly self-conscious, book under arm – over to Simpson Street, and took a chair and an *Inter Ocean* at Schultz and Schwartz's, among the line of those waiting to be shaved.

This accomplished he paused outside, on the curb, to pencil this entry in a red pocket account-book: —

'Shave – 10 c.'

He wavered when passing Donovan's; stepped in and consumed a frosted maple shake. Which necessitated the further entry in the red book: —

'Soda – 10 c.'

In front of Berger's grocery he met Martha Caldwell. They walked together to the corner.

Martha was a sizable girl, about as tall as Henry, with large blue eyes, an attractively short nose, abundant brown hair coiled away under her flat straw hat, and a general air of good sense. Martha was really a goodlooking young woman, and would have been popular had not Henry stood in her light. She had a small gift at drawing (the Gibson copies in Henry's room were hers) and danced gracefully enough. Monday and Thursday evenings were his regular calling times; and there were so many other evenings when he was expected to take her to this house or that with 'the crowd' that the other local 'men' had long since given up calling at her house. But they were not engaged.

On this occasion there was constraint between them. They spoke of the lovely weather. She, knowing Henry pretty well, looked with some curiosity at his book. Henry glanced sidelong at her across a wide bottomless gulf, and stroked his moustache. He was groping desperately for words. He began to resent her. He presented an outer front of stem self-control.

At the corner they stopped and stood in a silence that grew rapidly embarrassing.

She lowered her eyes and dug with the point of her parasol in the turf by the stone walk.

He thrust both hands into his trousers' pockets, spread his feet, and stared across at the long veranda of the Sunbury House. It seemed to him that he had never been so unhappy.

'Are you' – Martha began; hesitated; went on – 'were you thinking of coming around this evening?'

'Why – it's Thursday, ain't it?'

'Yes,' she said, 'it's Thursday.'

'Listen, Martha!' Was it possible that she suspected something? But how could she! His ears were getting red again. He knew it. She must never, never know about Mamie!.. 'Listen, I may have to go down to Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's.'

'Oh,' she murmured, 'that musicale.'

'Yes.' Eagerness was creeping into his voice. 'Anne Mayer Stelton. She's been over studying with Marchesi, you know. Mrs Henderson asked specially to have me cover it.'

'Why don't you go?'

'Well – you see how it is. Of course, I'd hate –'

'You'd better go.' Saying which Martha turned away down Filbert Avenue, and left him standing there.

He bit his lip; pulled at his moustache. 'I ought to do something for her,' he thought. 'Buy some flowers – or a box of Devoe's.'

This was an idle thought; for the day, Thursday, lay much too close to the financially lean end of the week to permit of flowers or candy. And he hadn't asked anywhere for a dollar of credit these nearly two years. Still, he felt faintly the warmth of his kindly intention.

It didn't seem altogether right to let her go like that. They had not before drifted so near a quarrel. On the farther side of the street he paused, and glanced down the avenue.

A smart trap that he had never seen before had pulled up, midway of the block. An impeccable coachman sat stiffly upon an indubitable box. A man who appeared to have reddish hair, dressed in a brown cutaway suit and Derby hat, a man with a pronounced if close-cropped red moustache and a suggestively interesting band of mourning about his left sleeve, was leaning out, gracefully, graciously, talking to – Martha. And Martha was listening.

Henry moved on, little confused pangs of quite unreasonable jealousy stabbing at his heart, and entered the business-and-editorial office of *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury*, where he worked.

Here he laid down the *Discourses of Epictetus* and asked Humphrey Weaver, untitled editor of the paper (old man Boice, the owner, would never permit any one but himself to be known by that title), for the galley proofs of the week's 'Personal Mention.'

He found this item: —

Mr James B. Merchant, Jr., of Greggs, Merchant & Co., was a guest of Mr and Mrs Ames at the Country Club on Saturday evening. Mr Merchant has leased for the summer the apartment of M. B. Wills, on Lower Filbert Avenue.

That was the man! James B. Merchant was a bachelor, rich, a famous cotillion leader on the South Side, Chicago, an only son of the original James B. Merchant.

And Martha had gone to the Country Club Saturday with the Ames. This curious tension between himself and Martha had then first bordered on the acute. Mr Ames disapproved of Henry; he felt that Martha shouldn't have gone. And now, of course, her lack of consideration for himself was leading her into new complications.

He sat moodily fingering the papers on the littered, ink-stained table that served him for a desk. He was disturbed, uncomfortable, but couldn't settle on what seemed a proper mental attitude. He was jealous; but he mustn't let his jealousy carry him to the point of taking a definite stand with Martha, because – well...

Life seemed very difficult.

4

The *Voice* office occupied what had once been a shop, opposite the hotel. The show window of plate glass now displayed the splintery rear panels of old Mr Boice's rolltop desk, that was heaped, on top, with back numbers of the *Voice*, the *Inter Ocean* and the *Congressional Record*, and a pile of inky zinc etchings mounted on wood blocks.

Within, back of a railing, were Humphrey Weaver's desk and Henry Calverly's table.

Humphrey was tall, rather thin and angular, with a long face, long nose, long chin, swarthy complexion, and quick, quizzical brown eyes with innumerable fine wrinkles about them. When he smiled, his whole face seemed to wrinkle back, displaying many large teeth in a cavernous mouth.

Humphrey might have been twenty-five or six. He was a reticent young man, with no girl or women friends that one ever saw, a fondness for the old corn-cob that he was always scraping, filling, or smoking, and a secret passion for the lesser known laws of physics. He lived alone, in a barn back of the old Parmenter place. He had divided the upper story into living and sleeping rooms, and put in hardwood floors and simple furniture and a piano. Downstairs, in what he called his shop, were lathes, a workbench, innumerable wood-and-metal working tools, a dozen or more of heavy metal wheels set, at right angles, in circular frames, and several odd little round machines suspended from the ceiling at the ends of twisted cords. In one corner stood a number of box kites, very large ones. And there were large planes of silk on spruce frames. He was an alumnus of the local university, but had made few friends, and had never been known in the town. Henry hadn't heard of him before the previous year, when he had taken the desk in the *Voice* office.

'Say, Hen,' – Henry looked up from his copy paper – ; 'Mrs Henderson looked in a few minutes ago, and left a programme and a list of guests for her show to-night. She wants to be sure and have you there. You can do it, can't you?'

Henry nodded listlessly.

'It seems there's to be a contralto, too – somebody that's visiting her. She – Sister Henderson – appears to take you rather seriously, my boy. Wants you particularly to hear the new girl. One Corinne Doag. We,' – Humphrey smoked meditatively, then finished his sentence – 'we talked you over, the lady and I. I promised you'd come.'

At noon, the editorial staff of two lunched at Stanley's.

'Wha'd you and Mrs Henderson say about me?' asked Henry, over the pie.

'She says,' remarked Humphrey, the wrinkles multiplying about his eyes, 'that you have temperament. She thinks it's a shame.'

'What's a shame?' muttered Henry.

'Whatever has happened to you. I told her you were the steadiest boy I ever knew. Don't drink, smoke, or flirt. I didn't add that you enter every cent you spend in that little red book; but I've seen you doing it and been impressed. But I mentioned that you're the most conscientious reporter I ever saw. That started her. It seems that you're nothing of the sort. My boy, she set you before me in a new light. You begin to appear complex and interesting.'

Still muttering, Henry said, 'Nothing so very interesting about me.'

'It seems that you put on an opera here – directed it, or sang it, or something. Before my time.'

'That was *Iolanthe*,' said Henry, with a momentarily complacent memory.

'And you sang – all over the place, apparently. Why don't you sing now?'

'It's too,' – Henry was mumbling, flushing, and groping for a word – 'too physical.'

Then, with a sudden movement that gave Humphrey a little start, the boy leaned over the table, pulled at his moustache, and asked, gloomily: 'Listen! Do you think a man can change his nature?'

Humphrey considered this without a smile. 'I don't see exactly how, Hen.'

‘I mean if he’s been heedless and reckless – oh, you know, girls, debts, everything. Just crazy, sorta.’

‘Well, I suppose a man can reform. Were you a very bad lot?’ The wrinkled smile was reassuring.

‘That depends on what you – I wasn’t exactly sporty, but – oh, you don’t know the trouble I’ve had, Humphrey. Then my mother died, and I hadn’t been half-decent to her, and I was left alone, and my uncle had to pay my debts out of the principal – it was hundreds of dollars –’

His voice died out.

There was an element of pathos in the picture before him that Humphrey recognised with some sympathy – the gloomy lad of twenty, with that absurd little moustache that he couldn’t let alone. After all, he *had* been rather put to it. It began to appear that he had suppressed himself without mercy. There would doubtless be reactions. Perhaps explosions.

Henry went on: —

‘I don’t know what’s happened to me. I don’t feel right about things. I’ – he hesitated, glanced up, then down, and his ears reddened – ‘I’ve been going with Martha Caldwell, you know. For a long time.’

Humphrey nodded.

‘Mondays and Thursdays I go over there, and other times. I don’t seem to want to go any more. But I get mixed up about it. I – I don’t want them to say I’m fickle. They used to say it.’

‘You’ve evidently got gifts,’ observed Humphrey, as if thinking aloud. ‘You’ve got some fire in you. The trouble with you now, of course, is that you’re stale.’ Humphrey deliberately considered the situation, then remarked: ‘You asked me if a man can change his nature. I begin to see now. You’ve been trying to do that to yourself, for quite a while.’

Henry nodded.

‘Well, I suppose you’ll find that you can’t do it. Not quite that. The fire that’s in you isn’t going to stop burning just because you tell it to.’

‘But what’s a fellow to do?’

‘I don’t know. Just stick along, I suppose, gradually build up experience until you find work you can let yourself go in. Some way, of course, you’ve got to let yourself go, sooner or later.’

Henry, his eyes nervously alert now, his slim young body tense, was drawing jerkily with his fork on the coarse table-cloth.

‘Yes,’ he broke out, with the huskiness in his voice that came when his emotions pressed – ‘yes, but what if you can’t let yourself go without letting everything go? What if the fire bums you!’

Humphrey found it difficult to frame a reply. He got no further, this as they were leaving the restaurant, than to say, ‘Of course, one man can’t advise another.’

5

As they were turning into the *Voice* office, Henry caught sight of Mamie Wilcox, in a cheap pink dress and flapping pink-and-white hat, loitering by the hotel. He fell back behind Humphrey. Mamie beckoned with her head. He nodded, and entered the office; and she moved slowly on around the corner of the avenue.

He mumbled a rather unnecessary excuse to Humphrey, and slipped out, catching up with her on the avenue. She was unpleasantly attractive. She excited him.

‘What is it?’ he asked, walking with her. ‘Did you want to speak to me?’

‘Stuck up, aren’t we!’

‘Well?’

She pouted. ‘Take a little walk with me. I do want to talk with you.’

‘Haven’t time. Got to get right back to the office.’

‘Well – listen, meet me to-night. I can get out by eight. It’s pretty important. Maybe serious.’

‘Is it – did anybody –’

She nodded. ‘Mrs MacPherson. She was right in her door when I came out of your room.’

‘Did she say anything?’

‘She looked a lot.’

‘Well, say – I’ll see you for a few minutes to-night. Say about eight.’ This was best. It would be dark, or near it. He simply mustn’t be seen strolling with Mamie Wilcox along Filbert Avenue in broad daylight. ‘What do you say to Douglass Street and the Lake Shore Drive?’

‘All right. Tell you what – bring a tandem along and take me for a ride.’

‘Oh, I can’t.’ But his will was weak. ‘Got to report a concert. I don’t know, though. I s’pose I could get around at half-past nine’ or ten and hear the last numbers.’

He had often done this. Besides, he could probably manage it earlier. He knew he could rent a tandem at Murphy’s cigar store down by the tracks. A quite wild, wholly fascinating stir of adventure was warming his breast and bringing that huskiness into his voice. He was letting go. He felt daring and a little mad. He hadn’t realised, before to-day, that Mamie had such a lure about her.

