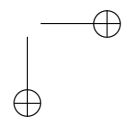
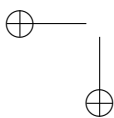
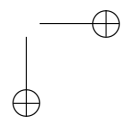
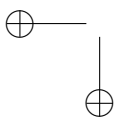
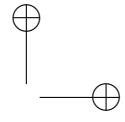
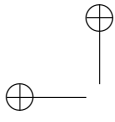
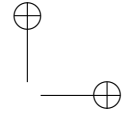
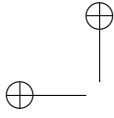


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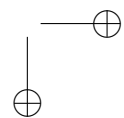
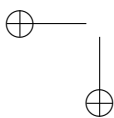


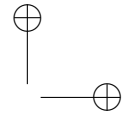
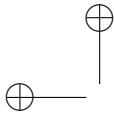


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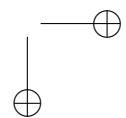
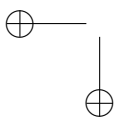
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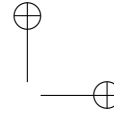
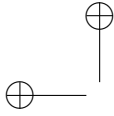
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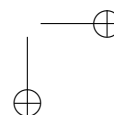
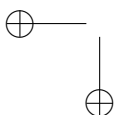
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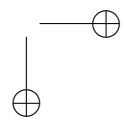
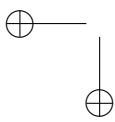
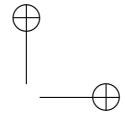
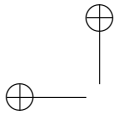


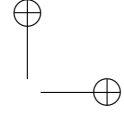


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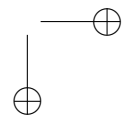
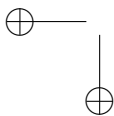
A WINTER IN GENEVA

I

Elizabeth Roberts had always considered herself a lucky person, and to be where she was just now seemed to her an outstanding proof of it. She had wanted for a long time to have some good reason – not a shallow reason; she was not a shallow woman – for spending six months or so in Europe, and now she had it: the very valid one that Phillip, her husband, who was not a shallow man, would be doing relief work in the Near East throughout the autumn and winter and she would naturally want to be as near him as possible.

There were of course other places nearer to the Near East and to Phillip than Switzerland, where she had elected to stay, but none that could offer at the same time so many advantages for Billy, their small son, and certainly Switzerland was nearer than Lexington, Kentucky, where she and Billy might have had to remain; nearer and nicer. She had not cared for Lexington since she had met and married Phillip. Everybody in

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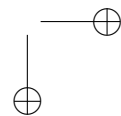
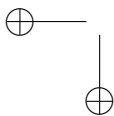


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Lexington, which was admittedly a shallow place, had wondered why she did it.

In spite of being a beauty and a belle she had from the first liked the idea of being married to a professional philanthropist – besides liking Phillip. She had enjoyed thinking of herself as marching shoulder to shoulder with him under his altruistic banners, and though this intention had almost immediately to be given up, or at least postponed on account of Billy, who for nearly eight years now had absorbed the practical side of her life entirely, there was still its ideal side to be expressed in sympathy and encouragement for Phillip's work. She still appreciated the nobility of Phillip's work; even if she didn't march with him into his battles for humanity, she could, like Helen, stand upon the wall to see; and while it might be argued that from Geneva she could hardly see very much of what Phillip was doing in Crete, she could get his letters telling her about it, without too much delay, and in return keep him almost up to date on Billy's progress at school.

She had found the perfect school for Billy. Nothing was easier in Geneva than finding a perfect school; and this one was so near the perfect pension she had already found that Billy could even run home for his lunch. He was learning French with what everybody said was astonishing rapidity, even for a child of seven; and no child, she was sure, could be too young to feel the charm of their immediate surroundings: the bright house with its *chauffage central* and its *confort*





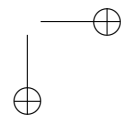
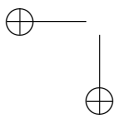
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moderne, where Mme Contenson made their meals so gay with her conversation and the hours afterwards so sweet with her music, which was almost as social and intimate as another form of speech. To be guests, even paying guests, in such a household – it was of course her lucky star.

It was a small household and this again Mrs. Roberts considered fortunate. Besides Mme Contenson and her brother Colonel Jabrowski, and besides herself and Billy, there was only Pierre Saint-Leger, whom Mme Contenson had presented as the son of an old friend and who, in addition to being himself very young, was also somewhat negligible from the fact that he was hardly ever there. Mrs. Roberts had gathered from his conversation at dinner that he spent his days in the confinement of a cage at the bank and his nights in the pursuit of pleasures somewhat unconfined.

Such at least had been his routine during the earlier weeks of her stay. Of late the young man had shown a tendency to loiter after dinner, making one of the group around the fire in the salon, and sometimes even to remain after the others had dispersed and the fire was burning low, for the purpose of engaging her in conversation about her country and its peculiar ways – which he said had always “intrigued” him – giving her in return considerable information of a more personal nature about himself and certain ways of his own.

As he was by no means devoid of intelligence and had in addition to his own rather engaging qualities the novel interest of being altogether different from the





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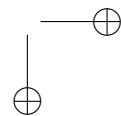
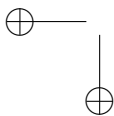
boys at home, Mrs. Roberts did not find this change in his habits displeasing. Just how it impressed the other members of the household she could not be certain – though she was very certain indeed that Colonel Jabrowski would sooner or later be offering her his comments on the situation, with that frankness she had already learned to expect from him, and, since his English was more than adequate, without even the veiling of a foreign idiom.

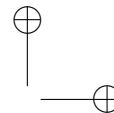
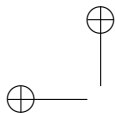
Colonel Jabrowski had allowed himself to fall into the habit of detaining his sister's paying guest after tea for what he tried to make a slight deepening of the conversation. He was holding her now, as he kept his seat by the table, knocking the ashes from his cigarette into his empty cup and noticing as little as possible the fact that she was dressed for walking and that Billy was finishing his cakes and waiting for her in the garden.

"We were speaking the other day about the romanticism of the Anglo-Saxon —" he said.

"You were speaking, you mean," Mrs. Roberts corrected him. "I was only listening, and not agreeing with a thing you said."

"But how, dear lady, can you read your own literature and not agree that it is you Anglo-Saxons – you Americans especially – and not we, who are romantic? Your writers are many of them such sentimentalists as would not be allowed among us unchained; there is always too much danger in the perversion of reality. Apropos of which, are you not leading our young





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friend Saint-Leger into precisely this danger by certain romantic perversions of your own?"

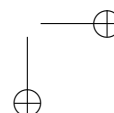
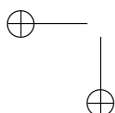
"What do you mean?" Mrs. Roberts asked him.

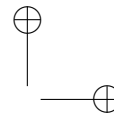
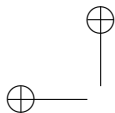
"Only what I meant in the beginning: that you are by race romantic, and since by nature you are beautiful, your doctrines, however unsound, are apt to be given more weight than they deserve, particularly in the case of a disciple such as Saint-Leger. And, in this connection, it is not too early to remind you that the doors in my sister's house are seldom closed – thanks to that central heating you appreciate so much – and one overhears perhaps too easily a conversation in an adjoining room."

"Then surely you must have heard," Mrs. Roberts said earnestly, "that what I am coving to do is the very opposite of romantic. I am trying to give Pierre a more practical view of life – to get him away from all these foolish foreign notions – yes, I know I mean un-American – about women especially; anybody would imagine to hear him talk that his affairs with women (I don't mean girls) are the only thing he ever thinks about. I might as well say it, since you have been listening."

"Not listening, Mrs. Roberts, only hearing – and learning nothing that I did not know already, or could not easily have guessed."

"Did you know that Pierre —" Mrs. Roberts coloured. It was evidently not so easy for her as it had been for Pierre to present conversationally certain phases of his experience.





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“I know that Pierre is a young realist, and that love at his age is of the essence of realism.”

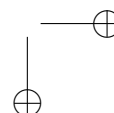
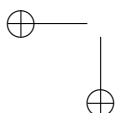
“But these affairs of his – you cannot call them love – are unworthy of a boy of his intelligence —”

“Nor can you, Mrs. Roberts, without being as I say romantic, call a young man of twenty-two a boy. And again I must remind you that by turning his emotions from their normal and relatively harmless channels – substituting a ‘sublimation’ which must find its centre in yourself – you may be taking a step whose consequences you cannot foresee. Just what – since you say you are practical I may permit myself the question – are you yourself prepared to sacrifice in this conversion?”

Mrs. Roberts reached for the silver fox curled in the chair beside her. “I really don’t know what you are talking about,” she said; “but I promised Billy I would take him over to the Manoir again this afternoon. And speaking of romance – my kind of romance – I think that is the most romantic-looking place I ever saw. It looks as if all kinds of things might have happened there.”

“But don’t they everywhere?” Colonel Jabrowski turned to follow her glance, through the window and beyond the garden with its gay gravel walks, where Billy was waiting, towards the adjoining park, whose trees, too many and too dark, hid from view the house of which they were speaking.

“Not romantic things.” Mrs. Roberts smiled at him and began putting on her gloves. “I can only hope we





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are not being a nuisance to Mme Savarin, going over there as often as we do; but Billy is so crazy about the animals. That is a regular little private zoo she has there – all those rabbits and frogs and things. I do wish Billy could have seen them when her husband was living, to make them do all the things she says he could – to ‘look after their education’, as she calls it.”

“Professor Savarin’s experiments in animal psychology were considered very remarkable.”

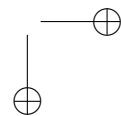
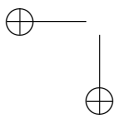
“They must have been. She says he used to show his students at the university how to hypnotize them, and sometimes he would have a whole row of frogs sitting on the back of a chair sound asleep. No wonder his lectures were always crowded.”