Before returning to the office he got his bank-book and brazenly drew from the bank, savings department, his entire account, amounting to ten dollars forty-six cents. He also bespoke the tandem.

These were the great days of bicycling. The first highwheeled, rattling horseless carriage was not to appear in the streets of Sunbury for a year or two yet. Bicycle clubs flourished. Memorial Day each year (they called it Decoration Day) was a mad rush of excursion and road races. Every Sunday witnessed a haggard-eyed humpbacked horde of ‘Scorchers’ in knickerbockers or woollen tights. Many of the young men one met on train and street wore medals with a suspended chain of gold bars, one for each ‘century run.’

And these were the first great days of the bloomer girl. She was legion. Sometimes her bloomers were bloomers, sometimes they were knickerbockers, sometimes little more than the tights of the racing breed. She was dusty, sweaty, loud. She was never the sort of girl you knew; but always appeared from the swarming, dingy back districts of the city. Sometimes she rode a single wheel, sometimes tandem with some male of the humpbacked breed and of the heavily muscled legs and the grotesquely curved handle bars. The bloomer girl was looked at askance by the well-bred folk of the shaded suburbs. Ministers thumped pulpits and harangued half-empty pews regarding this final moral, racial disaster while she rode dustily by the very doors.

Henry, as he pedalled the long machine through back streets to the rendezvous, was glad that the twilight was falling fast. In his breast pocket were copy paper and pencils, in an outer pocket his little olive-green book. His white trousers were caught about the ankles with steel dips.

Mamie kept him waiting. He hid both himself and the wheel in the shadows of the tall lilac bushes in the little village park.

She came at length, said 'Hello!' and with a little deft unhooking, coolly stepped out of her skirt, rolled up that garment, thrust it under a bush, and stood before him in the sort of wheeling costume rarely seen in Sunbury save on Saturdays and Sundays when the Chicago crowds were pouring through.

Henry stood motionless, silent, in the dusk.

'Well,' said she, smartly, 'are we riding?'

Without a word he wheeled out the bicycle and they rolled away.

She was very close, there before him. She bent over the handle bars like an old-timer, and pedalled with something more than the abandon of a boy. It was going to be hard to talk to her... If he could only blot this day out of his life. 'She started it,' he thought fiercely, staring out ahead over her rhythmically moving shoulder. 'I never asked her to come in!'

'I didn't know you rode a wheel,' said he, after a time, dismally.

'I ride Sundays with the boys from Pennyweather Point. But you needn't tell that at home.'

'I'm not telling anything at home,' muttered Henry. Then she flung back at him the one word.

'Surprised?'

'Well – why, sorta.'

'You thought I was satisfied to do the room work and wash dishes, I suppose!'

'I don't know as I thought anything.'

'What's the matter, anyway? Scared at my bloomers?'

'That's what you call'em, is it?'

'I must say you're grand company.'

He made no reply.

They pedalled past the university buildings, the athletic field, the lighthouse, up a grade between groves of oak, out along the brink of a clay bluff overlooking the steely dark lake – horizonless, still, a light or two twinkling far out.

'Shall we go to Hoffman's?' she asked.

'I don't care where we go,' said he.

6

The Weekly Voice of Sunbury was put to press every Friday evening, was printed during that night, and appeared in the first mail on Saturday mornings.

Friday, therefore, was the one distractingly busy day for Humphrey Weaver. And it was natural enough that he should snatch at Henry's pencilled report of the musicale at Mrs Henderson's with the briefest word of greeting, and give his whole mind, blue copy-editing pencil posed in air, to reading it. But he did note that the boy looked rather haggard, as if he hadn't slept much. He heard his mumbled remark that he had been over at the public library, writing the thing; and perhaps wondered mildly and momentarily why the boy should be writing at the library and not at home, and why he should speak of the fact at all. And now and again during the day he was aware of Henry, pale, dog-eyed, inclined to hang about as if confidences were trembling on his tongue. And he was carrying a little olive-green book around; drew it from his pocket every now and then and read or turned the pages with an ostentatious air of concentration, as if he wanted to be noticed. Humphrey decided to ask him what the trouble was; later, when the paper was put away. When he might have spoken, old man Boice was there, at his desk. And Humphrey never got out to meals on Fridays. Henry got all his work in on time: the 'Real Estate Notes' for the week and the last items for 'Along Simpson Street.'

The report of the musicale would have brought a smile or two on another day. There was nearly a column of it. Henry had apparently been deeply moved by the singing of Anne Mayer Stelton. He dwelt on the 'velvet suavity' of her legato passages, her firmness of attack and the 'delicate lace work of her colourature.' 'Mme. Stelton's art,' he wrote, 'has deepened and broadened appreciably since she last appeared in Sunbury. Always gifted with a splendid singing organ, always charming in personality and profoundly rhythmically musical in temperament, she now has added a superstructure of technical authority, which gives to each passage, whether bravura or pianissimo, a quality and distinction seldom heard in this country. Miss Corinne Doag also added immeasurably to the pleasure of the select audience by singing a group of songs. Miss Corinne Doag has a contralto voice of fine *verve* and *timbre*. She is a guest of Mrs Henderson, who herself accompanied delightfully. Among those present were: –'

Henry's writing always startled you a little. Words fairly flowed through his pencil, long words, striking words. He had the word sense; this when writing. In speech he remained just about where he had been all through his teens, loose of diction, slurring and eliding and using slang as did most of the Middle-Westerners among whom he had always lived, and, like them, swallowing his tongue down his throat.

Humphrey initialed the copy, tossed it into the devil's basket, turned to a pile of proofs, paused as if recollecting something, picked up the copy again, glanced rapidly through it, and turned on his assistant.

'Look here, Hen,' he remarked, 'you don't tell what they sang, either of 'em. Or who *were* among those present.'

Henry was reading his little book at the moment, and fumbling at his moustache. A mournful object.

He turned now, with a start, and stared, wide-eyed, at Humphrey. His lips parted, but he didn't speak. A touch of colour appeared in his cheeks.

Then, as abruptly, he went limp in his chair.

'I thought she left a list here and a programme,' he said, eyes now on the floor.

Humphrey's practised eye ran swiftly over the double row of pigeonholes before him. 'Right you are!' he exclaimed.

It was a quarter past eleven that night when Humphrey scrawled his last 'O.K.'; stretched out his long form in his swivel chair; yawned; said, 'Well, *that's* done, thank God!'; and hummed and tapped out on his bare desk the refrain of a current song: —

'But you'd look sweet
On the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.'

He turned on Henry with a wrinkly, comfortable grin.

'Well, my boy, it's too late for Stanley's but what do you say to a bite at Ericson's, over by the tracks?'

Then he became fully aware of the woebegone look of the boy, fiddling eternally with that moustache, fingering the leaves of his little book, and added: —

'What on earth is the matter with you!'

Henry gazed long at his book, swallowed, and said weakly: —

'I'm in trouble, Humphrey.'

'Oh, come, not so bad as all — '

He was silenced by the sudden plaintive appeal on Henry's face. Mr Boice, a huge-slow-moving figure of a man with great white whiskers, was coming in from the press room.

They walked down to the little place by the tracks. Humphrey had a roast-beef sandwich and coffee; Henry gloomily devoured two cream puffs.

There Humphrey drew out something of the story. It was difficult at first. Henry could babble forth his most sacred inner feelings with an ingenuous volubility that would alarm a naturally reticent man, and he could be bafflingly secretive. To-night he was both, and neither. He was full of odd little spiritual turnings and twistings – vague as to the clock, intent on justifying himself, submerged in a boundless bottomless sea of self-pity. Humphrey, touched, even worried, finally went at him with direct questions, and managed to piece out the incident of the Thursday morning in the boy's room.

'But I never asked her in,' he hurried to explain. 'She came in. Maybe after that it was my fault, but I didn't ask her in.'

'But as far as I can see, Hen, it wasn't so serious. You didn't make love to her.'

'I tried to.'

'Oh yes. She doubtless expected that. But she got away.'

'But don't you see, Hump, Mrs MacPherson saw her coming out. She'd been snooping. Musta heard some of it. That's why Mamie hung around for me yesterday noon.'

'Oh, she hung around?'

Henry swallowed, and nodded. 'That's why I slipped out again after lunch yesterday. I didn't want to tell you.'

'Naturally. A man's little flirtations – '

'But wait, Hump! She was excited about it. And she seemed to think it was up to me, somehow. I couldn't get rid of her.'

'Well, of course – '

'She made me promise to see her last night – '

'But – wait a minute! – last night – '

'This was the first part of the evening. She made me promise to rent Murphy's tandem – '

'Hm! you *were* going it!'

'And we rode up the shore a ways.'

'Then you didn't hear all of the musicale?'

'No. She wanted to go up to Hoffmann's Garden. So we went there – '

'But good lord, that's six miles – '

‘Eight. You can do it pretty fast with a tandem. The place was jammed. I felt just sick about it. The waiter made us walk clear through, past all the tables. I coulda died. You see, Mamie, she – but I had to be a sport, sorta.’

‘Oh, you had to go through with it, of course.’

‘Sure! I *had* to. It was awful.’

‘Anybody there that knew you?’

Henry’s colour rose and rose. He gazed down intently at the remnant of a cream puff; pushed it about with his fork. Then his lips formed the word, ‘Yes.’

Humphrey considered the problem. ‘Well,’ he finally observed, ‘after all, what’s the harm? It may embarrass you a little. But most fellows pick up a girl now and then. It isn’t going to kill anybody.’

‘Yes, but’ – Henry’s emotions seemed to be all in his throat to-night; he swallowed – ‘but it – well, Martha was there.’

‘Oh – Martha Caldwell?’

‘Yes. And Mary Ames and her mother. They were with Mr Merchant’s party.’

‘James B., Junior?’

‘Yes. They drove up in a trap. I saw it outside. We weren’t but three tables away from them. They saw everything. Mamie, she – ’

‘After all, Hen. It’s disturbing and all that, but you were getting pretty tired of Martha – ’

‘It isn’t that, Hump I don’t know that I was. I get mixed. But it’s the shame, the disgrace. The Amesese have been down on me anyway, for something that happened two years ago. And now...! And Martha, she’s – well, can’t you see, Hump? It’s just as if there’s no use of my trying to stay in this town any longer. They’ll all be down on me now. They’ll whisper about me. They’re doing it now. I feel it when I walk up Simpson Street. They’re going to mark me for that kind of fellow, and I’m not.’

His face sank into his hands.

Humphrey considered him; said, ‘Of course you’re not;’ considered him further. Then he said, reflectively: ‘It’s unpleasant, of course, but I’ll confess I can’t see that what you’ve told me justifies the words “shame” and “disgrace.” They’re strong words, my boy. And as for leaving town... See here, Hen I Is there anything you haven’t told me?’

The bowed head inclined a little farther.

‘Hadn’t you better tell me? Did anything happen afterward? Has the girl got – well, a real hold on you?’ The head moved slowly sidewise. ‘We fought afterward, all the way home. Rowed. Jawed at each other like a pair of little muckers. No, it isn’t that. I hated her all the time. I told her I was through with her. She tried to catch me in the hall this morning, up on the third floor. Came sneaking to my room again. With towels. That’s why I wrote in the library.’

‘But you aren’t telling me what the rest of it was.’

‘She – oh, she drank beer, and – ’

‘That’s what most everybody does at Hoffmann’s. The beer’s good there.’

‘I don’t know. I don’t like the stuff.’

‘Come, Hen, tell me. Or drop it. Either.’

‘I’ll tell you. But I get so mad. It’s – she – well, she wore pants.’

Humphrey’s sympathy and interest were real, and he did not smile as he queried: ‘Bloomers?’

‘No, pants. Britches. I never saw anything so tight. Nothing else like ‘em in the whole place. People nudged each other and laughed and said things, right out loud. Hump, it was terrible. And we walked clear through – past hundreds of tables – and away over in the corner – and there were the Amesese, and Martha, and – ’

His head was up now; there was fire in his eyes; his voice trembled with the passion of a profound moral indignation.

‘Hump, she’s tough. She rides with that crowd from Pennyweather Point. She smokes cigarettes. She – she leads a double life.’

And neither did it occur to Humphrey, looking at the blazing youth before him, to smile at that last remark.

Humphrey had reached a point of real concern over Henry. He thought about him the last thing that night – pictured him living a lonely, spasmodically ascetic life, in the not over cheerful boarding-house of Mrs Wilcox – and the first thing the next morning.

The curious revelation of the later morning nettled him, perhaps, as a responsible editor, but, if anything, deepened his concern. He had the boy on his conscience, that was the size of it. He thought him over all the morning, before and after the revelation. After it he smoked steadily and hard, and knit his brows, and shook his head gravely, and chuckled.

Henry always came in between half-past eleven and twelve Saturdays to clip his contributions from the paper and paste them, end to end, in a 'string.' Then Humphrey would measure the string with a two-foot rule and fill out an order on the *Voice* Company for payment at the rate of a dollar and a quarter a column, or something less than seven cents an inch. Henry despairing of a raise from nine dollars a week had, months back, elected to work 'on space.'

That the result had not been altogether happy – he was averaging something less than nine dollars a week now – does not concern us here.

Humphrey contrived to keep busy until the string was made and measured; then proposed lunch.

At Stanley's, the food ordered, he leaned on his lank elbows and surveyed the dejected young man before him.

'Hen,' he remarked dryly, 'do you really think Anne Mayer Stelton's voice has a velvet suavity?'

Henry glanced up from his barley soup, coloured perceptibly, then dropped his eyes and consumed several spoonfuls of the tepid fluid.

'Why not?' said he.

'You feel, do you, that her art has deepened and broadened appreciably since she last appeared in Sunbury?'

Henry centred all his attention on the soup.

'You feel that she has really added a superstructure of technique during her study abroad?'

Henry's ears were scarlet now.

Humphrey, his soup turning cold between his elbows, looked steadily at his deeply unhappy friend.

For a moment longer Henry went on eating. But then he quietly laid down his spoon, sank rather limply back in his chair, and wanly met Humphrey's gaze.

'There was a moment this morning, Hen, when I could have wrung your neck. A moment.'

Henry's voice was colourless. His expression was that of a man who has absorbed his maximum of punishment, to whom nothing more matters much. 'What is it?' he asked. 'What happened?'

'Madame Stelton fell in the Chicago station, hurrying for the train, and sprained her ankle. Miss Doag gave the entire programme.'

Henry sat a little time considering this. Finally he raised his eyes.

'Hump,' he said, 'I don't know that I'm sorry. I'm rather glad you caught me, I think.'

It was a difficult speech to meet. Humphrey even found it a moving speech.

'You had an unlucky day,' he said.

Henry nodded. The roast beef and potato were before them now; but Henry pushed his aside. He ate nothing more.

'Mrs Henderson was in,' Humphrey added. 'I don't care what they say about her, she's a really pretty woman and bright as all get out.'

'Was she mad, Hump?'

'I – well, yes, I gathered the impression that you'd better not try to talk to her for a while. There she was, you see – came straight down to the office or stopped on her way to the train. Had Miss Doag along. Unusual dark brown eyes – almost black. A striking girl. But you won't meet her – not

this trip. Though she couldn't help laughing once or twice. Over your phrases. You see you laid it on unnecessarily thick. *Verve. Timbre*. It puts you – I won't say in a Bad light – but certainly in a rather absurd light.'

'Yes,' said Henry, gently, meekly, 'it does. It sorta completes the thing. I picked up some of the town talk this morning. They're laughing at me. And Martha cut me dead, not an hour ago. I've lost my friends. I'm sort of an outcast, I suppose. A – a pariah.'

There was a long silence.

'You'd better eat some food,' said Humphrey.

'I can't.' Henry was brooding, a tired droop to his mouth, a look of strain about the eyes. He began thinking aloud, rather aimlessly. 'It ain't as if I did that sort of thing. I never asked her to come in. I couldn't very well refuse to talk with her. She suggested the tandem. It did seem like a good idea to get her out of town, if I had to risk being seen with her. I'll admit I got mixed – awfully. I don't suppose I knew just what I was doing. But it was the first time in two years. Hump, you don't know how hard I've –'

'It's the first-time offenders that get most awfully caught,' observed Humphrey. 'But never mind that now. You're caught, Hen. No good explaining. You've just got to live it down.'

'That's what I've been doing for two years – living things down. And look where it's brought me. I'm worse off than ever.'

There was a slight quivering in his voice that conveyed an ominous suggestion to Humphrey.

'Mustn't let the kid sink this way,' he thought. Then, aloud: 'Here's a little plan I want to suggest, Hen. You're stale. You're taking this too hard. You need a change.'

'I don't like to leave town, exactly, Hump – as if I was licked. I've changed about that.'

'You're not going to leave town. You're coming over to live with me. Move this afternoon.'

Henry seemed to find difficulty in comprehending this. Humphrey, suddenly a victim of emotion, pressed on, talking fast. 'I'll be through by four. You be packing up. Get an expressman and fetch your things. Here's my key. I'll let you pay something. We'll get our breakfasts.'

He had to stop. It struck him as silly, letting this forlorn youth touch him so deeply. He gulped down a glass of water. 'Come on,' he said brusquely, 'let's get out.' And on the street he added, avoiding those bewildered dog eyes – 'I'm going to reshuffle you and deal you out fresh.' That's all you need, a new deal.'

But to himself he added: 'It won't be easy. He is taking it hard. He's unstrung. I'll have to work it out slowly, head him around, build up his confidence. Teach him to laugh again. It'll take time, but it can be done. He's good material. Get him out of that dam boardinghouse to start with.'

7

It was nearly five o'clock when Humphrey reached his barn at the rear of the Parmenter place. He found the outside door ajar.

'Hen's here now,' he thought.

He stepped within the dim shop, that had once been a carriage room, called, 'Hello there!' and crossed to the narrow stairway. There was no answer. He went on up.

On the rug in the centre of the living-room floor was a heap consisting of an old trunk, a suitcase, a guitar in an old green woollen bag, two canes, an umbrella, and various loose objects – books, a small stand of shelves, two overcoats, hats, and a wire rack full of photographs.

The polished oak post at the head of the stairs was chipped, where they had pushed the trunk around. Humphrey fingered the spot; found the splinter on the floor; muttered, 'I'll glue it on, and rub over the cracks.'

He looked again at the disorderly heap in the centre of the room. 'It didn't occur to him to stow'em away,' he mused. 'Probably didn't know where to put 'em.'

He set to work, hauling the trunk into a little unfinished room next to his own bedroom. He had meant to make a kitchen of this some day. He carried in the other things; then got a dust-pan and brushed off the rug.

The rooms were clean and tidy. Humphrey was a born bachelor; he had the knack of living, alone in comfort. His books occupied all one wall of his bedroom, handy for night reading. He had running water there, and electric lights placed conveniently by the books, beside his mirror, and at the head of his bed.

He stood now in the living-room, humming softly and looking around with knit brows. After a few moments he stopped humming. He was struggling against a slight but definite depression. He had known it would be hard to give up room in his comfortable quarters to another; he had not known it would be as hard as it was now plainly to be. He started humming again, and moved about, straightening the furniture. This oddly pleasant home was his citadel. He had himself evolved it, in every detail, from a dusty, cobwebby old bam interior. He had run the wires and installed the water pipes and fixtures with his own hands. He seldom even asked his acquaintances in. There seemed no strong reason why he should do so.

'Hen shouldn't have left the door open like that,' he mused.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled a little. Then he sighed.

'Well,' he thought, 'needn't be a hog. It's my chance to do a fairly decent turn. The boy hasn't a soul. Not yet.'

He isn't the sort you can safely leave by himself. Got to be organised. Very likely I've got to build him over from the ground up. Might try making him read history. God knows he needs background. It'll take time. And patience. All I've got. Help him, little by little, to get hold of his self-esteem. Teach the kid to laugh again. That's it. I've taken it on. Can't quit. It seems to be my job.' And he sighed again. 'Have to get him a key of his own.'

There were footsteps below. Henry, his arms full of personal treasures and garments he had overlooked in packing, came slowly up the stairs.

'I put your things in there,' Humphrey pointed. 'We'll move the box couch in for you to-night.'

'That'll be fine,' said Henry, aimless of eye, weak of voice.

Humphrey's eyes followed him as he passed into the improvised bedroom; and he compressed his lips and shook his head.

Shortly Henry came out and sank mournfully on a chair. It was time for the first lesson. 'There's simply no life in the boy,' thought Humphrey. He cleared his throat, and said aloud: —

‘Tell you what, Hen. We’ll celebrate a little, this first evening. I’ve got a couple of chafing dishes and some odds and ends of food. And I make excellent drip coffee. If you’ll go over to Berger’s and get a pound or so of cheese for the rabbit, I’ll look the situation over and figure out a meal. Charge it to me. I have an account there.’

Henry, without change of expression, got slowly up, said, ‘All right,’ hung around for a little time, wandering about the room, and finally wandered off down the stairs and out.

He returned at twenty minutes past midnight.

Humphrey was abed, reading Smith’ on Torsion. He put down the book and waited. He had left lights on downstairs and in the living-room. Since six o’clock he had passed through many and extreme states of feeling; at present he was in a state of suspense between worry and strongly suppressed wrath.

Henry came into the room – a little flushed, bright of eye, the sensitive corners of his mouth twitching nervously, alertly, happily upward. He even actually chuckled.

‘Well, where – on – earth...

Henry waved a light hand. ‘Queerest thing happened. But say, I guess I owe you an apology, sorta. I ought to have sent word or something. Everything happened so quickly. You know how it is. When you’re sorta swept off your feet like that – ’

‘Like what!’

‘Oh – well, it was like this. I went over to get the cheese... Funny, it doesn’t seem as if it could have been to-day! Seems as if it was weeks ago that I moved my things over.’ His eyes roved about the room; lingered on the books; followed out the details of the neat surface wiring with sudden interest.

‘Go on!’ From Humphrey, this, with grim emphasis that was wholly lost on the self-absorbed youth.

‘Oh yes! Well, you see, I went over to Berger’s and got the cheese; and just as I was coming out I ran into Mrs Henderson and Corinne.’

‘Who!’

‘Corinne Doag. You know. She’s visiting there. Well, sir, I could have died right there. Fussed me so I turned around and was going back into the store. I was just plain rattled. And you were right about Mrs Henderson. She was kinda mad. She made me stand right up and take a scolding. Shook her finger at me right, there in front of Berger’s. That fussed me worse. Gee! I was red all over. But you see it sorta fussed Corinne Doag too – she was standing right there – and she got a little red. Wasn’t it a scene, though! Sorta made us acquainted right off. You know, threw us together. Then she – Mrs Henderson – said I didn’t deserve to meet a girl with verve and timbre, but just to show she wasn’t the kind to harbour angry feelings she’d introduce us. And – and – I walked along home with’em.’

He was looking again at the solid ranks of books that extended, floor to ceiling, across the end wall.

‘Say, Hump, you don’t mean to say you really read all those!’

‘You walked home with them. Go on.’

‘Oh, well, they asked me to stay to supper, and I did, and some folks came in, and we sang and things, and then we – oh, yes, how much was the cheese?’

‘How in thunder do I know?’

‘Well – there was a pound of it – Mrs Henderson made a rabbit.’

The none too subtle chill in the atmosphere about Humphrey seemed at last to be meeting and somewhat subduing the exuberant good cheer that radiated from Henry. He fell to fingering his moustache, and studying the bed-posts. Once or twice, he looked up, hesitated on the brink of speech, only to lower his eyes again.