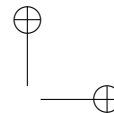
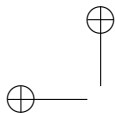
“But why should a frog be more interesting asleep on the back of a chair than hopping about its business? I don’t believe Billy would have found it so.”

“Oh, I’m sure he would. I can remember how thrilled I was once when my brother hypnotized our old rooster at home. He drew a chalk line from his bill across the kitchen floor and the rooster didn’t seem to be able to do a thing but just lie there and look at it. Children adore things like that. How long has Professor Savarin been dead?”

“Three years – or is it four? *Le temps passe, madame!*”

“And she goes on living there, with just her mother-in-law in that lonesome-looking house?”





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“‘Romantic-looking,’ Mrs. Roberts; and not lone-
some surely, with all the animals. Poor Maria Savarin.
She is rather in captivity too, I feel sometimes.”

“Is she real Italian, or just Italian-Swiss?”

“She is from the Val d’Aosta – very real. They are
even a little wild there sometimes. Professor Savarin
knew her in Torino, where she was doing some sort of
work at the time – housework I rather think, though
no one ever told me. He had the chair of psychology
at the university there, and when he came back to
Geneva he brought her with him.”

“Well, she is certainly different from the rest of you
– even after all this time; but Billy is crazy about her;
he even copies her accent – which isn’t very good for
his French, is it? The other day she showed him where
they keep the snakes – *les najas*; Billy knows the name
for everything. They didn’t go to the classes too, I
hope?”

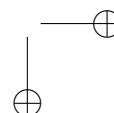
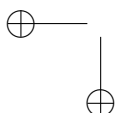
“The *najas* were, I believe, a private pastime. They
were brought to Professor Savarin from India.”

“Well, he certainly had enough without them. Why
did he have to have so many of everything?”

“I presume their number has increased. The voice
of nature, Mrs. Roberts, is heard even in captivity –
and again I say: poor Maria Savarin; for, biologically
speaking, she is still young you know.”

“I should never have thought of her as anything else.
How horrid you are! She has gorgeous eyes.”

“You find them so? Then you can understand that
they should have had at one time – until quite lately,





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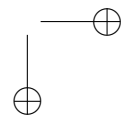
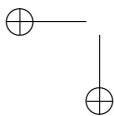
in fact – such an attraction for Saint-Leger, as he has doubtless told you. In making his confessions he could hardly have omitted an experience so recent and so – shall we say comprehensive?”

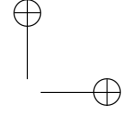
He looked at her inquiringly, and, feeling her cheeks grow hot again, she tried to make her voice as cool as possible. “Somebody seems to have been making confessions to you too,” she said.

“No, Mrs. Roberts; in my case it was not necessary. My room, as you know, overlooks the park, and young Romeo returning to his chamber at the peep of dawn – for him it really is the lark and not the nightingale – has been visible to me more than once.”

Mrs. Roberts fastened her fur about her throat and got up from her chair. “Between hearing and seeing, you don’t miss much, do you?” she said. She was not going to let him know he had shocked her; for that, she felt certain, was precisely the thing he was trying to do. She even managed to smile back at him as she went out through the glass door he held open for her, into the garden, where Billy, hearing the sound, turned in a whirl of gravel and ran to seize her hand.

“If we don’t hurry up they’ll all be gone to bed,” he said, and pulled her towards the gate in the low wall that separated the garden from the park of the Manoir.





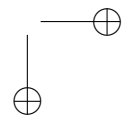
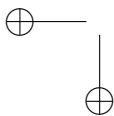
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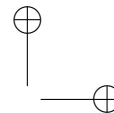
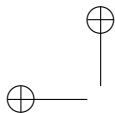
II

The League of Nations, then functioning more influentially than it has done since in the palace by the lake, gave a special tone to thought and conversation in Geneva during that winter of 1924–5. Altruism, Mrs. Roberts discovered, was not regarded with suspicion over here, the way it was at home; on the contrary, it was considered rather *chic*; and it was a relief to her not to have to explain Phillip as she did in Lexington – nor to explain philanthropy.

The late Monsieur Contenson himself, while not a professional philanthropist like Phillip, had been an impassioned amateur in this field and, after the unsatisfactory close of the war, had devoted most of his time and far too much of his fortune to forwarding the interests of those social units who held themselves to be among the politically under-privileged. It was largely because the journal he founded on their behalf – which he called the *Rights of Small Nations* and filled bi-monthly with their wrongs – had proved so expensive, what with all the consequences it entailed, that Mme Contenson, even before her husband's death, had found it expedient to add a few paying guests to all the non-paying ones who were continually dropping in from the four corners of the earth.

Some of these, to Mrs. Roberts's great satisfaction, kept on dropping, even now that Monsieur Contenson and the journal were no more. She found it delightful and, as she wrote to Phillip, very broadening to meet





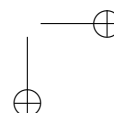
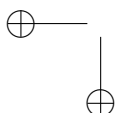
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so many different kinds of people – and all of them with the same unselfish ideals. Nobody, she noticed, ever came to Geneva on business of his own, but always in the interests of others.

Once there, however, she might also have noticed that these emissaries felt free on their own account to accept whatever benefits the City of Refuge had to offer, and Mme Contenson's hospitality was very favourably known to many of them.

Mrs. Roberts filled a long letter with an account of the day she came in with Billy late for luncheon and found the place at Mme Contenson's right occupied by an Indian chief from Canada – in mufti, but with his full quota of feathers reposing on a vacant chair where it had been deposited for his greater convenience while eating. He was not the Last of the Mohicans, which was all she could think of at the time, she said, but almost the last of the Iroquois, as he explained to them at some length during the course of the afternoon; indeed, it was to plead before the League the cause of this obsolescent dynasty that he had come to Geneva.

Mrs. Roberts was glad it was before her arrival that the two negresses had been entertained at dinner and given the prettiest bedroom for the night. They were charming young women, Mme Contenson assured her, and quite the blackest human beings she had ever seen. "When I went to their room," she said – "the room that is now yours, madame – to assure myself that they were entirely comfortable, and found them already in bed, I was so struck by the contrast between their faces





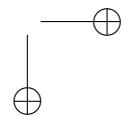
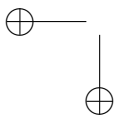
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

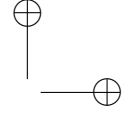
and the bed linen that I was for a moment speechless. *Elles étaient vraiment bijoux!*"

So darling indeed! reflected the lady from Kentucky. She remembered a Sunday at home when her grandmother's cook had asked her for a white dress to wear to church – "even ef it is goin' to make me look like a fly in the buttermilk." She wondered if she could tell it so it would sound funny in French. She did tell it in English to Colonel Jabrowski the next afternoon at tea. "You are supposed to laugh," she said.

He smiled indulgently. "Your story is diverting, Mrs. Roberts, as the stories we tell on our inferiors are apt to be; but has it ever occurred to you that our motive in telling them is seldom praiseworthy? We are generally prompted by a desire – subconscious if you will – to keep this inferiority in evidence. You find it 'romantic' again perhaps, as well as amusing, that my sister should entertain in her home your redskins and your blackskins, while I on the other hand am amused at the greater romance of your democracy – your melting-pot and your other myths that you yourselves do not believe in – that no nation was ever young enough to really believe in. They are the *concordat* of a fairy-tale: and they all lived happy ever after. But here, dear Mrs. Roberts, we are no longer young and no longer expect to live happily, and our melting-pot, though it boils, melts nothing; and how do you think we could live at all if it were not for our bitter realism, which teaches us to accept without hope our eternal differences?"

She thought a while before she answered.

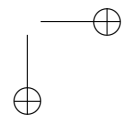
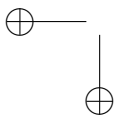




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“Maybe you really are more tolerant than we are at home about differences in people,” she said. “I have noticed that nobody seems to mind about Mme Savarin being so different. Your sister seems to like her just the way she would anybody else, and you say her mother-in-law is quite devoted to her —”

“Maria Savarin has been a daughter to her husband’s mother, though not the one she would have chosen,” Colonel Jabrowski said with a seriousness she had not in the least expected. It was the first time she had found herself alone with him since the afternoon he had taken it upon himself to enlighten her on the subject of Mme Savarin and Pierre and what she would have called at home the goings-on next door; she was giving him this opportunity to resume the topic because she had spent the intervening days in making up her mind that she didn’t believe him and thought she would rather like to tell him so. But though she was surprised at having the subject closed against her in this way, she was not really disappointed, for after all what she wanted to do more than anything was to forget about it. It still made her uncomfortable to remember the way she had felt that afternoon, walking through the park with Billy and thinking about the things she had just been told. It seemed to her as if just having them in her mind kept her from being a fit companion for her own child. And reminding herself that it was none of her business hadn’t helped a bit. The question was how much ought she to make it her business. Certainly at home nobody would know a thing like that about

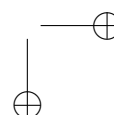
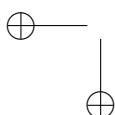




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a fellow-boarder and a next-door neighbour and not let it make a difference in his feeling towards them, and in his behaviour too; yet there she was, walking through the park with Billy to Mme Savarin's house. And then Pierre – of course she had known all along what Pierre was like; he had taken pains enough to tell her; only, for some reason, those adventures of his seemed not to belong to any world she would ever be called upon to enter. But now this thing had entered her world, and there must be some action, or at least some attitude that she ought to take about it, and not just let things be the way they were before. She hoped she was not losing her clear sense of right and wrong – over here with these people who were so different. It would be dreadful to fall into some sort of moral confusion. She would a whole lot rather just believe she didn't believe Colonel Jabrowski. And there were plenty of reasons for not believing him – reasons that had nothing to do with morality. Mme Savarin herself might almost be considered one of them, she was so far removed from anything likely to meet the taste of such a specialist as Pierre. She was not young – in relation to him at least – nor beautiful. "She is exactly like the Italians we have at home," Mrs. Roberts reflected; "though maybe when she was a girl – before she got so stocky. . ."