Then, unexpectedly, he chuckled aloud, and said, ‘She’s a wonderful girl. At first she seems quiet, but when you get to know her... going to take a walk with me to-morrow morning. She was going to church with Mrs H., but I told her we’d worship in God’s great outdoor temple.’

He yawned now. And stretched, deliberately, luxuriously like a healthy animal, his arms above his head.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘it’s late as all get out. I suppose you want to go to sleep.’ He got as far as the door, then leaned confidently against the wall. ‘Look here, Hump, I don’t want you to think I don’t appreciate your taking me in like this. It’s dam nice of you. Don’t know what I’d have done if it wasn’t for you. Well, good-night.’

He got part way out the door this time; then, brushed by a wave of his earlier moody self-consciousness, turned back. He even came in and leaned over the foot of the bed, and flushed a little. It occurred to Humphrey that the boy appeared to be momentarily ashamed of his present happiness.

‘Do you know what was the matter with me?’ he broke out. ‘It was just what you said. I was taking things too hard. The great thing is to be rational, normal. Thing with me was I used to go to one extreme and now these last two years I’ve been going with all my might to the other. Of course it wouldn’t work... Do you know who’s helped me a whole lot? You’d never guess.’ Rather shamefaced, he drew from his pocket a little book bound in olive-green ‘ooze’ leather. ‘It’s this old fellow. Epictetus. Listen to what he says – “To the rational animal only is the irrational intolerable.” That was the trouble with me. I just wasn’t a rational animal. I *wasn’t*... Well, I’ve got to say good-night.’

This time he went.

Humphrey heard him getting out of his clothes and into the bed that Humphrey himself had made up on the box couch. It seemed only a moment later that he was snoring – softly, slowly, comfortably, like a rational animal.

The minute hand of the alarm clock on Humphrey’s bureau crept up to twelve, the hour hand to one. Then came a single resonant, reverberating boom from the big clock up at the university.

Slowly, lips compressed, Humphrey got up, and in his pyjamas and slippers went downstairs and switched off the door light he found burning there. The stair light could be turned off upstairs.

Then, instead of going up, he opened the door and stood looking out on the calm village night.

‘Of all the – ’ he muttered inconclusively. ‘Why it’s – he’s a – Good God! It’s the limit! It’s – it’s intolerable.’

The word, floating from his own lips, caught his ear. His frown began, very slowly, to relax. A dry, grudging smile wrinkled its way across his mobile face. And he nodded, deliberately. ‘Epictetus,’ he remarked, ‘was right.’

II – IN SAND-FLY TIME

1

It was half-past nine of a Sabbath morning at the beginning of June. The beneficent sunshine streamed down on the dark-like streets, on the shingled roofs of the many decorous but comfortable homes, on the wide lawns, on the hundreds of washed and brushed little boys and starched little girls that were marching meekly to the various Sunday schools, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Congregational, Baptist. Above the new cement sidewalk on Simpson Street – where all the stores were closed except two drug stores and Swanson's flower shop – the sunshine quivered and wavered, bringing oppressive promise of the first really warm day of the young summer. Slow-swinging church bells sent out widening, reverberating circles of mellow tone through the still air.

The sun shone too on the old barn back of the Parmenter place.

The barn presented an odd appearance; the red paint of an earlier decade in the nineteenth century here faded to brown, there flaked off altogether, but the upstairs part, once the haymow, embellished with neat double windows. Below, giving on the alley, was a white-painted door with a single step and an ornamental boot scraper.

Within, in Humphrey's room, the bed was neatly made, clothes hung in a corner, shoes and slippers stood in a row.

In Henry's room the couch bed was a rumpled heap, a suit-case lay on the floor half-unpacked, a trunk was in the same condition, clothes, shoes, neckties, photographs were scattered about on table, chairs and floor, a box of books by the bed, the guitar in its old green woollen bag leaning against the door.

In a corner of the living-room the doors of an ingeniously contrived cupboard stood open, disclosing a sink, shelves of dishes, and a small ice-box.

Humphrey, in shirt, trousers and slippers, stood washing the breakfast things. He was smoking his cob pipe. His long, wrinkly, usually quizzical face, could Henry have seen it, was deathly sober.

Henry, however, could see only the lean back. And he looked at that only momentarily. He was busy smoothing the fringe along his upper lip and twisting it up at the ends. Too, he leaned slightly on his bamboo walking stick, staring down at it, watching it bend. Despite his white ducks and shoes, serge coat, creamy white felt hat on the back of his shapely head, despite the rather noticeable nose glasses with the black silk cord hanging from them to his lapel, he presented a forlorn picture. He wished Humphrey would say something. That long back was hostile. Henry was helpless before hostility, as before logic. Already they weren't getting on. Little things like washing dishes and making beds and – dusting! Humphrey was proving an old fuss-budget. And Henry couldn't think what to do about it. He could never: – never in the world – do those fussy things, use his hands. He couldn't even flounder through the little mental processes that lead up to doing things with your hands. He wasn't that sort of person. Humphrey was.

'Oh, thunder – Hump!' Thus Henry, weakly. 'Let the old dishes slide a little while. I'll be back. It ain't my fault that I've got a date now.'

Humphrey set down a cup rather hard, rolled the dish-towel into a ball and threw it, with heat, after the cup, then strode to the window, nursing his pipe and staring out at the gooseberry and currant bushes in the back yard of the First Presbyterian parsonage across the alley.

Humphrey liked order. It was the breath of his life. Combined with solitude it spelled peace to his bachelor soul. But here it was only the second day and the place was a pigsty. What would it be in a week!

He was aware that Henry moved over, all hesitation, and with words, to shut the door of that hopelessly littered bedroom. The boy appeared to have no intention of picking up his things; he wasn't even unpacking! Leaving his clothes that way 1... The words he was so confusedly uttering were the absurdest excuses: 'Just shut the door – fix it all up when I get back – an hour or so...

It was in a wave of unaccustomed sentimentalism that Humphrey had gathered him in. Humphrey had few visitors. You couldn't work with aimless youths hanging around. He knew all about that. Humphrey's evenings were precious. His time was figured out, Monday morning to Saturday night, to the minute. And the Sundays were always an orgy of work. But this youth, to whom he had opened his quarters and his slightly acid heart, was the most aimless being he had ever known. An utter surprise; a shock. Yet here he was, all over the place.

Humphrey was trying, by a mighty effort of will, to get himself back into that maudlin state of pity which had brought on all this trouble. If he could only manage again to feel sorry for the boy, perhaps he could stand him. But he could only bite his pipe-stem. He was afraid he might say something he would be sorry for. No good in that, of course... No more peaceful study, all alone, propped up in bed, with a pipe and reading light! No more wonderful nights in the shop downstairs! No more holding to a delicately fresh line of thought – balancing along like a wire-walker over a street! The boy was over by the stairs now, all apologies, mumbling useless words. But he was going – no doubt whatever as to that.

'I'm late now,' he was saying. 'What else can I do, Hump? I promised. She'll be looking for me now. If you just wouldn't be in such a thundering hurry about those darn dishes... I can't live like a machine. I just can't!'

'You could have cleaned up your room while you've been standing there,' said Humphrey, in a rumbling voice.

'No, I couldn't! Put up all my pictures and books and things! I'm not like you. You don't understand!' Humphrey wheeled on him, pipe in hand, a cold light in his eyes, a none-too-agreeable smile wrinkling the lower part of his face.

'I'm not asking much of you,' he said.

'Oh, thunder, Hump! Do you think I don't appreciate – '

'I'd be glad to help you. But you've got to do a *little* on your own account. For God's sake show some spine!' Sand-fly! Damn it, this is more than I can stand! It smothers me! How can I work! How can I think!' He stopped short; bit his lip; turned back to the window and thrust his pipe into his mouth.

Humphrey knew without looking that the boy was fussing endlessly at that absurd moustache. And sighing – he heard that. He bit hard on his pipe-stem. The day was wrecked already. He would be boiling up every few moments; tripping over Henry's things; regretting his perhaps too harsh words. Yes, they were too harsh, of course.

Henry was muttering, mumbling, tracing out the pattern in the rug-border with his silly little stick. These words were audible: —

'I don't see why you asked me to come here. I suppose I... Of course, if you don't want me to stay here with you, I suppose I... Oh, well! I guess I ain't much good...'

The voice trailed huskily off into silence.

After all, there didn't seem to be any place the boy could stay, if not here. Living alone in a boarding-house hadn't worked at all. To send him out into the world would be like condemning him.

Henry moved off down the stairs, slowly, pausing once as if he had not yet actually determined to go.

Walking more briskly, he emerged from the alley and swung around into Filbert Avenue. The starched and shining children were pouring in an intermittent stream into the First Presbyterian chapel, behind the big church.

Gloom in his eyes, striking in a savage aimlessness with his cane at the grass, he passed the edifice. Walking thus, he felt a presence and lifted his eyes.

2

Approaching was a pleasant-looking young woman of twenty, of a good figure, a few girlish freckles across the bridge of her nose, abundant hair tucked in under her Sunday hat.

It was Martha Caldwell. She had a class in the Sunday-school.

Martha saw him. No doubt about that.

For the moment, in Henry's abasement of spirit, he half forgot that she had cut him dead, publicly, on Simpson Street on the Saturday. Or if it was not a forgetting it was a vagueness. Henry was full to brimming of himself. Not in years had he craved sympathy as he craved it to-day. The word 'craved,' though, isn't strong enough. It was an utter need. An outcast, perhaps literally homeless; for how could he go back to Humphrey's after what had occurred! He must pack his things, of course.

He raised his hand – slowly, a thought stiffly – toward his hat.

Martha moved swiftly by, staring past him, fixedly, her lips compressed, her colour rising.

Henry's hand hung suspended a moment, then sank to his side.

Henry himself was capable of any sort of heedlessness, but never of unkindness or of cutting a friend.

The colour surged hotly over his face and reddened his ears.

There was a chance – a pretty good chance, it seemed, as he recalled the pleasant Saturday evening over a rabbit – that he might find sympathy at Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's. That was one place, where, within twelve hours, Henry Calverley, 3rd, had had some standing. They had seemed to like him. Mrs Henderson had unquestionably played up to him. And her guest was a peach!

At a feverish pace, almost running, he went there.

3

Corinne Doag was a big girl with blue-black hair and a profile like the Goddess of Liberty on the silver quarter of the period. Her full face rather belied the profile; it was an easy, good-natured face, though with a hint of preoccupation about the dark eyes. Her smile was almost a grin. She had the great gift of health. She radiated it. You couldn't ignore her you felt her.

Though not a day older than Henry, Corinne was a singer of promise. At Mrs Henderson's musicale, she had managed groups of Schumann, Schubert, Franz and Wolff, an Italian aria or two and some quaint French folk songs with ample evidence of sound training and coaching. Her voice had faults. It was still a little too big for her. It was a contralto without a hollow note in it, firm and strong, with a good upper range. There was in it more than a hint of power. It moved you, even in her cruder moments. Her speaking voice – slow, lazy, strongly sensuous – gave Henry thrills.

She and Henry strolled up the lake, along the bluff through and beyond the oak-clad campus, away up past the lighthouse. She seemed not to mind the increasing heat. She had the careless vitality of a young mountain lion, and the grace.

Henry himself minded no external thing. Corinne Doag was, at the moment, the one person in the world who could help him in his hour of deep trouble. It was not clear how she could help him, but somehow she could. He was blindly sure of it. If he could just impress himself on her, make her forget other men, other interests! He had started well, the night before. Things had gone fine.

He was leading her to a secluded breakwater, between the lighthouse and Pennyweather Point, where, under the clay bluff, the shell of an old boat-house gave you a back as you sat on a gray timber and shielded you at once from morning sun and from the gaze of casual strollers up the beach. Henry knew the place well, had guided various girls there. Martha had often spoken of it as 'our' breakwater. But no twinge of memory disturbed him now. His nervous intentness on this immediate, rather desperate task of conquering Corinne's sympathy fully occupied his turbulent thoughts.

When they arrived at the spot he was stilted in manner, though atremble within. He ostentatiously took off his coat, spread it for her, overpowering her protests.

It had been thought by a number of girls and by a few of his elders that Henry had charm. He was aware of quality they called charm he could usually turn on and off like water at a faucet.

Now, of all occasions, was the time to turn it on. But he was breathlessly unequal to it.

Perversity seized his tongue. He had seen himself lying easily, not ungracefully beside her, saying (softly) the things she would most like to hear. Speak of her voice, of course. And sing with her (softly) while they idly watched the streaky, sparkling lake and the swooping, creaking gulls above it. But he did none of these. Instead he stood over her, glaring down rather fiercely, and saying nothing at all.

'The shade does feel good,' said she.

Still he groped for words, or for a mental attitude that might result in words. None came. Here she was, at his feet, and he couldn't even speak.

He fell back, in perturbation, on physical display, became the prancing male.

'I like to skip stones,' he managed to say, with husky self-consciousness. He hunted flat stones; threw them hard and far, until his face shone with sweat and a damp spot appeared in his shirt between his shoulders.

To her, 'Better let me hold your glasses,' he responded with an irritable shake of the head.

But such physical violence couldn't go on indefinitely. Not in this heat. He threw less vigorously. He wondered in something of a funk, why he couldn't grasp his opportunity.

He became aware of a sound. A sound that in a more felicitous moment would have thrilled him.

She was singing, softly. Something French, apparently. Once she stopped, and did a phrase over, as if she were practising.

He stole a glance. She wasn't even looking at him. She had sunk back on an elbow, her long frame stretched comfortably out, and seemed to be observing the gulls, rather absently.

Henry came over; sat on a spile; glared at her.

'I skipped that last one seven times,' said he.

She gave him an indulgent little smile, and hummed on.

'She doesn't know I'm here,' he mused, with bitterness. 'I don't count. Nobody wants me.' And added, 'She's selfish.'

Suddenly he broke out, tragically: 'You don't know what I've been through. I wouldn't tell you.'

The tune came to an end. Still watching the gulls, still absently, she asked, after a pause, 'Why not?'

'You'd be like the others. You'd despise me.'

'I doubt that. Mildred Henderson certainly doesn't. You ought to hear her talk about you.'

'She'll be like the others too. My life has been very hard. Living alone with my way to make. Wha'd she say about me?'

'That you're a genius. She can't make out why you've been burying yourself, working for a little country paper.'

Henry considered this. It was pleasing. But he might have wished for a less impersonal manner in Corinne. She kept following those gulls; speaking most casually, as if it was nothing or little to her what anybody thought about anybody.

Still – it was pleasing. He sat erect. A light glimmered in his eye; glimmered and grew. When he spoke, his voice took on body.

'So she says I'm a genius, eh! Well, maybe it's true. Maybe I am. I'm something. Or there's something in me. Sometimes I feel it. I get all on fire with it. I've done a few things. I put on *Iolanthe* here. When I was only eighteen. Chorus of fifty, and big soloists. I ran it – drilled 'em –'

'I know. Mildred told me. Mildred really did say you were wonderful.'

'I'll do something else one of these days.'

'I'm sure you will,' she murmured politely.

It was going none too well. She wasn't really interested. He hadn't touched her. Perhaps he had better not talk about himself. He thought it over, and decided another avenue of approach would be better.

'That's an awfully pretty brooch,' he ventured.

She glanced down; touched it with her long fingers. The brooch was a cameo, white on onyx, set in beaded old gold.

'It was a present,' she said. 'From one of the nicest men I ever knew.'

This chilled Henry's heart. His own emotions were none too stable. Out of his first-hand experience he had been able at times, in youthfully masculine company, to expound general views regarding the sex that might be termed cynical. But confronted with the particular girl, the new girl, Henry was an incorrigible idealist.

It had only vaguely occurred to him that Corinne had men friends. It hurt, just to think of it. And presents – things like that, gold in it – the thing had cost many a penny! His bitterness swelled; blackened his thoughts.

'That's it,' these ran now. 'Presents! Money! That's what girls want. Keep you dancing. String you. Make you spend a lot on 'em. That's what they're after!'

The situation was so painful that he got up abruptly and again skipped stones. Until the fact that she let him do it, amused herself practising songs and drinking in the beauty of the place and the day, became quite too much for him.

When he came gloomily over, she remarked: —

'We must be starting back.'

He stood motionless; even let her get up, with an amused expression throw his coat over her arm, and take a few steps along the beach.

‘Oh, come on, don’t go yet,’ he begged. ‘Why, we’ve only just got here.’

‘It’s a long walk. And it’s hot. We’ll never get back for dinner if we don’t start. I mustn’t keep Mildred waiting.’

He thought, ‘A lot she’d care if she wanted to be with me!’

He said, ‘What you doing to-night?’

‘Oh, a couple of Chicago men are coming out.’

‘Oh!’ It was between a grunt and a snort. He struck out at such a gait that she finally said: —

‘If you want to walk at that pace I’m afraid you’ll have to walk alone.’

So far a failure. Just as with Humphrey, the situation had given him no opportunity to display his own kind of thing. The picturesque slang phrase had not then been coined; but Henry was in wrong and knew it. It was defeat.

The first faint hope stirred when Mrs Henderson rose from a hammock and came to the top step to clasp his hand. She thought him a genius. Well, she had been accompanist through all those rehearsals for *Iolanthe*. She ought to know.

She asked him now, in her alertly offhand way, to stay to dinner. He accepted instantly.

4

Mildred Henderson was little, slim, quick, with tiny feet and hands. Despite these latter she was the most accomplished pianist in Sunbury. She had snappy little eyes, and a way of smiling quickly and brightly. The Hendersons had lived four or five years in Sunbury. They had no children. They had no servant at this time – but she possessed the gift of getting up pleasant little meals without apparent effort.

After the arrival of Corinne and Henry she disappeared for a few moments, then called them to the dining-room.

‘It’s really a cold lunch,’ she said, as they gathered at the table – ‘chicken and salad and things. But there’s plenty for you, Henry. Do have some iced tea. I know they starve you at that old boarding-house. We’ve all had our little term at Mrs Wilcox’s.’

‘I – I’m not living there any more. I’ve moved.’

‘Not to Mrs Black’s?’

‘No... you see I work with Humphrey Weaver at the *Voice* office and he asked me to come and live with him.’

‘With him? And where does he live?’

‘Why, just back of the old Parmenter place.’

‘But there’s nothing back of the Parmenter place!’

‘Yes – you see, the barn – ’

‘Not that old red – ’

‘Yes. You’d be surprised! Humphrey’s put in hardwood and electricity and things. He’s really a wonderful person. Did the wiring himself. And the water pipes. You ought to see his books – and his shop downstairs. He’s an inventor, you know. Going to be. Don’t you think for a minute that he’s just a country editor. That’s just while he’s feeling his way. Oh, Hump’s a smart fellow. Mighty decent of him to take me in that way, too; because he’s busy and I know he’d rather live alone. You see, he’s quiet and orderly about things, and I – well, I’m different.’

‘Offhand,’ mused Mrs Henderson, ‘I shouldn’t suspect Humphrey Weaver of temperament. But tell me – how on earth do you live? Who cooks and cleans up?’

‘Well, Hump gets breakfast and – and we’ll probably take turns cleaning up.’

‘You remember Humphrey Weaver, Corinne,’ the little hostess breezed on. ‘You’ve met him. Tall, thin, face wrinkles up when he smiles or speaks to you.’ She added, as if musing aloud, ‘He *has* nice eyes.’ Then, to Henry:

‘But do you mean to say that so fascinating a man as that lives undiscovered, right under our noses, in this bourgeois town.’

Henry was rather vague about the meaning of ‘bourgeois,’ but he nodded gravely.

‘You must bring him down here, Henry. I can’t imagine what I’ve been thinking of to overlook him.’

Tell you what, we’ll have a little rabbit to-morrow night. We four. We’ll devote an evening to drawing Mr Humphrey Weaver out of his shell.’

Her quick eyes caught a doubtful look in Corinne’s eyes. ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘we did speak of letting Will and Fred take us in town, didn’t we?’

Corinne nodded.

It seemed to Henry that he ought to take the situation in hand. As regarded his relations with Humphrey he was sailing under false colours. Among his confused thoughts he sought, gropingly, a way out. The speech he did make was clumsy.

‘I don’t know whether I could make him come. He likes to read evenings, or work in his shop.’

Mrs Henderson took this in, then let her eyes rest a moment, thoughtfully, on Henry's ingenuous countenance. An intent look crept into her eyes.

'Do you mean that you two sweep and make beds and wash dishes and dust?'

'Well' – Henry's voice faltered – 'you see, I haven't been – I just moved over there yesterday afternoon.'

'Hm!' There was a bright, flash in Mrs Henderson's eyes. She chuckled abruptly. It was a sharp little chuckle that had the force of an interruption. 'I'd like to see the corners of those rooms. There ought to be some woman that could take care of you.' She turned again on Henry. 'Be sure and bring him down to-morrow. Come in about six for a picnic supper. Or no – let me think –'

Henry's eyes were on Corinne. She was eating now, composedly, like an accomplished feminine fatalist, leaving the disposition of matters to her more aggressive hostess. The food he had eaten rested comfortably on his long ill-treated but still responsive young stomach. His nervous concern of the morning was giving place to a glow of snug inner well-being. Ice-cream was before him now, a heaping plate of it – vanilla, with hot chocolate sauce – and a huge slice of chocolate layer cake. He blessed Mrs Henderson for the rich cream as he let heaping spoonfuls slip down his throat and followed them with healthy bites of the cake. What a jolly little woman she was. No fuss.

Nothing stuck up about her. And he knew she was on his side.

She had sympathy. Even if she hadn't yet heard – when she did hear – it wouldn't matter. She would be on his side; he was sure of it.

Corinne's hair, a loose curl of it, curved down over her ear and part of her cheek. She reached up a long hand and brushed it back. The motion thrilled him. He was quiveringly responsive to the faint down on her cheek, to the slight ebbing and flowing of the colour under her skin, to the whiteness of her temple, the curve of her rather heavy eyebrow, even to the 'waist' she wore – a simple garment, with an open throat and a wide collar that suggested the sea.

Mrs Henderson was talking about something or other, in her brisk way.

Henry only partly heard. He was day-dreaming, weaving an imaginative web of iridescent fancy about the healthy, rather matter-of-fact girl before him. And eating rapidly his second large helping of ice-cream, and his second piece of cake.

Little resentments were still popping up among his thoughts, taunting him. But tentative little hopes were struggling with these now. A sense of power, even, was stirring to life in his breast. This brought new thrills. It was a long, long time since he had felt as he was now beginning to feel. Life had dealt pretty harshly with him these two years. But he wasn't beaten yet. Not even if nice men did give cameo brooches mounted on beaded gold.

He felt in his pocket. Nearly all of the week's pay was there – about eight dollars. It wasn't much. It wouldn't buy gold brooches. Space-reporting on a country weekly at a dollar and a quarter a column, as a means of livelihood, was pretty hard sledding. He would have to scheme out something. There would be seventeen dollars more on the fifteenth from his Uncle Arthur, executor of his mother's estate and guardian to Henry, but that had been mentally pledged to the purchase of necessary summer underwear and things. Still, he might manage somehow. You had to do a lot for girls, of course. They expected it. Expensive business.

He indulged himself a moment, shading his eyes with one hand and eating steadily on, in a momentary wave of bitterness against well-to-do young men who could lavish money on girls.

Corinne was speaking now, and he was answering. He even laughed at something she said. But the train of his thoughts rumbled steadily on.

After the coffee they all carried out the dishes and washed them. Henry amused them by wearing a full-length kitchen apron. Corinne tied the strings around his waist. He found an excuse to reach back, and for an instant his hands covered hers. She laughed a little. He danced about the kitchen and sang comic songs as he wiped dishes and took them to the china closet in the butler's pantry.