Billy had let go her hand as they came out from under the chestnuts and the fir-trees on to the mossy bricks of the terrace in front of the Manoir; he was in a hurry to get round to the kitchen garden and





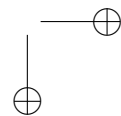
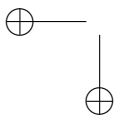
A WINTER IN GENEVA

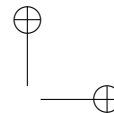
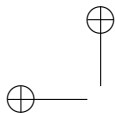
the stables while it was still light enough to visit the denizens of that interesting region; and she had stood for a few minutes looking up at the grey façade of the house and thinking how different were the romantic associations with which she had invested it from Colonel Jabrowski's "realism." Then she rang the bell and was shown into the salon, with its low ceiling and its big blue porcelain stove, where Mme Savarin, who was sitting near the window with her embroidery, rose and came quickly forward to greet her in the staccato French she had thought might be bad for Billy's accent.

"Do go on with your work," Mrs. Roberts said, taking a chair near the one from which Mme Savarin had risen. "I feel very apologetic about coming so often."

Mme Savarin smiled, showing the white, too pointed teeth that Mrs. Roberts thought her least attractive feature – associating them somehow with her incisive way of speaking – and assured her visitor with fluent cordiality of the pleasure it gave her to have "*le p'tit Billee*" so interested in her small menagerie – a pleasure always shared, she said, by her mother-in-law, who, although too indisposed of late to leave her room, was both cheered and gratified by his visits and frequently had her chair pushed to the window so she could see him in the garden below. An extremely intelligent child they both considered him.

She resumed her chair and her thimble and bent the "gorgeous eyes" once more upon her work. Even when they were downcast, one could see they had been



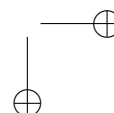
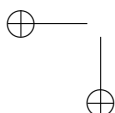


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finished with a lavish pencil, and her face in repose, while not beautiful according to any standard with which Mrs. Roberts was familiar, might, she admitted, have interested an artist more than her own. But she was undeniably “stocky,” and when presently, after everything politeness required had been said about the weather and a few kindred topics, she rose again and crossed the room to ring for a servant, both her low figure and her dark dress seemed to her visitor too common-place to have interested anybody.

In speaking of the weather Mrs. Roberts had expressed the hope that they would soon have snow – on Billy’s account – and she now went on to say that Pierre Saint-Leger had promised to teach Billy to ski. She was not given to conversational strategy and had only brought Pierre’s name in because it belonged there, but she watched Mme Savarin, who was dispensing the light refreshment that had appeared, for any sign of self-consciousness, and thought how disappointed Colonel Jabrowski would have been that there was none. The really fine colour in her cheeks grew no finer and the hand with which she had filled Mrs. Roberts’s glass a little too full set it down before her with perfect steadiness. Should she have Billy summoned from the garden, she asked, for some little cakes and perhaps an orange, as being better for him than the wine?

Mrs. Roberts, declining refreshment for Billy and finishing her own, felt her last wisp of doubt evaporate. It was with a lighter heart that she fastened again





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about her throat the furs she had clung to in the face of the blue china stove, and began to make the formal adieux which she had learned were the only kind ever used in Geneva.

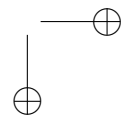
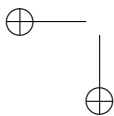
“Do not trouble to come with me, I beg of you,” she said, giving Mme Savarin her hand finally at the door; “I will just call to Billy and we will run home through the park. How short the afternoons are now! Come, Billy. – Au revoir, madame.”

But Billy did not come, and after the door closed behind her and she ran no risk of incurring further etiquette she made her way round to the enclosure at the back of the garden, where the disused farm buildings still stood, though the marching suburb of the city had long since overrun the farm and where in their various little huts and cages the animals resided.

Billy, who had evidently stopped by the kitchen for a piece of bread, was keeping some sleepy pigeons from their roost in the loft with the lure of crumbs, most of the miniature village having retired for the night, though by human measurements it was still only afternoon.

“Come, darling,” his mother said; “it will give them bad dreams to eat so much at bedtime. Isn’t the white one lovely – and so tame! They are none of them afraid, are they?”

“Not of me,” Billy said proudly, “and I suppose they wouldn’t be of you either, because you are my mother; but you ought to see how everything comes to the door of its house, even the snakes, when they hear





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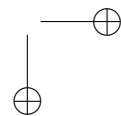
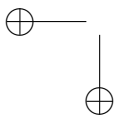
Mme Savarin. The snakes don't eat anything in the wintertime; she just feeds them a little milk, so they won't forget her, she says."

"Where are the snakes?" his mother asked.

"They live in a cage down under the stable, where it is warm; they used to keep the potatoes there," Billy explained. "They came from a warm country, Mme Savarin says, and they don't like Switzerland very much. There are only two of them; she says they haven't any children. I will ask her to let you see them some day. When she feeds them is the best time."

III

There were not many cars in Geneva except the ones pertaining to tourists, and the solid citizens moved about to a large extent on bicycles. It was always a surprise to Mrs. Roberts to see a professor gliding thus to his chair at the university, or a physician pedalling to his patient's bedside. Coming from a land of motor-cars and horses, there had grown up in her mind a class distinction – an age distinction, anyway – about the people one saw on bicycles. Even Pierre Saint-Leger, who was young enough to ride anything, would have looked better to her riding almost anything else. He was tall and took pleasure in being mistaken for an Englishman, in his London tweeds with his soft felt at the London angle, but Mrs. Roberts thought he might easily have been mistaken for the grocer's assistant when she saw him turn in at the gate on his wheel.





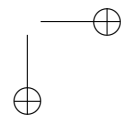
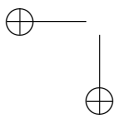
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He left the house at an early hour; a winter day in Switzerland begins for the business man and for the school-child too while it is still night to all appearances; and Pierre, although she did not realize it and he himself would hardly have admitted it, had a serious attitude towards business with which even his pleasures were not allowed seriously to interfere. He had spent two winters in London studying the international aspects of banking, and acquiring, in addition to the tweeds, an insular accent that was sometimes very amusing. He found England entirely congenial, he rather boasted, and, in contrast with what he had heard and was now hearing about the United States, altogether easy to understand. At least they understood him there; they considered him rather the British type, he said, and went on to confess with becoming hesitation that more than one person in London had thought he resembled Rupert Brooke.

"You thought they understood you because they liked you perhaps," Mrs. Roberts suggested; "but the two things do not always go together. I rather like you too, but I do not understand you in the least. Your way of looking at things, for instance. It seems to me positively myopic – stupid even."

"In what respect – what new respect, I mean?"

"I was thinking just then of the *débutantes*' ball – the *bal blanc* you went to the other night. You say those girls were lovely, and certainly that is the set you will one day be choosing your wife from – unless you are going to disappoint your family and surprise all





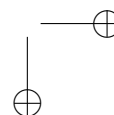
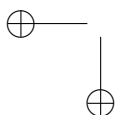
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your friends; and yet you came home bored to death. You didn't stay till it was more than half over. In America —"

"In America no doubt your young men would have had no better sense than to stay until morning in that kindergarten; but I had. I had sense enough to come home before you had gone to bed so I could sit here and talk to you."

They were in the salon and had drawn their chairs close to the fire, whose brightest hours always ended with the retirement of Mme Contenson, and this time Mrs. Roberts had taken pains to close the doors against any possible whereabouts of Colonel Jabrowski; this time she didn't want anybody to overhear the conversation she meant to have with Pierre. Something had happened that afternoon — only a few hours before — to make her feel that she had come to a turning-point where that young man was concerned. Either he would have to explain a few things (which she was sure he could not explain), or it would be impossible for her to go on treating him the way she did — or let him go on admiring her as openly as he was doing. The time had come for what she called a show-down on the subject of Mme Savarin.

That next-door neighbour, who had dwelt so comfortably in her thoughts since the visit, now more than a fortnight ago, when all her doubts had been set at rest, was once more looming darkly in the foreground of suspicion; only it was not suspicion any longer; this time it was certainty. Mrs. Roberts had been that af-



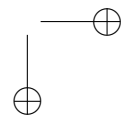
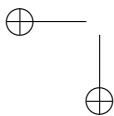


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ternoon the unseen spectator of a bit of drama too well defined to make charitable constructions and things like that any longer possible, and the fact that her conscience accused her of an equally well-defined bit of eavesdropping did not lessen her determination to call Pierre to a swift account.

She had walked back from town rather late; she still liked to walk home in the afternoons, though the hours of daylight were now so fatally short that there was little pleasure in doing it except for the exercise. There was not even the glow in the sky that followed the end of winter days in Kentucky; over here, it seemed to her, they just stopped dead. It was quite dark when she turned in at the gate, directly behind a moving shadow that she knew must be Pierre on his bicycle, and she quickened her steps, thinking she would get to the door in time to be let in with his latchkey instead of having to ring, and wait for Isabelle. When she reached the house, however, she saw the bicycle propped against the steps, and Pierre was over by the little gate that led into the park, talking to Mme Savarin. She could not really see either one of them, but she could hear them talking, and she knew it was Mme Savarin by her staccato French, which was more pronounced than ever because she seemed to be in a state of great excitement.

Mrs. Roberts was fully aware that she ought either to ring the bell at once or to make her presence known in some other way, but instead she did what her conscience called exactly the opposite, and stood quite



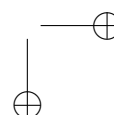
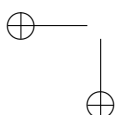


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still. She tried to believe it was only for a moment or two, but it was long enough for her to hear that Mme Savarin was reproaching Pierre for something, with a vehemence and fluency that sounded very much like scolding, or even cursing. Frankly trying to hear the words did not help a great deal, but those she managed to understand seemed all to deal with time – last year... last summer... in the future... in the past... ever... never...