This chore finished, they went to the living-room.

Mrs Henderson said: 'Oh, Corinne, you must hear Henry sing "When Britain Really Ruled" from *Iolanthe*.' She found the score and played for him. He sang lustily, all three verses.

'Too much dinner,' he remarked, beaming with pleasure, at the close. 'Voice is rotten.'

'It's a good organ,' said Corinne. 'You ought to work at it.'

'Perfect shame he won't study,' said Mrs Henderson. Henry found *The Geisha* on the piano.

'Come on, Corinne,' he cried. 'Do the "Jewel of Asia." Mrs Henderson'll transpose it.'

Corinne leaned carelessly against the piano and sang the pleasant little melody with an ease and a steady flow of tone that brought a shine to Henry's eyes. He had to hide it, dropping on the big couch and resting his head on his hand. He could look nowhere but at her. He ordered her to sing 'The Amorous Goldfish.'

She fell into the spirit of it, and moved away from the piano, looking provocatively at Henry, gesturing, making an audience of him. She even danced a few steps at the end.

Henry sprang up. The power was upon him. Obstacles, difficulties, the little scene with Humphrey, while not forgotten, were swept aside. He was irresistible.

'Tell you what,' he said gaily, with supreme ease – 'w'e'll send those Chicago men a box of poisoned candy to-morrow, and – oh, yes w-e will! – and then we'll have a party at the rooms. You'll be chaperon, Mrs Henderson and Hump'll cook things in the chafing dish, and – '

'What a perfectly lovely idea!' said Mrs Henderson in a surprisingly calm voice. 'I'll bring the cold chicken, and a vegetable salad...'

Henry watched Corinne.

For an instant – she was rummaging through the music – her eyes met his. 'It'll be fun,' she said.

Henry felt a shock as if he had plunged unexpectedly, headlong, into ice-water; then a glow.

He was a daring soul. They didn't understand him in Sunbury. He had temperament, a Bohemian nature. The thing was, he'd wasted two years trying to make another sort of himself. Kept account of every penny in a red book! All that! Book was in his pocket now.

He decided to tear it up. He wouldn't be a coward another day. That plodding self-discipline hadn't got him anywhere. Now really, had it?

Little inner voices were protesting weakly. People might find out about it. Have to be pretty quiet. And keep the shades down. It wouldn't do for the folks in the parsonage, across the alley, to know that Mrs Arthur V. Henderson and her guest were in the Parmenter barn. Have to find some tactful way of suggesting that they come after dark...

As if she could read his thoughts, Mrs Henderson remarked calmly: 'You come for us, Henry. Say about eight.'

Still the little voices of doubt and confusion. Even of fear. He mentally shouted them down; fixing his eyes on the disturbingly radiant Corinne, then glancing for moral support at the really pretty little Mrs Henderson who gave out such a reassuring air of knowing precisely what she was about, of being altogether in the right. Funny, knowing her all these years, he hadn't realised she was so nice!

He had turned defeat into victory. Single-handed. Will and Fred could go sit on the Wells Street bridge and eat bananas. He had settled *their* hash.

5

To this lofty mood there came, promptly? an opposite and fully equal reaction.

Difficulties having arisen in connection with the problem of breaking the news to Humphrey, he couldn't very well go back to the rooms.

The thing would have to be put right before Humphrey. He decided to think it over. That was the idea – think it over. Humphrey would be eating his supper, if not at the rooms, then at Stanley's little restaurant on Simpson Street. So he could hardly go to Stanley's. There was another little lunch room down by the tracks, but Humphrey had been known to go there. And of course it was impossible to return for a transient meal to Mrs Wilcox. For one thing, the student waiters would be off and Mamie Wilcox on duty in the dining-room. He didn't want Mamie back in his life. Not if he could help it. He even went so far as to wonder, with a paralysing sense of helplessness in certain conceivable contingencies, if he *could* help it... So instead of eating supper he sat on a breakwater, alone, unobserved, while the golden sunset glow faded from lake and sky and darkness claimed him for her own.

Later, handkerchief over face, rushing and pawing his way through the myriads of sand-flies that swarmed about each corner light, he walked into the neighbourhood of Martha Caldwell's house. He walked backhand forth for a time on the other side of the street, and stood motionless by trees. He found the situation trying, as he didn't know why he had come, whether he wanted to see Martha or what he could say to her.

He could hear voices from the porch. And he thought he could see one white dress.

Then, because it seemed to be the next best thing to do, he crossed over and mounted the familiar front steps.

He found himself touching the non-committal hand of James B. Merchant, Jr., who carried the talk along glibly, ignoring the gloomy youth with the glasses and the tiny moustache who sat in a shadow and sulked. Finally, after deliberately, boldly arranging a driving party of two for Monday evening, the cotillion leader left.

Martha, when he had disappeared beyond the swirling, illuminated sand-flies at the corner, settled back in her chair and stared, silent, at the maples.

Henry struggled for speech.

'Martha, look here,' came from him, in a tired voice, 'you've cut me dead. Twice. Now it seems to me –'

'I don't want to talk about that,' said Martha.

'But it isn't fair not to –'

'Please don't try to tell me that you weren't at Hoffmann's with that horrid girl.'

'I'm not trying to. But –'

'You took her there, didn't you?'

'Yes, but she –'

'She didn't make you. You knew her pretty well. While you were going with me, too.'

'Oh, well,' he muttered. Then, 'Thunder! If you're just determined not to be fair —'

'I won't let you say that to me.' The snap in her voice stung him.

'You're not fair! You won't even let me talk!'

'What earthly good is talk!'

'Oh, if you're going to take that attitude –'

She rose. So did he.

'I can't and I won't talk about a thing like that,' she said quickly, unevenly.

'Then I suppose I'd better go,' said he, standing motionless.

She made no reply.

They stood and stood there. Across the street, at B. F. Jones's, a porch full of young people were singing *Louisiana Lou*. Henry, out of sheer nervousness, hummed it with them; then caught himself and turned to the steps.

‘Well,’ he remarked listlessly, ‘I’ll say good-night, then.’

Still she was silent. He lingered, but she gave him no help. He hadn’t believed that she could be as angry as this. He waited and waited. He even felt and weighed the impulses to go right to her and make her sit in the hammock with him and bring back something of the old time feeling.

But he found himself moving off down the steps and heading for the yellow cloud at the corner.

He hated the sand-flies. Their dead bodies formed a soft crunchy carpet on pavement and sidewalk. You couldn’t escape them. They came for a week or two in June. They were less than an inch long, pale yellow with gauzy wings. They had neither sting nor pincers. They overwhelmed these lake towns by their mere numbers. Down by the bright lights on Simpson Street they literally covered everything. You couldn’t see through a square inch of Donovan’s wide plateglass front. Mornings it was sometimes necessary to clear the sidewalks with shovels.

It was two or three hours later when Henry crept cautiously into Humphrey’s shop and ascended the stairs.

Humphrey had left lights for him. He was awake, too; there was a crack of light at the bottom of his bedroom door. But the door was shut tight.

Henry put out all the lights and shut himself in his own disorderly room.

He stood for a time looking at the mess; everything he owned, strewn about on chairs, table and floor. Everything where it had fallen.

He considered finishing unpacking the suit-case. Pushed it with his foot.

‘Just have to get at these things,’ he muttered aloud. ‘Make a job of it. Do it the first thing tomorrow, before I go to the office.’

Then he dug out the box of books that stood beside the bed, the volume entitled *Will Power and Self Mastery*.

He sat on the bed for an hour, reading one or another of the vehemently pithy sentences, then gazing at the wall, knitting his brows, and mumbling the words over and over until the small meaning they had ever possessed was lost.

6

He came almost stealthily into the office of *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury* on the Monday morning. He had not fallen really asleep until the small hours. When he awoke, Humphrey was long gone and the breakfast things stood waiting on the centre table. And there they were now. He hadn't so much as rinsed them in the sink.

Humphrey sat behind his roll-top desk, back of the railing. Old Mr Boice, the proprietor, was at his own desk, out in front. At the first glimpse of his massive head and shoulders with the heavy white whiskers falling down on his shirt front, Henry, hesitating on the sill, gave a little quick sigh of relief. He let himself, moving with the self-consciousness that somewhat resembled dignity, through the gate in the railing and took his chair at the inkstained pine table that served him for a desk.

He felt Humphrey's eyes on him, and said 'Goodmorning!' stiffly, without looking round. He looked through the papers on the table for he knew not what; snatched at a heap of copy paper, bit his pencil and made a business of writing nothing whatever.

At eleven Mr Boice, who was also postmaster, lumbered out and along Simpson Street toward the post office. Henry, discovering himself alone with Humphrey, rushed, muttering, to the press room and engaged Jim Smith, the foreman, in talk which apparently made it necessary for that blonde little man, whose bare forearms were elaborately tattooed and who chewed tobacco, to come in, sit on Henry's table, and talk further.

Noon came.

Humphrey pushed back his chair, tapped on the edge of his desk, and thoughtfully wrinkled his long face. The natural thing was for Henry to come along with him for lunch at Stanley's. He didn't mind for himself. It was quite as pleasant to eat alone. In the present circumstances, more pleasant. It was awkward.

He got up; stood a moment.

He could feel the boy there, bending over proofs of the programmes for the Commencement 'recital' of the Music School, pencil poised, motionless, almost inert.

Suddenly Henry muttered again, sprang up, rushed to the press room, proof in hand; and Humphrey went to lunch alone.

Henry did not appear again at the office. This was not unusual. Monday was a slack day, and much of Henry's work consisted in scouting along Simpson Street, looking up new real estate permits at the village office, new volumes at the library and other small matters.

The unusual thing was the note on Humphrey's desk. Henry had put it on top of his papers and weighted it down conspicuously with the red ink bottle.

'I've had to ask Mrs Henderson and Corinne Doag to the rooms to-night for a little party. I'll bring them about eight.' Pinned to the paper was a five-dollar banknote.

At supper-time, Humphrey, eating alone in Stanley's, saw a familiar figure outside the wide front window. It was Henry, dressed in his newest white ducks, his blue coat newly pressed (while he waited, at the Swede tailor's down the street), standing stiffly on the curb.

Occasionally he glanced around, peering into the restaurant.

The light was failing in the rear of the store. Mrs Stanley came from her desk by the door and lighted two gas-jets.

Henry again glanced around. He saw Humphrey and knew that Humphrey saw him.

A youth on a bicycle paused at the curb.

Through the screen door Humphrey heard this conversation: —

'Hallo, Hen!'

'Hallo, Al!'

'Doing anything after?'

‘Why – yeah. Got a date.’

And as the other youth rode off, Henry glanced around once more, nervously.

He was carrying the bamboo stick he affected. He twirled this for a moment, and then wandered out of view.

But soon he reappeared, entered the restaurant and marched straight back to Humphrey’s table. His sensitive lips were compressed.

He said, ‘Hallo, Hump!’ and with only a moment’s hesitation took the chair opposite.

Humphrey buried his nose in his coffee cup.

Henry cleared his throat, twice; then, in a husky, weak voice, remarked: —

‘Get my note?’

There was a painfully long silence.

‘Yes,’ Humphrey replied then, ‘I did.’ And went at the pie.

Henry picked up a corner of the threadbare table-cloth and twisted it. He had been pale, but colour was coming now, richly.

‘Well,’ he mumbled, ‘I s’pose we’ve gotta say something about it.’

‘Not necessary,’ Humphrey observed briskly.

‘Well, but – we’ll have to plan – ’

‘Not at all.’

‘You mean – you – ’ Henry’s voice broke and faltered.

‘I mean – ’ Humphrey’s voice was clear, sharp.

‘Ssh! Not so loud, Hump.’