She had never thought before how inevitably those who talk of love are led to talk of time, but she was sure that love lay at the root of Mme Savarin's tirade, and when suddenly it changed to sobs, and Pierre, putting his arm about her, turned her back into the park, she made her own escape by slipping round to the kitchen and astonishing the cook with her abrupt and unexpected entrance.

As she sat now by the waning fire in the salon, stirring the embers with the little brass poker and regarding the face of the young man beside her – the profile that was supposed to resemble Rupert Brooke – she wondered how long it would take for what she vaguely called the “kind of life” Pierre led to begin to set its mark on him – and what mark? She could not imagine him having the dissipated look so many of the boys at home took on at about his age; Pierre was not dissipated and would never be, she felt sure; nor could he ever look cynical, like Colonel Jabrowski. One must watch, she supposed, for some line of weakness settling about the mouth that was now only what she would





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have called “nice” – or even “innocent,” had she not been so frequently enlightened. “Just imagine Billy —” she thought. She often imagined Billy in her dealings with Pierre.

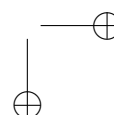
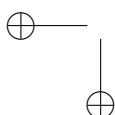
“So it was not the *bal blanc* that was worrying you,” he said when she had screwed up her courage and told him all her facts and what she could bring herself to tell him of her inferences. “I thought it must be something worse than that – to make you look so serious.”

“But it is that too,” she answered. “It all goes together, Pierre. If it were not for these deplorable affairs of yours – and really you do remind me of that dreadful Casanova Colonel Jabrowski has been reading to me. You seem to have no age limits – or any other kind. It is unnatural for you not to like the girls at your own age and in your own class better than a woman like Mme Savarin.”

Pierre looked at her thoughtfully.

“And when you say,” she went on, “that my opinion means so much to you and that you think about me all the time, I wonder what you mean by that. How does that square up with thinking about Mme Savarin?”

“You mean, I suppose,” Pierre said after a little consideration, “that you wouldn’t want a man who could ever be in love with her to even think of loving you; but you cannot help it, you see. And besides, why should you think I cannot feel about you the way you want me to feel? I really do adore you. I would never ask you – I would never even want anything that you did not feel free to give me.”





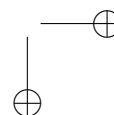
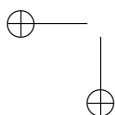
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“But you ought to feel that way about every woman,” she said. “Why should you ask Mme Savarin, for instance, for what she would think it wrong to give?”

Pierre’s face lost all at once its chastened expression. “Perhaps she didn’t —” he ventured, and then caught himself. “No, I didn’t mean that. Please just forget it. And why should we be talking about her all this time anyway, when I would so much rather be talking about you — or me? You have no idea how much I want to be the kind of man you like — even one of those dull Americans. Every night when I close my eyes I say: ‘God, please make me good for Elizabeth’s sake. Amen.’ I call you Elizabeth to God; He wouldn’t like ‘Mrs. Roberts’ — though He must like Mr. Roberts very well, since you say he is so virtuous. Shall we talk about him?”

She hung the poker back in its place and got up from her chair. “I think we have talked enough about everybody,” she said; “especially since you can’t stay sensible for five minutes. But I wish you would tell me —” she turned to pick up the book she had left lying open on the table — “and this is serious, Pierre — what was Mme Savarin saying about me, there in the garden? I couldn’t hear much, but I distinctly heard my name.”

Pierre had risen too and was standing with one arm on the mantelpiece watching her, as he often did when no one else was present, with a mixture of admiration and amusement which she found agreeable enough, but annoying too in one so young. He looked down





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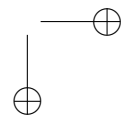
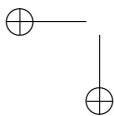
now at the little china figure he had picked up and was holding in his hand.

“Are you sure?” he said. “I can’t seem to remember — But I do think we have talked enough.” He stepped forward to hold open the door without looking at her again.

IV

On Mme Contenson’s piano, which was a concert grand and stood always open, keeping the whiteness of its keys protected by a strip of pink quilted *crêpe de Chine*, not unlike an elongated coverlet for a dolls bed, a photograph in an old-fashioned gilt frame was placed so that when she played she could, if she ever cared to do so, look it in the face, or rather faces, for it was a picture of herself taken with Monsieur Contenson at the time of their betrothal.

Although she seldom glanced at this presentment of herself as she sat at the piano, those who listened to her music were apt to look at it rather than at her, finding its delicate serenity more in harmony with her manner of playing, as well as with the things she habitually chose to play, than the face which the years had done so much to mar — too much, one knew somehow, even without knowing the number of the years — or the hands which in spite of their undiminished virtuosity were older still. While listening to her music, there was a sense of confusion in contemplating the stigmata





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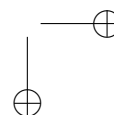
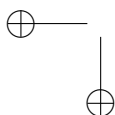
age had put upon her, for that was not only immortal – it was young.

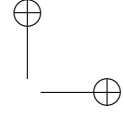
“You are simply marvellous,” Mrs. Roberts exclaimed, coming into the salon before dinner, just at the close of Chopin’s *Fantaisie Impromptu*. “You are always at concert pitch. Anybody would swear you practised for hours every day.”

A little wave of sadness passed over the face Mme Contenson turned towards her paying guest. “Ah no, madame,” she said; “my fingers are rusty; I can hear them creak. You should have heard me when I did practise. *Mes doigts volaient!* Paderewski thought my talent considerable.” She ended on the note of moderation with which she was apt to close her reminiscences of a youth which one felt, in spite of understatement, must have been a very brilliant affair, and which had been in Paris until it too had ended on the note of moderation imposed by life in Geneva and the Swiss virtues of Monsieur Contenson.

“Paderewski was a friend of my father, who was also a Pole; Jabrowski is a Polish name,” Mme Contenson explained. “He was often at our house, which was very gay – my mother was Parisienne. He used to play for us to dance.”

There was only firelight in the room, and the rose brocade of the curtains and the chairs gave a bright elegance to the scene whose central figure had already begun methodically replacing the little pink blanket over the keys she had just subjected to such whirlwind exercise. Mrs. Roberts had not been much in France



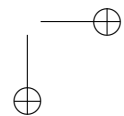
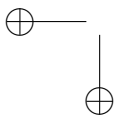


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nor, so far, very much in Switzerland, but she was sure that only Mme Contenson's metropolitan upbringing was expressed in the way she had furnished her house. It looked to the American woman as French as Paris itself.

This interval before dinner was her favourite part of the day. It was at this hour that Mme Contenson, who never faced the "little world" of her guests without an air of cheerfulness bordering on exhilaration, felt that she could do so without preoccupation. She kept house behind the scenes with vigilance and energy, and the hours spent in consultation with her cook or the regimentation of her upstairs maids were most of the hours of her day; but once dressed for dinner – the white lace scarf imposed on the afternoon's black silk and the odd arrangement of her hair a little odder still – all domestic manoeuvres were forgotten; then, like a general who has planned the battle down to the last detail and now seeks higher ground, she went to her piano, rolled up the coverlet from the keyboard, and began to fill the house with lovely sound.

Mrs. Roberts in her room above would hear, and close the book she had been reading to Billy or the letter she had been writing to Phillip, and come down; and presently Colonel Jabrowski would emerge from his study, the *Journal de Genève* in hand. Then they would hear the crunching of Pierre's bicycle on the gravel and the sound of his latchkey in the door; and pretty soon the little company would assemble and one of their evenings would begin. They were always



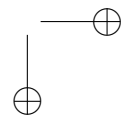
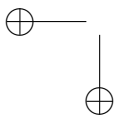


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like a party, Mrs. Roberts wrote to her husband, even when there were no guests – or like a play; ever so much nicer than the evenings people had at home.

Billy always had his dinner earlier, but on the evening of the Fête de l'Escalade he was coming to theirs, for that was an anniversary of almost fairy-tale commemoration, and juvenility was in the air. The *Parade of the Wooden Soldiers* took over at the piano the minute Billy, brushed and shining, was heard descending the stairs, and the dining-table, glowing with candles and favours, looked through the open door like Christmas itself. Billy had already seen the favours; he had gone round and round the table with Isabelle, pacing the little candy ladders at everybody's place, to remind them of the ladders the Savoyards had used to scale the walls of Geneva – and they might have succeeded if the citizens had not had the bright idea of pouring kettles of boiling chocolate down on their heads. There was a kettle too for every place, made of chocolate without and within and filled with lovely bonbons.

Billy had made the acquaintance of the Savoyards at school, along with William Tell and the other heroes and villains of his Swiss history book, and the engaging piece of villainy this occasion commemorated had lost none of its charm for him by happening long ago, or happening in French. When Mrs. Roberts in her long blue dress (everybody was dressing for the party) came into the salon, she found Mme Contenson telling him the story over again, with a wealth of gruesome detail.





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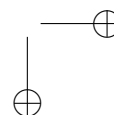
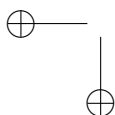
It was something of a shock to her to see Billy so plainly gloating over the blistered Savoyards. Even Colonel Jabrowski, in his usual place by the best reading-lamp, but not attending to his book, seemed no more entranced with the realistic saga than her sensitive child – too sensitive for a boy, she had often thought. What was happening to Billy in this new environment? Nothing was ever softened for children over here; she had noticed it about his lessons. Things were not made easy for them the way they were at home; they were just given to them straight.

She was still occupied with these reflections when Pierre came in, very elegant in his evening attire, and the story reached its terrible climax, and they all began to be extremely gay.