‘I mean that since you’ve done this extraordinary thing without so much as consulting me, I will see it through. I don’t want you for one minute to think that I like it. God knows what it’s going to mean – having women running in there! My privacy was the only thing I had. You’ve chosen to wreck it without a by-your-leave. I’ll be ready at eight. And I’ll see that the door of your room is shut.’

With which he rose, handed his ticket to Mrs Stanley to be punched, and left the restaurant.

Henry walked the streets, through gathering clouds of sand-flies, until it was time to call at Mrs Henderson’s.

7

They stood on the threshold.

‘This is the shop,’ Henry explained, ‘where Hump works.’

‘How perfectly fascinating!’ exclaimed Mrs Henderson. Her quick eyes took in lathes, kites, models of gliders, tools. ‘Bring him ‘straight down here. I won’t stir from this room till he’s explained everything.’

‘Hump!’ called Henry, with austere politeness, up the stairway: ‘Would you mind coming down?’

He came – tall, stooping under the low lintel, in spotless white, distant in manner, but courteous, firmly courteous.

Mrs Henderson, prowling about, lifted a wheel in a frame.

‘What on earth is this thing?’ she asked.

‘A gyroscope.’

‘What do you do with it?’

Humphrey wound a long twine about the handle and set the wheel spinning like a top.

‘Hold it by the handle,’ said he. ‘Now try to wave it around.’

The apparently simple machine swung itself back to the horizontal with a jerk so violent that Mrs Henderson nearly lost her footing. Humphrey, with evident hesitation, caught her elbow and steadied her. She turned her eyes up to his, laughing, all interest.

‘Sit right down in that chair and explain it to me,’ she cried. ‘How on earth did it do that? It’s uncanny.’ And she seated herself on a work-bench, with a light little spring.

When Henry showed Corinne up the stairs, Humphrey was talking with an eager interest that had not before been evident in him. And Mrs Henderson was listening, interrupting him where his easy flow of scientific terms and mechanical axioms ran too fast for her.

Henry’s pulse beat faster. Suddenly the pleasantly arranged old barn looked, felt different. Charm had entered it. And the exciting possibility of fellowship – a daring fellowship. He was up in the living-room now. Corinne was moving lazily, comfortably about, humming a song by the sensational new Richard Strauss who was upsetting all settled musical tradition just then, and prying into corners and shelves. She wore a light, shimmery, silky dress that gave out a faint odour of violets. It drugged Henry, that odour. He felt for the first time as if he belonged in these rooms himself.

Corinne found the kitchen cupboard’, and exclaimed.

‘Mildred!’ she called down the stairs, in her rich drawling voice, ‘come right up here – the cutest thing!’

To which Mildred Henderson coolly replied: —

‘Don’t bother me with cute things now. Play with Henry and keep quiet.’

And Humphrey’s voice droned on down there.

Henry dropped on the piano stool. Corinne was certainly less indifferent. A little.

He struck chords; all he knew. He hummed a phrase of the Colonel’s song in *Patience*.

Corinne drew a chair to the end of the keyboard and settled herself comfortably. ‘Sing something,’ she said. ‘I love your voice.’

‘It’s no good,’ said he, flushing with delight.

Surely her interest was growing. He added: —

‘I’d a lot rather hear you.’ But then, when she smilingly shook her head, promptly broke into —

‘If you want a receipt for that popular mystery
Known to the world as a Heavy Dragoon,
Take all the remarkable people of history,
Rattle them off to a popular tune.’

It is the trickiest and most brilliant patter song ever written, I think, not even excepting the Major General's song in *The Pirates*. Which, by the way, Henry sang next.

'How on earth can you remember all those words!' Corinne murmured. 'And the way you get your tongue around them. I could never do it.'

She tried it, with him; but broke down with laughter.

'I know hundreds of 'em,' he said expansively, and sang on.

It was an opportunity he had not foreseen during this dreadful day. But here it was, and he seized it. The stage was set for his kind of things; all at once, as if by the merest accident. For the first time since the awkward Sunday morning on the beach he was able to turn on full the faucet that controlled his 'charm.' And he turned it on full. He had parlour tricks. Out of amateur opera experience he had picked up a superficial knack at comedy dancing. He did all he knew. He taught an absurd little team song and dance to Corinne, with Mrs Henderson (who had at last come up) improvising at the piano. And Corinne, flushed and pretty, clung to his hand and laughed herself speechless. Once in her desperate confusion over the steps she sank to the floor and sat in a merry heap until Henry lifted her up. Then Henry imitated Frank Daniels singing 'The man with an elephant on his hands,' and H. C. Bamabee singing *The Sheriff of Nottingham*, and De Wolf Hopper doing *Casey at the Bat*. All were clever bits; the 'Casey' exceptionally so. They applauded him. Even Humphrey, silent now, leaning on an end of the piano, watching Mrs Henderson's flashing little hands, clapped a little.

Once Humphrey went rather moodily to a window and peered out.

Mrs Henderson followed him; slipped her hand through his arm; asked quietly, 'Who lives across the alley?'

'It's the Presbyterian parsonage,' he replied, slightly grim.

It was after midnight when they set out, whispering, giggling a little in the alley, for Chestnut Avenue.

'These sand-flies are fierce,' said Henry. 'You girls better take our handkerchiefs.'

They circled on lawns to avoid the swirling, crunching, softly suffocating clouds of insects. Nearer the lake it grew worse. At the corner of Chestnut and Simpson they stopped short. Mrs Henderson, pressing the handkerchief to her face, clung in humorous helplessness to Humphrey's arm.

He looked down at her. Suddenly he stooped, gathered her up in his arms as if she were a child, and carried her clear through the plague into the shadows of Chestnut Avenue.

Henry, running with Corinne pressing close on his arm, caught a glimpse of his face. The expression on it added a touch of alarm to the pæan of joy in Henry's brain.

They stepped within the Henderson screen door to say good-night.

'Let's do something to-morrow night – walk or go biking or row on the lake,' said Mrs Henderson. 'You two had better come down for dinner. Any time after six.'

'How about you?' Henry whispered to Corinne. 'Do you want me to come... Will and Fred...'

Corinne's firm long hand slipped for a moment into his. He gripped it. The pressure was returned.

'Don't be silly!' she breathed, close to his ear.

8

The sand-flies served as an excuse for silence between Humphrey and Henry on the walk back. Nevertheless, the silence was awkward. It held until they were up in the curiously, hauntingly empty living-room.

Humphrey scraped and lighted his pipe.

Henry, rather surprisingly unhappy again, was moving toward a certain closed door.

‘Tell me,’ said Humphrey gruffly, slowly, ‘where is Mister Arthur V. Henderson?’

‘He travels for the Camman Company, reapers and binders and ploughs.’

Humphrey very deliberately lighted his pipe.

Henry moved on toward the closed door. Emotions were stirring uncomfortably within him. And conflicting impulses. Suddenly he shot out a muffled ‘Good-night,’ and entered the bedroom, shutting the door after him.

An hour later Humphrey – a gaunt figure in nightgown and slippers, pipe in mouth – tapped at that door.

Henry, only half undressed, flushed of face, dripping with sweat, quickly opened it.

Humphrey looked down in surprise at a fully packed trunk and suit-case and a heap of bundles tied with odd bits of twine – sofa cushions, old clothes, what not.

‘What’s all this?’ Humphrey waved his pipe.

‘Well – I just thought I’d go in the morning.’

‘Don’t be a dam’ fool.’

‘But – but’ – Henry threw out protesting hands – ‘I know I’m no good at all these fussy things. I’d just spoil your –’

The pipe waved again. ‘That’s all disposed of, Hen.’ A somewhat wry smile wrinkled the long face. ‘Mildred Henderson’s running it, apparently. There’s a certain Mrs Olson who is to come in mornings and clean up. And – oh yes, I’ve got a lot of change for you. Your share was only eight-five cents.’

There was a long silence. Henry looked at his feet; moved one of them slowly about on the floor.

‘We’re different kinds,’ said Humphrey. ‘About as different as they make’em. But that, in itself, isn’t a bad thing.’

He thrust out his hand.

Henry clasped it; gulped down an all but uncontrollable uprush of feeling; looked down again.

Humphrey stalked back to his room.

Thus began the odd partnership of Weaver and Calverly. Though is not every partnership a little odd?

III – THE STIMULANT

1

Miss Wombast looked up from her desk in the Sunbury Public Library and beheld Henry Calverly, 3rd. Then with a slight fluttering of her pale, blue-veined eyelids and a compression of her thin lips she looked down again and in a neat practised librarian's hand finished printing out a title on the-catalogue card before her.

For Henry Calverly was faintly disconcerting to her. Though it was only eleven o'clock, and a Tuesday, he was attired in blue serge coat, snow white trousers and (could she have seen through the desk) white stockings and shoes. His white *négligé* shirt was decorated at the neck with a 'four-in-hand' of shimmering foulard, blue and green. In his left hand was a rolled-up creamy-white felt hat and the crook of a thin bamboo stick. With his right he fussed at the fringe on his upper lip, which was somewhat nearer the moustache stage than it had been last week. Behind his nose glasses and their pendant silk cord his face was sober; the gray-blue eyes that (Miss Wombast knew) could blaze with primal energy were gloomy, or at least tired; there was a furrow between his blond eyebrow's. He had the air of a youth who wants earnestly to concentrate without knowing quite how.

Miss Wombast was a distinctly 'literary' person. She read Meredith, Balzac, De Maupassant, Flaubert, Zola, and Howells. She was living her way into the developing later manner of Henry James. She talked, on occasion, with an icy enthusiasm that many honest folk found irritating, of Stevenson's style and of Walter Pater.

It was Miss Wombast's habit to look in her books for complete identification of the living characters she met. She studied all of them, coolly, critically, at boardinghouse and library. Naturally, when a living individual refused to take his place among her gallery of book types, she was puzzled. One such was Henry Calverly.

She had known something of his checkered career in high school, where he had directed the glee club, founded and edited *The Boys' Journal*, written a rather bright one-act play for the junior class. Indeed the village in general had been mildly aware of Henry. He had stood out, and Miss Wombast herself had sung a modest alto in the *Iolanthe* chorus, two years back, under Henry's direction and had found him impersonally, ingenuously masterful and a subtly pleasing factor in her thought-world. He had made a success of that mob. The big men of the village gave him a dinner and a purse of gold. After all of which, his mother had died, he had run, apparently, through his gifts and his earnings, and settled down to a curiously petty reporting job, trotting up and down Simpson Street collecting useless little items for *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury*. Other young fellows of twenty either went to college or started laying the foundations of a regular job in Chicago. Those that amounted to anything. You could see pretty plainly ahead of each his proper line of development. Yet here was Henry, who *had* stood out, working half-heartedly at the sort of job you associated with the off-time of poor students, dressing altogether too conspicuously, wasting hours – daytimes, when a young fellow ought to be working – with this girl and that. For a long time it had been the Caldwell girl. Lately she had seen him with that strikingly pretty but, she felt, rather 'physical' young singer who was visiting the gifted but whispered-about Mrs Arthur V. Henderson, of Lower Chestnut Avenue. Name of Doge, or Doag, or something like that.

Henry himself had been whispered about. Very recently. He had been seen at Hoffmann's Garden, up the shore, with a vulgar young woman in extremely tight bloomers. Of the working girl type. Had her out on a tandem. Drinking beer.

So it was, unable to forget those secretly stirring *Iolanthe* days, that Miss Wombast had looked about among her book types for a key to Henry, but without success. He didn't appear to be in De

Maupassant. Nor in Balzac. In Meredith and James there was no one who said ‘Yeah’ and ‘Gotta’ and spoke with the crude if honest throat ‘r’ of the Middle West and went with nice girls and vulgar girls and carried that silly cane and wore the sillier moustache; who had, or had had, gifts of creation and command, yet now, month in, month out, hung about Donovan’s soda fountain; who never smoked and, apart from the Hoffmann’s Garden incident, wasn’t known to drink; and who, when you faced him, despite the massed evidence, gave out an impression of earnest endeavour. Even of moral purpose.