She thought again how much less spirited such a party as this would have been at home. They were so few in number and of such disparate ages, and yet how everything sparkled even before the champagne; for this evening there was champagne, and there were toasts, historical and contemporary in prose and in rhyme.

Billy must be taught to propose a toast, Pierre decided, and to respond to one. “We will drink now to Mme Contenson,” he announced with the graceful seriousness he could assume so easily. “What shall we say, Billy? . . . And now to your mother. . .”

These ceremonies being duly completed, Billy said he would like to drink a toast to the Savoyards, “because if it wasn’t for them we wouldn’t be having the





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party”; and Colonel Jabrowski approved this sentiment as being in line with certain realistic slants of his own.

“*Alors, bien,*” he said; “they have a toast already written” – he raised his glass:

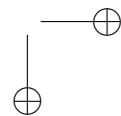
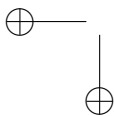
*“Si jamais plus vous retournez
Je prie à Dieu qu’il vous maudie. . . .”*

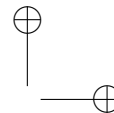
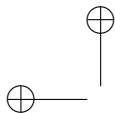
“I meant a nice one,” Billy said.

“I know a nice one,” Pierre told him; “not to the Savoyards, but to all of us. I will teach it to you the way they drink at Heidelberg. You hold your glass” – he got up and went round the table to where Billy sat beside his mother – “like this – only there it is a mug full of beer – and you say. . . .”

Billy was perhaps the only one who heard the German doggerel Pierre began to repeat, for just then, without ringing the bell or being announced in any way, Mme Savarin surprisingly appeared in the doorway opening from the salon, and they were for a moment so startled that all their keyed-up nonsense snapped like a broken string.

Never before had she looked so “different,” Mrs. Roberts thought. She was naturally not aware of the glowing picture she herself presented, in her blue dress with the candlelight on her bare throat and bright braids, looking up at the young man who stood beside her chair showing Billy how to hold his glass, but she was acutely conscious of the contrast between the scene in the dining-room and Mme Savarin’s still figure in





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the doorway – in black as usual, and with the shawl she had thrown over her head now hanging from her shoulders like a cloak. It was more than ever something from a play. But the tableau was immediately resolved in action. Colonel Jabrowski rose and clicked his heels together and Mme Contenson held out a welcoming hand.

“Come in, my dear,” she said. “A chair for Madame, Isabelle – *mais tout de suite* —”

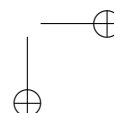
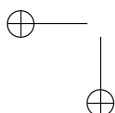
Mme Savarin came in, but would not sit down. She had come, she said, to ask advice about the new prescription the doctor had left that afternoon for her mother-in-law, whose rheumatism had been troubling her again. She was not sure of the dose.

Colonel Jabrowski took the bottle which she produced from the folds of her shawl and, holding it to the nearest candle, began to decipher the prescription, while she asked a thousand pardons for her intrusion. She was sure they would have finished dinner.

“But so we have, my dear; we were in the very act of finishing,” Mme Contenson assured her, and rose to lead the way into the salon, where Isabelle soon followed with the coffee, but where again Mme Savarin would not sit down. She must hurry back, she said; her mother-in-law would be waiting.

“But you must not go alone,” Mme Contenson protested. “Someone will go with you. Pierre —”

He came forward without the slightest sign of embarrassment, and Mrs. Roberts, who had felt all the while quite unable to look at him or at Mme Savarin – or to





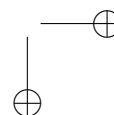
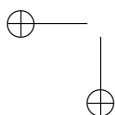
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meet the eyes of anybody in the room, for that matter – now that she saw them go off together so casually this way, accused herself of behaving rather absurdly. For after all why should she be the one – and obviously the only one – to feel the constraint the situation so plainly demanded? These people were a mystery to her; sometimes they seemed more congenial – more “sympathetic,” as they said over here – than any of her friends at home; then all of a sudden they could be as foreign as if they belonged to another planet.

A little later, however, when with the help of the *Wooden Soldiers*, she was marching Billy up to bed, she remembered that she really had noticed a difference in Pierre these last few weeks – ever since the night when she had told him what she thought of him. His repentance on that occasion had of course left much to be desired; she didn’t think he was repentant now; but he did take a more serious view of things, and that was a hopeful sign. She felt almost sure that in time —

She took as long as possible in putting Billy to bed. She hadn’t liked the way Colonel Jabrowski had begun to scrutinize her over the top of his paper as soon as the door closed behind Pierre and Mme Savarin. She thought she would just wait until she heard Pierre come in again before she went downstairs, so there would at least be someone to divide Colonel Jabrowski’s interest – if anybody wanted to be polite enough to call it that.

But when Pierre did come back, it was her own curiosity that made her look at him and wonder what





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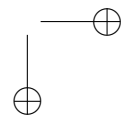
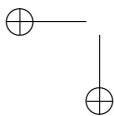
could have happened to make him so angry or upset or whatever it was – so silent anyway. He picked up a book and went into another room, but she could see through the open door that he was not reading it. “Perhaps after the others have gone upstairs he will tell me what is the matter,” she thought.

But this time Pierre was the first to go.

V

Mrs. Roberts was reading in her room, embraced by the eiderdown of her chaise-longue, which had been drawn up near the open fire. Mme Contenson insisted on her having it these cheerless January days while she was cheerlessly recovering from a cold that had laid her low before Christmas and seemed reluctant ever to let her up again. Such colds, she was now learning, were an accepted part of a winter in Geneva and kept the doctors of that damp delightful city flitting through its streets on their bicycles like so many birds of ill omen.

Neither she nor Billy had been well enough to enjoy Christmas, but Billy at least was out again, while she still felt as if she would never enjoy anything any more. Her book, in which she was not interested, lay open on her knees, and she was watching through the window the dull end of a Swiss winter afternoon and wondering, as she had done a good deal of late, just how another climate – Crete for instance – might be at this season, when Isabelle came in with a little note





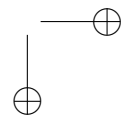
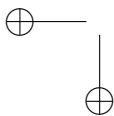
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from Colonel Jabrowski asking her permission to have his tea brought up with hers and to drink it in the charming company that he had missed far more, he assured her, than the sunshine of which they had been deprived of late.

It had not occurred to her until he came in, with his military bearing and his odd unmilitary gaiters, that she had missed him too. She must really like him after all; or maybe she was getting lonesome enough to like anybody. At any rate, as he sat there, full of solicitude for the discomforts of her illness and of appreciation for the lacy garments of her convalescence, she wondered why she had ever thought him tiresome; tiresome people were only interested in themselves. And if Colonel Jabrowski leaned a little to the other extreme and was inclined to be too much interested in everybody else – well, certainly that made him the best person to tell her what everybody had been doing while she had been sick.

She was aware that by “everybody” she meant Pierre and Mme Savarin. She had thought of them little enough since the night of the party, her own interest in other people’s behaviour depending, it seemed, on feeling well herself; but now she really wanted to know what had been happening, and it was not long before she began to suspect that it was for the very purpose of telling her that Colonel Jabrowski had come.

The conversation, which through two cups of tea he had kept hovering solicitously over her cold, finally moved across the park to the rheumatism of the elder





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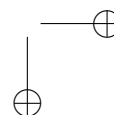
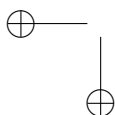
Mme Savarin, concerning which he had been the previous afternoon to inquire. He had found her much improved, and as always, he affirmed, the most remarkable woman of her age he had ever known – holding her own in every way, except perhaps rheumatically, to a degree that should inspire, if it did not discourage, all younger persons.

“For great age, Mrs. Roberts, is not in itself a boon and may be dreaded as well as desired. One goes upward in years very much as one does in a balloon – by throwing overboard almost everything one has ever possessed. But Mme Savarin *ainée* has held on with admirable tenacity to more than one could have believed possible; and having besides, in her daughter-in-law, so invaluable a nurse —” He paused and Mrs. Roberts quickly agreed.

“I am sure she is; I could see that night – the evening of our party —”

Colonel Jabrowski looked at her attentively. “I have wondered more than once,” he said, “just what you did see on that occasion. My sister, I presume, saw nothing, because she knows nothing, but surely you must have realized that although Mme Savarin brought along a bottle, the motive of her visit had nothing to do with a doctor’s prescription; it was much more plainly written.”

“I didn’t really look at her,” Mrs. Roberts said. “I suppose I felt a little funny about seeing her and Pierre together – after what you had been telling me. Maybe I felt embarrassed because I thought they ought to be.”





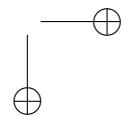
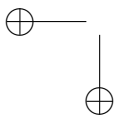
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“Embarrassment is a weakness in which Saint-Leger rarely indulges, I believe,” Colonel Jabrowski said, “and as for Maria Savarin, I fear she has reached, or may do so before long, a state of mind where none of our social trammels will seem binding to her. I took occasion before I left her house yesterday to invite her confidence – which turned out to be rather like inviting a cataract – and I then understood perfectly why Saint-Leger returned from seeing her home that evening both agitated and angry, as you yourself, for all your discretion, took note of, I am sure. Indeed, Mrs. Roberts, the intemperance of her feeling is such for the moment that I felt I should advise you, before you are out again, not to take Billy over to visit his zoo for a while, nor to go yourself where you might encounter Mme Savarin.”

Mrs. Roberts felt suddenly as if her fever must be coming back. She looked at him in amazement. “That is the craziest thing I ever heard of,” she said. “Sometimes I think you all must be crazy over here. What have I ever done to her that she should —”

“That she should hate you? You have only deprived her of her lover, Mrs. Roberts – a thing which, to paraphrase your Shakespeare, has profited you nothing and left her poor indeed.”

Mrs. Roberts, who was really not strong enough for the heavy turn the play seemed to be taking, felt her eyes fill with indignant tears. She tried to find her handkerchief, and Colonel Jabrowski picked it up from the rug and handed it to her.





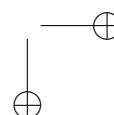
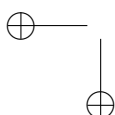
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“You must not let it distress you,” he said after a little, more gently, seeing that she was distressed; “and above all do not let it make you angry; not with Mme Savarin, nor with the rest of us. We are as God and the conditions of our life have made us, Mrs. Roberts, and even where charity cannot flourish and pity has run dry, the rock of understanding remains. We must build on that.”

He took up the hand that held the handkerchief and touched it lightly with his lips. “You did not take me for a poet?” he said, smiling at her. “But is not everyone in your presence inspired? I will ring for Isabelle to take away the tea, which you have hardly touched, and then I will take myself away; and on a day when you are stronger we will perhaps talk of these things again.”

He got up and pulled the bell cord, and as Isabelle appeared with the customary “*Vous avez sonné, madame?*” he bowed and departed, leaving Mrs. Roberts to wave away the tea.

If it had not been for her weakened condition she might have started that very afternoon to pack, or at least to plan, for Crete. It seemed intolerable to her to be called upon to consider even for a moment the melodramatic possibilities Colonel Jabrowski had suggested; but however great her indignation at being told to keep out of Mme Savarin’s way, her recollection of that outburst she had witnessed in the garden was vivid and unpleasant enough to reinforce the warning. Was it Shakespeare – her Shakespeare Colonel Jabrowski





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always called him though she hardly knew a single quotation – or who, that said something about hell having no fury like a woman scorned? Mme Savarin was, she supposed, a woman scorned – the first one she had ever met – and what she should really be doing was feeling sorry for her. When pity gave out, she must try understanding, Colonel Jabrowski said; but it would be a lot easier to pity Mme Savarin than to understand her.

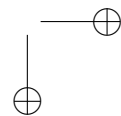
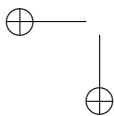
In spite of her agitated state of mind, there was no return of her fever, and before the evening was over, her indignation had insensibly given way to a feeling of complacency. Her own position was after all too plain and too open, she decided, for anybody to misunderstand it very long; all she had to do was to wait for Mme Savarin to come to her senses.

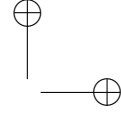
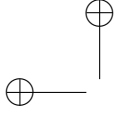
She really slept better that night than she had done since her illness. “The jolt must have been for me,” she thought on waking the next morning, and since the sun was actually shining for a change, she decided to dress and go down to luncheon. For certainly she would have to get her strength back before she could do anything else – even run from Mme Savarin.

VI

In the end she decided to run, but not as far as Crete.

“I think I shall take Billy to Les Avants for a week or two. Your nice Dr. de Rham thinks he ought to have a drier air and more sunshine until he gets entirely over





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his cough." She made the announcement at luncheon a few days later and waited a little self-consciously for the responses from the other three-quarters of the table.

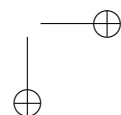
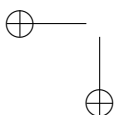
"*Bien, très bien!*" Mme Contenson exclaimed with enthusiastic approval. "Precisely what I had in mind to suggest, as soon as you seemed a little stronger."

Colonel Jabrowski, rather to her relief, made no comment; he gave her one quick glance, then looked away, and Pierre, to her surprise, said nothing either. He helped himself to the soufflé Isabelle was serving and placidly consumed it; then while Mme Contenson was pouring the coffee, he looked reflectively at Billy and said: "You must learn to ski up there. I'd better come up for the week-end and teach you."

"Your decision, Mrs. Roberts, has been admirably and promptly taken, and I would suggest even in my own despite that you prolong the week or two you have in mind to three or four."

Colonel Jabrowski had come with her to the train, for which they were too early, owing to Billy's impatience to arrive upon the snowy heights with the skis she had bought for him the day before. He was wearing them now, one on each shoulder, and was further encumbered with skates and a rucksack as he plied up and down the length of the almost empty station platform.

"I make no comment," Colonel Jabrowski continued, "on Saint-Leger's avowed intention of joining you for





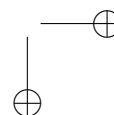
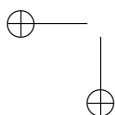
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whatever week-end or ends he may have at his disposal, or on your own indulgence in permitting him to do so, since that is not within my province. My interest in your happiness, though I would like to think it boundless, has none the less its boundaries defined. I may, however, be permitted to hope that nothing, whether false or true, may reach the ears of Mme Savarin of a nature to add fuel to her flame."

Mrs. Roberts smiled at the measured diction. Already it seemed strange to think of the play she was walking out of still going on. The emotions that had occasioned her flight had been quite lost in the interest of movement. She had been back to normal, she believed, ever since she got out her suitcases.

"Why don't you come too?" she said. "You could help me see things from a higher plane – which is really what I am going for. I know the best thing I can do right now is to try to forget all about this ridiculous business I have stumbled into. How little did I think I would ever be mixed up in an intrigue! But before I start forgetting it, I wish you would tell me what you really think Mme Savarin could do to me – except talk, of course – or maybe swear. I imagine she has the sort of temper Italians are supposed to have; but, after all, you know, I would survive that."

"You must remember, Mrs. Roberts, that Maria Savarin comes from a region where even today pins are stuck into the stuffed figure of an enemy, and wax images are burned at a slow fire."



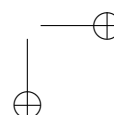
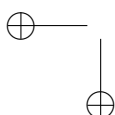


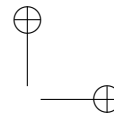
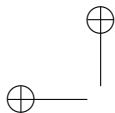
A WINTER IN GENEVA

“Well, I believe I might survive that too.” She smiled again and turned to signal to the distant Billy that their train was in sight. “Good-bye, dear Colonel Jabrowski. I really think I love you a little in spite of all the scoldings you have given me. I dare say I shall deteriorate horribly without them – even on the heights.”

As the train, after following the border of the lake for an hour or so, turned towards the mountains and began to climb and more people came aboard with that special look of freedom they wear on such occasions, she felt her spirits rising with the altitude. It seemed to her that they were all escaping together from the habitual level of their days; and as the cloudy cup of the lake receded and sunlight struck across the snows that lay ahead – sometimes almost overhead, so steep was the ascent – and everybody, whether they knew one another or not, began to talk and laugh and sin; together, it was as if they thought their childhood waited for them somewhere near the top.

She could not remember having ever, since she was a child herself, been in a company made up and held together this way by the simple anticipation of play. It was something new in human behaviour and she began, as she had a way of doing, to wonder “what it meant.” It took her some time – the rest of the way, in fact – to realize that its charm consisted in not meaning anything. It gradually dawned upon her that man’s state of innocence, presumably left behind him somewhere at about Billy’s age, might have a way of





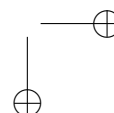
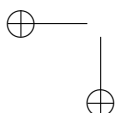
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

overtaking him again, and when it did, the knowledge of good and evil he had so carefully acquired along the way might mean little in its turn.

Some of the passengers got out at Les Avants with her and Billy; many were going farther, into regions higher and whiter yet, and waved to them as the train pulled out, and shouted beatific *aux revoirs*. The porter took their bags and led the way between walls of snow to the hotel whose windows had been visible in glimpses as they wound upward and from which they now seemed to survey the universe. The lake they had left so far behind looked near again, but the familiar peaks that had seemed from its shore to be quite close at hand were farther now than they had ever been, and higher than she had imagined they could be.

She was always glad, in looking back on their first experience with winter sports, that neither she nor Billy had to wait to look back before realizing what a good time they were having. It took her only a few hours to teach him all she had ever learned herself in that line (on the pond at home and down whatever hills the moderate landscape afforded), and then with skis and skates and sleds they plunged together into the unknown. They spent their days falling down and getting up again in a world where walking seemed forgotten and people only slipped and slid.

There were a few who danced sometimes in the evenings in the ballroom of the hotel, but not for long, and she could not imagine even trying it, with all the aches and bruises she had immediately acquired.





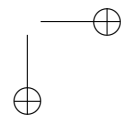
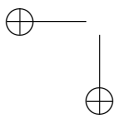
A WINTER IN GENEVA

Besides, she could not stay awake. The white days were followed by nights of black oblivion that did not even give them back in dreams.

She might not have known her Shakespeare well, but she had been in her girlhood a good deal “exposed to religion,” as they say in certain sections of Kentucky, and knew her Bible rather better. It was strange to her now how the words she had listened to Sunday after Sunday in the little count church she had attended with her grandmother came back to her in this far place, no longer as a riddle to be guessed, but in the way that music comes, or poetry – for their beauty and a sort of clearness that they shed on things. *And they shall be whiter than snow...* Gazing on these untarnished surfaces she knew what that could mean... *That taketh away the sin of the world...* She had seen up here how light itself makes things invisible. Could one ever learn to see so clearly that evil would just not be there any more? That would automatically be forgiveness.

She felt somehow strangely uplifted and would not willingly have admitted that her physical well-being had anything to do with it.

Pierre came up for the first weekend, and again for the last one. She had done as Colonel Jabrowski suggested and prolonged her stay beyond her original intention – not for his reasons, however, but for her own. She thought she would have liked to stay for ever, but Billy was missing too much school, and at the end of the third week she decided that they must go back with Pierre.





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

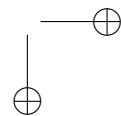
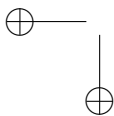
He had not brought with him on either occasion any suggestion of the unpleasant associations that had grown up about him in her thoughts before she left Geneva. He had been a delightful companion. On his skis he had been for Billy a marvel and a despair, and on a sled, taking them both behind him, he had shot them into blue spaces where only wings, it seemed to her, should go. Reviewing the days, now at the end of their last evening, she knew that she had been entirely happy, and said so to Pierre as they were finishing their coffee on the glassed-in veranda of the hotel.