Had she known him better Miss Wombast would have found herself the more puzzled. For Miss Wombast, despite her rather complicated reading, still clung in some measure to the moralistic teachings of her youth, believing that people either had what she thought of as character or else didn’t have it, that people were either industrious or lazy, bright or stupid, vulgar or nice. Therefore the fact that Henry, while still wrecking his stomach with fountain drinks and (a recently acquired habit) with lemon meringue pie between meals, had not touched candy for two years – not a chocolate cream, not even a gum drop! – and this by sheer force of character, would have been confusing.

And to read his thoughts, as he stood there before her desk, would have carried her confusion on into bewilderment.

Mostly these thoughts had to do with money, and bordered on the desperate. Tentative little schemes for getting money – even a few dollars – were forming and dissolving rapidly in his mind.

He was concerned because his sudden little flirtation with Corinne Doag, after a flashing start, had lost its glow. Only the preceding evening. He hadn’t held her interest. The thrill had gone. Which plunged him into moods and brought to his always unruly tongue the sarcastic words that made matters worse. He was lunching down there to-day – he and Humphrey – and dreaded it, with moments of a rather futile, flickering hope. Deep intuition informed him that the one sure solution was money. You couldn’t get on with a girl without it. Just about so far, then things dragged. And this, of course, brought him around the circle, back to the main topic.

He was thinking about his clothes. They, at least, should move Corinne. Along with the moustache, the cane, the cord on his glasses. He didn’t see how people could help being a little impressed. Miss Wombast, even, who didn’t matter. It seemed to him that she *was* impressed.

He was thinking about Martha Caldwell., She was pretty frankly going with James B. Merchant, Jr., now. Henry was jealous of James B. Merchant, Jr. And about Martha his thoughts hovered with a tinge of romantic sadness. He would like her to see him to-day, in these clothes, with his moustache and cane.

He was wondering, with the dread that the prospect of mental effort always roused in him, how on earth he was ever to write three whole columns about the Annual Business Men’s Picnic of the preceding afternoon. Describing in humorous yet friendly detail the three-legged race, the ball game between the fats and the leans, the dinner in the grove, the concert by Foote’s full band of twenty pieces, the purse given to Charlie Waterhouse as the most popular man on Simpson Street. He had a thick wad of notes up at the rooms, but his heart was not in the laborious task of expanding them. He knew precisely what old man Boice expected of him – plenty of ‘personal mention’ for all the advertisers, giving space for space. Each day that he put it off would make the task harder. If he didn’t have the complete story in by Thursday night, Humphrey would skin him alive; yet here it was Wednesday morning, and he was planning to spend as much of the day as possible with the increasingly unresponsive Corinne. Life was difficult!

He was aware of a morbid craving in his digestive tract. He decided to get an ice-cream soda on the way back to the office. He would have liked about half a pound of chocolate creams. The Italian kind, with all the sweet in the white part. But here character intervened.

A corner of his mind dwelt unceasingly on queer difficult feelings that came. These had flared out in the unpleasant incident of Mamie Wilcox and the tandem; and again in the present flirtation with Corinne. In a way that he found perplexing, this stir of emotion was related to his gifts. He

couldn't let one go without the other. There had been moments – in the old days – when a feeling of power had surged through him. It was a wonderful, irresistible feeling. Riding that wave, he was equal to anything. But it had frightened him. The memory of it frightened him now. He had put *Iolanthe* through, it was true, but he had also nearly eloped with Ernestine Lambert. He had completely lost his head – debts, everything!

Yes, it was as well that Miss Wombast couldn't read his thoughts. She wouldn't have known how to interpret them. She hadn't the capacity to understand the wide swift stream of feeling down which an imaginative boy floats all but rudderless into manhood. She couldn't know of his pitifully inadequate little attempts to shape a course, to catch this breeze and that, even to square around and breast the current of life.

Henry said politely: —

'Good-morning, Miss Wombast. I just looked in for the notes of new books.'

'Oh,' she replied quickly. 'I'm sorry you troubled. Mr Boice asked me to mail it to the office at the end of the month. I just sent it – this morning.'

She saw his face fall. He mumbled something that sounded like, 'Oh – all right! Doesn't matter.' For a moment he stood waving his stick in jerky, aimless little circles. Then went off down the stairs.

2

Emerging from Donovan's drug store Henry encountered the ponderous person of old Boice – six feet an inch and a half, head sunk a little between the shoulders, thick yellowish-white whiskers waving down over a black bow tie and a spotted, roundly protruding vest, a heavy old watch chain with insignia of a fraternal order hanging as a charm; inscrutable, washed-out blue eyes in a deeply lined but nearly expressionless face.

Henry stopped short; stared at his employer.

Mr Boice did not stop. But as he moved deliberately by, his faded eyes took in every detail of Henry's not unremarkable personal appearance.

Henry was thinking: 'Old crook. Wish I had a paper of my own here and I'd get back at him. Run him out of town, that's what!' And after he had nodded and rushed by, his colouring mounting: 'Like to know why I should work my head off just to make money for *him*. No sense in that!'

Henry came moodily into the *Voice* office, dropped down at his inkstained, littered table behind the railing, and sighed twice. He picked up a pencil and fell to outlining ink spots.

The sighs were directed at Humphrey, who sat bent over his desk, cob pipe in mouth, writing very rapidly. 'He's got wonderful concentration,' thought Henry, his mind wandering a brief moment from his unhappy self.

Humphrey spoke without looking up. 'Don't let that Business Men's Picnic get away from you, Hen. Really ought to be getting it in type now. Two compositors loafing out there.'

Henry sighed again; let his pencil fall on the table; gazed heavily, helplessly at the wall...

'Old man say anything to you about the "Library Notes"?'

Humphrey glanced up and removed his pipe. His swarthy long face wrinkled thoughtfully. 'Yes. Just now. He's going to have Miss Wombast send 'em in direct every month.'

'And I don't have 'em any more.'

Humphrey considered this fact. 'It doesn't amount to very much, Hen.'

'Oh, no – works out about sixty cents to a dollar. It ain't that altogether – it's the principle. I'm getting tired of it!'

The press-room door was ajar, Humphrey reached out and closed it.

Henry raised his voice; got out of his chair and sat on the edge of the table. His eyes brightened sharply. Emotion crept into his voice and shook it a little.

'Do you know what's he done to me – that old doubleface? Took me in here two years ago at eight a week with a promise of nine if I suited. Well, I did suit. But did I get the nine? Not until I'd rowed and begged for seven months. A year of that, a lot more work – You know! "Club Notes," this library stuff, "Real Estate Happenings," "Along Simpson Street," reading proof –'

Humphrey slowly nodded as he smoked.

'– And I asked for ten a week. Would he give it? No! I knew I was worth more than that, so I offered to take space rates instead. Then what does he do? You know, Hump. Been clipping me off, one thing after another, and piling on the proof and the office work. Here's one thing more gone to-day. Last week my string was exactly seven dollars and forty-six cents. Dam it, it ain't fair! I can't *live*! I won't stand it. Gotta be ten a week or I – I'll find out why. Show-down.'

He rushed to the door. Then, as if his little flare of indignation had burnt out, fingered there, knitting his brows and looking up and down the street and across at the long veranda of the Sunbury House, where people sat in a row in yellow rocking chairs.

Humphrey smoked and considered him. After a little he remarked quietly: —

'Look here, Hen, I don't like it any more than you do. I've seen what he was doing. I've tried to forestall him once or twice –'

‘I know it, Hump.’ Henry turned. He was quite listless now. ‘He’s a tricky old fox. If I only knew of something else I could do – or that we could do together – ’

‘But – this was what I was going to say – no matter how we feel, I’m going to be really in trouble if I don’t get that picnic story pretty soon. Mr Boice asked about it this morning.’

Henry leaned against Mr Boice’s desk, up by the window; dropped his chin into one hand.

‘I’ll do it, Hump. This afternoon. Or to-night. We’re going down to Mildred’s this noon, of course.’

‘That’s part of what’s bothering me. God knows how soon after that you’ll break away from Corinne.’

‘Pretty dam soon,’ remarked Henry sullenly, ‘the way things are going now... I’ll get at it, Hump. Honest I will. But right now’ – he moved a hand weakly through the air – ‘I just couldn’t. You don’t know how I feel. I *couldn’t*!’

‘Where you going now?’

‘I don’t know.’ The hand moved again. ‘Walk around. Gotta be by myself. Sorta think it out. This is one of the days... I’ve been thinking – be twenty-one in November. *Then* I’ll show him, and all the rest of ‘em. Have a little money then. I’ll show this hypocritical old town a few things – a few things...’

His voice died to a mumble. He felt with limp fingers at his moustache.

‘I’ll be ready quarter or twenty minutes past twelve,’ Humphrey called after him as he moved mournfully out to the street.

3

Mr Boice moved heavily along, inclining his massive head, without a smile, to this acquaintance and that, and turned in at Schultz and Schwartz's.

The spectacle of Henry Calverly – in spotless white and blue, with the moustache, and the stick – had irritated him. Deeply. A boy who couldn't earn eight dollars a week parading Simpson Street in that rig, on a week-day morning! He felt strongly that Henry had no business sticking out that way, above the village level. Hitting you in the eyes. Young Jenkins was bad enough, but at least his father had the money. Real money. And could let his son waste it if he chose. But a conceited young chump like Henry Calverly! Ought to be chucked into a factory somewhere. Stoke a furnace. Carry boxes. Work with his hands. Get down to brass tacks and see if he had any stuff in him. Doubtful.

Mr Boice made a low sound, a wheezy sound between a grunt and a hum, as he handed his hat to the black, muscular, bullet-headed, grinning Pinkie Potter, who specialised in hats and shoes in Sunbury's leading barber shop.

He made another sound that was quite a grunt as he sank into the red plush barber chair of Heinie Schultz. His massive frame was clumsy, and the twinges of lumbago, varied by touches of neuritis, that had come steadily upon him since middle life, added to the difficulties of moving it about. He always made these sounds. He would stop on the street, take your hand non-committally in his huge, rather limp paw, and grunt before he spoke, between phrases, and when moving away.

Heinie Schultz, who was straw-coloured, thin, listlessly patient (Bill Schwartz was the noisy fat one), knew that the thick, yellowish gray hair was to be cut round in the back and the neck shaved beneath it. The beard was to be trimmed delicately, reverently – 'not cut, just the rags taken off' – and combed out. Heinie had attended to this hair and beard for sixteen years.

'Heard a good one,' murmured Heinie, close to his patron's ear. 'There was a bride and groom got on the sleeping car up to Duluth –'

A thin man of about thirty-five entered the shop, tossed his hat to Pinkie, and dropped into Bill Schwartz's chair next the window. The new-comer had straight brown hair, worn a little long over ears and collar. His face was freckled, a little pinched, nervously alert. Behind his gold rimmed spectacles his small sharp eyes appeared to be darting this way and that, keen, penetrating through the ordinary comfortable surfaces of life.

This was Robert A. McGibbon, editor and proprietor of the *Sunbury Weekly Gleaner*. He had appeared in the village hardly six months back with a little money – enough, at least, to buy the presses, give a little for good will, assume the rent and the few business debts that Nicholas Simms Godfrey had been able to contract before his health broke, and to pay his own board at the Wombasts' on Filbert Avenue. His appearance in local journalism had created a new tension in the village and his appearance now in the barber shop created tension there. Heinie's vulgar little anecdote froze on his lips. Mr Boice, impassive, heavily deliberate, after one glimpse of the fellow in the long mirror before him, lay back in the chair, gazed straight upward at the fly-specked ceiling.

Mr Boice, when face to face with Robert A. McGibbon on the street, inclined his head to him as to others. But up and down the street his barely expressed disapproval of the man was felt to have a root in feelings and traditions infinitely deeper than the mere natural antagonism to a fresh competitor in the local field.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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