"Getting back to Geneva will be rather like the end of the bob-sled run," he said. "I hate gravity anyhow; I have never been able to understand it in the least. Why can't we just go the other way instead and keep right on?"

She smiled rather absently. She had only heard as far as "back to Geneva." There was something she had made up her mind to say to him when they got back, and she suddenly decided to say it now.

"I want you to explain some things about me to Mme Savarin," she told him, "and I would like for you to do it before I go home – to America I mean. I am sure that if you made her understand just what your relation to me has really been it would make her feel better about me, and about a lot of things."

Pierre shook his head. "It would make her feel worse," he said, "except that she understands it already. That is just the trouble. She realizes, even if you do not, what a hold you have on me. No, don't worry;





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I am not going to say anything you don't want me to. I am not even going to say you have made me better; perhaps you haven't; just different. But why should you go back to America? That must be gravity — everything falling —”

VII

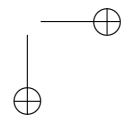
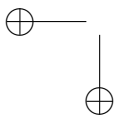
“Are you looking at my sunburn?”

Mrs. Roberts had surprised Colonel Jabrowski more than once since her return in a rather close scrutiny of her face, and this time, since they were alone, she thought she would try to find out why his curiosity, which he called his interest, should be so much more than usually alert.

He laid aside the newspaper over whose top he had been regarding her and turned frankly in her direction. “To tell you the truth,” he said, “I was not at that moment noticing the traces of your recent affair up yonder with the sun — that divinity among your lovers — though the marks of his ardour are plain enough; especially, if you do not mind my saying so, on your very attractive nose.”

“Go right ahead,” Mrs. Roberts said. “I shall not worry over what you say about my nose, nor any of your other insulting implications. I learned a lot of things up there in the snow, and one of them was to stop paying you so much mind, as we say at home.”

“No, seriously, Mrs. Roberts, it is easy to see that Les Avants did you and Billy both a world of good. I





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am sure that not only health but happiness attended you on those high places, and virtue, which I am convinced never forsakes you, did not, naturally, do so there."

"Go right ahead," she said again.

Colonel Jabrowski availed himself of the permission.

"It is only in the case of uncomplicated natures like your own," he continued, "that logic can be trusted. With such as you the syllogism holds: she has been happy; only the good are happy; ergo, she has been good."

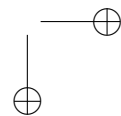
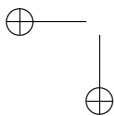
Mrs. Roberts laughed. "I wonder if you realize how much I have changed since I have been over here," she said. "I wouldn't even have known what you were talking about when I first came, and if I had, I would probably have been offended."

"And now?"

"Now I do know, and I don't mind." She looked out of the window and began to roll up her knitting. "Isn't the weather lovely! I think I will go out for another flirtation with the sun. School must be about over now, all but the singing. I will go get Billy for a walk."

Colonel Jabrowski rose and went over to the window that faced the park. It was evident that he wanted to say something and was for once uncertain how to begin.

"You have not seen Mme Savarin since your return, I presume," he presently inquired.





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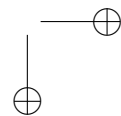
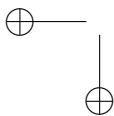
“No. You know she hardly ever comes here, and I have not been there – though I am going. I shall make a point of seeing her before we go away.”

“And in the meantime – Billy sees her, does he not? He still goes there sometimes?”

She put her knitting into its wide bag and fastened the wooden handles together firmly. “I am going to ask a favour of you, Colonel Jabrowski,” she said. “You know we haven’t many more weeks before we go away – I am meeting Phillip in Naples the middle of March – and I do not want to have the rest of my time here spoiled. Let’s not discuss this subject any more. I am terribly sorry about my part in it of course, but what has happened would have happened sooner or later anyhow. Pierre has had to wriggle out of these affairs before – he has told me – and this one I am sure he regrets. I really do believe he sees a lot of things differently.

“Not that I have any illusions about reforming people,” she went on as Colonel Jabrowski did not speak, “but I believe you actually enjoy thinking the worst of them. All the same, when it comes to suggesting that Mme Savarin would put the evil eye or something on Billy, I do think you are going too far. How you can hold such ideas about anybody you know and have to meet and be polite to —!” She got up and started towards the door.

“One moment, Mrs. Roberts; sit down, please.” Colonel Jabrowski indicated the chair from which she had risen. “At the risk of giving you further offence I





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must say something more on this subject, which is for you, I am sure, exceedingly unpleasant.”

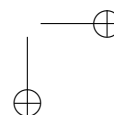
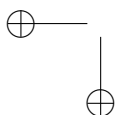
“It really does upset me,” she said, turning back into the room. “That is why I wish you wouldn’t keep going on with it.” She did not sit down, but went over to the window and stood there with him, looking out on the fir-trees beyond the sunny garden.

“I hope I shall not do so again, and for that reason I must try now to make you understand some things that are difficult for you because they are new. I said just now,” he continued, “that you had an uncomplicated nature. The motions of your spirit – I draw again from Shakespeare – are direct, but they are light; that is your charm. You are actuated by imagination. As I have told you more than once, you are romantic.”

“I know,” she said with a movement of impatience; “don’t tell me again.”

Colonel Jabrowski put out his hand in a restraining gesture. “Mme Savarin on the contrary, though she is also direct – nothing that runs on steel could be more so – is moved by passion; that is her strength. You will never know a great deal about passion, I imagine, but you will be always mistaken if you think of it as in itself an evil, when it is only a force – like wind, or steam perhaps. Though you can have no sympathy with her motives as you understand them, she is in many respects admirable; in others, as I have told you, she is quite literally to be feared.”

“But how feared?” Mrs. Roberts asked. “That is what I can never understand.”



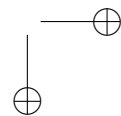
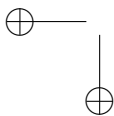


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“One should always be apprehensive in presence of a power that has been set in motion and at the same time distracted. This strength, of will, of nature – you would call it physical, no doubt, but it would not be less strong for that – by which she held her husband, though she had no part in his intellectual life – he was, by the way, not only a distinguished scholar, he was a charming man as well – this strength by which she holds his old mother now, holds her from the grave, Mrs. Roberts; I think sometimes she will live for ever – this same force has been turned on young Saint-Leger with what I have reason to believe is violence. He has had, as you say, his experiences, but nothing like this before. Men, however, are cowards in such matters and I have no fear that he will do anything but flee before the storm. You, on the other hand, seem disposed to defy it.”

“Not that,” Mrs. Roberts interrupted, “but to try if there isn’t something I can do to pacify it. Certainly it can do no harm to try. You are not actually afraid of knives or guns, I imagine, though you do seem to be of witchcraft; but when you come right down to it, all she can do is to throw some kind of fit, and I can always get up and come home. But I don’t believe she will. I believe in spite of all you have said that I can explain some things to her in a way to make her feel better about them.”

Colonel Jabrowski shook his head. “You are probably right in supposing that she will not, as you say, ‘throw a fit.’ She has passed that stage of her trouble.





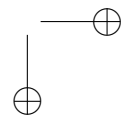
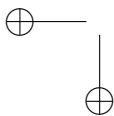
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

I have seen her once since she learned that Saint-Leger was with you at Les Avants – for she did learn it, through the servants I presume, or my sister in her innocence may have told her – and her condition of cold fury could find no relief in outward expression of any kind. Again I advise you, Mrs. Roberts, not to go where she can see you. I would rather you went at once to Naples – or to America. I say this from my heart – and I shall say no more.”

It was impossible to doubt his sincerity; there was something almost pathetic about it, Mrs. Roberts thought; and of course she could only thank him sincerely in her turn, giving his shoulder a friendly little pat as she turned once more to leave the room.

She looked for him when she came downstairs presently, dressed for her walk, intending to ask him to go with her, but he had disappeared.

She went on her way to get Billy more slowly than usual, for, in spite of herself, she kept thinking of Mme Savarin’s unreasonable behaviour. But how could Colonel Jabrowski be right – how could Pierre be right – in supposing she would not be less bitter, even though she might not be less unhappy, if she could be made to see just how things really were – just how they had been all along? The more she thought of how simple it would be to enlighten Mme Savarin, the more anxious she was to do it. After all, she ought to know more than a man – more than two men – about how a woman would be likely to feel in a matter of this kind.





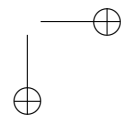
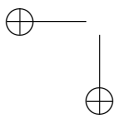
A WINTER IN GENEVA

The high piping of small voices as she drew near the school notified her that work was over for the day. The last half-hour was always devoted to singing, and they were now on the last song:

*La Suisse est belle,
O qu'il la faut chérir...*

"They use that for their *Star-Spangled Banner* over here," Billy had informed her, and she had often thought how charming it was to teach children as their earliest lesson in patriotism that their land should be cherished for its beauty first of all. The Rocket's Red Glare would have less appeal to her than ever, she felt, after Billy's school, and she wondered if Colonel Jabrowski would call that being romantic too.

The afternoons were ever so much longer now. The change had come quite suddenly, while she was in the mountains, and the shining hours seemed to her these days miraculously extended. When she and Billy, returning from their ramble, reached the wide gate of the park in front of the Manoir, the long rays of the sun were still slanting under the fir-trees. Quite suddenly she decided to go in. It would be a good idea to see Mme Savarin right now and get it over with; things might be better afterwards, and they could not, apparently, be worse. "Just for a minute, Billy," she said. "You may run around and see how many of the animals are still awake, while I make a little visit. I will wave to you through the window when it's time to go."



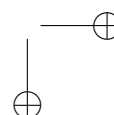
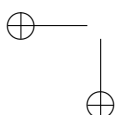


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She rang the bell and was shown at once into the salon, where she had never failed to find Mme Savarin, either alone or with her mother-in-law, and where she found her now – as much a part of the interior as the porcelain stove itself, near which the elder lady was today serenely knitting.

Mrs. Roberts expressed the pleasure she really felt at seeing her there, so unchanged after her weeks of rheumatism, and, taking the chair beside her, began the usual amenities, to which the usual replies were made. This time it was the dowager Mme Savarin who made them, in the light tones which always brought back to Mrs. Roberts her grandmother's voice, speaking its so different language at home in Kentucky. Being very old made people alike, she supposed, just as being very young did – though they themselves were probably never less conscious of differences. She could see how beautifully her grandmother would fit into this Old World setting – which she would no doubt begin at once to change, discarding the blue china stove in favour of something less picturesque but hotter; removing certainly from her own head the cap with long lace ends which the elder Mme Savarin wore so becomingly.

They spoke of the lovely lengthening of the days, and Mrs. Roberts, looking out through the low window into an enclosure where espaliered apricots were outlined in delicate relief against a wall, and a fountain, deprived of water at this season, offered to the eye a basin of moss, took occasion at the same time to look as carefully as she dared for the changes Colonel





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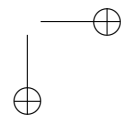
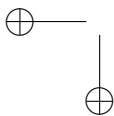
Jabrowski had led her to expect in the woman she was supposed to have offended.

The younger Mme Savarin was seated as usual near the light, but not as usual sewing. This time she had been reading aloud to her mother-in-law, and the book lay open on the table, ready to be resumed. How really sweet and unselfish she must be, Mrs. Roberts thought, in spite of her dreadful temper. She tried to imagine the “cold fury” Colonel Jabrowski had mentioned. He was certainly an expert in bringing out the worst in any situation; if it had not been for what he had told her, she would not have noticed anything wrong at all with Mme Savarin, except that she was more silent than usual – and that might be only because her mother-in-law had more to say.

“Ring for Joséphine, Marie,” she was saying now, but this time Mrs. Roberts declined the intended refreshment; it was late, she said, glancing down at her watch – these longer afternoons were deceptive. She got up and went over to the window to signal to Billy.

“I am going to hate terribly to take him away from Geneva,” she said, looking out and waving her hand in the direction of the kitchen garden and the stable; “I know how he is going to miss your little zoo – and all your kindness – but we shall be going very soon now. I am joining my husband at Naples, in March.”

She felt a movement behind her, so sharp and sudden that she turned to see if anything had touched her – though that she knew was nonsense, for nothing could. The elder lady was knitting tranquilly in her place





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by the stove, and the younger one had only risen for politeness. But politeness never made one feel like that. How pleased Colonel Jabrowski would be to know she could hardly restrain a sudden impulse to run!

Billy, however, was nowhere to be seen, and the adieux must be made as usual. If only she could keep Mme Savarin from going any farther than the door. It would be her chance, of course, to say the things that she had come to say, but she did not want to take the chance; she knew now that she would never say those things.

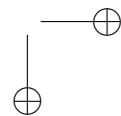
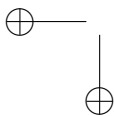
"Please do not come – it is only a step," she begged with an urgency that transcended etiquette, and when a little later she and Billy were scurrying home across the park under the trees where sudden night had fallen, she thought again of Colonel Jabrowski.

"Billy darling," she said, "suppose you don't go back to see the animals for a while – not until they get their new spring coats – so you will be surprised at how fine they look."

"Will it take them long to get them?" Billy asked.

VIII

"One thing I certainly mean to do before I go is to visit some of your outlying shrines. So far I have only seen the ones right in Geneva. I haven't been to Ferney, nor to Coppet, nor the Villa Diodati..."





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Mrs. Roberts laid down her fork and began to count on her fingers the homes of the illustrious dead who had found the shores of Lac Léman a better place to be while living than whatever native land had been assigned to them. There were so many that, with a little prompting, her fingers soon gave out. "But of course I do not mean all of them," she said. "I shall have to choose – Diodati, certainly. We have all been reading books about Byron at home lately. There have been a lot of new ones."

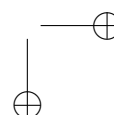
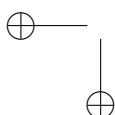
"Diodati isn't so hot," Pierre said, in the new vernacular he had been studiously acquiring.

"I want to see it all the same – 'I've seen the poets' houses,'" she quoted. "Some day I want to be able to say that – 'And Diodati by blue Léman's shore.' I want to see the vineyard where Claire Clairmont lost her slipper, running home to fast."

"Sounds like Cinderella," Pierre said. "But I believe in this story the prince didn't 'come across.'"

"Pierre, you are wonderful!" she exclaimed. "You will soon be speaking American better than I do. No, he didn't come across. I have always felt a little sorry for Byron in that affair – and some of the others too. In fact, the biographies they are putting out these days are pretty much on his side."

"The English – I presume the books you allude to are English —" Colonel Jabrowski said, "must be going through one of their periods of voluble tolerance, which alternate with their crises of incoherent virtue."





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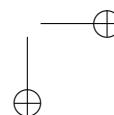
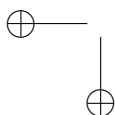
“Well, certainly they are being more tolerant about Byron than anybody used to be,” Mrs. Roberts said. “My grandmother kept his poetry on the highest shelf of the bookcase, because she didn’t want me to read it – and didn’t want to have to take it away from me, for fear that might make me suspect what it was about.”

They were finishing their elaborate Sunday luncheon. Sunday in the city of Calvin was, in Mme Contenson’s estimation, more of a feast day than one of religious observance. She was always too busy in the morning to go to a church that must have seemed to her, with her religious lineage, little worth going to at any time; so she made Sunday different by giving everybody more to eat and eating less herself. Today she had retired to her room before the dessert, and Mrs. Roberts was pouring the coffee.

“So it is now permissible to forgive Byron,” Colonel Jabrowski said, taking the cup she handed him; “but for what? For being a great poet, or for holding opinions that differed from those held by others?”

“I don’t imagine it was his opinions as much as his behaviour that people disapproved of,” Mrs. Roberts said. “Certainly he doesn’t have to be forgiven for being a poet.”

“But how can you divide a man – least of all a genius – into compartments like that?” Colonel Jabrowski asked. “You have to take him all of a piece, as God made him. If you will permit me to change the metaphor, I would suggest that in such a case one is not dealing with taps and faucets, like a plumber





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– permitting a tinkling fountain here, a useful sprinkle there. One is dealing with a torrent that sweeps everything, even the man himself, before it.”

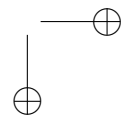
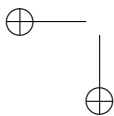
Mrs. Roberts was interested. “Well, at any rate I will have to concede Byron as one romantic Anglo-Saxon for you,” she said.

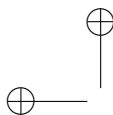
“But he is one I cannot accept,” Colonel Jabrowski objected. “His romanticism is too disingenuous – too *affiché*. I believe he really had, at heart, most of the middle-class virtues. He was a bad husband it is true, but certainly not a good lover. Whether or not you want to ‘forgive’ him, you will have to admit that he was, as he said himself, more pursued than pursuing.”

“Personally I don’t feel much like forgiving him for saying so.” Mrs. Roberts glanced in Pierre’s direction. “I think a man should keep those things to himself. It is childish to go around boasting about them – or complaining, either.”

Pierre was looking out the window and not, to all appearances, attending. “What do you say to going to Copper this afternoon?” he suddenly proposed. “That is about the best of the near-by shrines, as you call them, and this is certainly one of the ‘better’ afternoons.”

“As I call them too? I would love it – and so would Billy. Do come, Colonel Jabrowski, and tell me all about Corinne – who wasn’t romantic either, I suppose?”





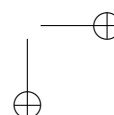
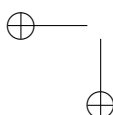
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Colonel Jabrowski declined. He didn't like Coppet, he said, and didn't want to be reminded of Mme de Staël.

They had a compartment to themselves on the train – one of the really charming compartments of the Swiss *deuxième classe*, with the neat crocheted antimacassars on the blue velvet seats, and the clear windows that afforded so wide a view of the lake, whose shores they followed all the way on the short journey. It still seemed strange to Mrs. Roberts that anything so scenic as a trip on a Swiss train could ever be considered as just going somewhere. How long would it take to get used to it and stop exclaiming: “Oh, look!” even to perfect strangers?

Presently Billy began to sing. “*La Suisse est belle. . .*” he carolled, either because he thought so or from force of habit, and she and Pierre joined in. From that song they went to another, until by the time they reached Coppet they had gone through Billy's repertoire, and the young conductor who had smiled in at them now and then as he passed along the corridor, helped them to descend at the little station with a cordial “*Bien plaisir.*” Lovely people, Mrs. Roberts thought; lovely, lovely land.

She even liked Coppet, which Mme de Staël, according to tradition, had never liked – where she had felt exiled from the great brain-centres – Paris in particular. Mrs. Roberts had read thus far in the little book she carried, and it made her think of Mme Contenson, who probably felt about her music and a few things





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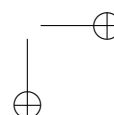
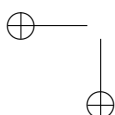
like that the way Mme de Staël used to feel about her brains. She had been rather like Mme Contenson too, it seemed, in her attitude towards Swiss home-building; Coppet was French within and without.

"This is the room where Mme Récamier danced her famous gavotte, when she was here once on a visit," Mrs. Roberts expounded to Pierre, with one eye on her book and the other on the dim tapestries and gilded chairs of the long salon. "They had to get a French dancing-master from the village to come in and do it with her. What a sad house-party! Why couldn't they do something Swiss instead?"

"Can you see Mme Récamier going down the bobsled run?"

"No; but I can see her in a boat on the lake – still holding her pose and her apple of Venus. Somebody else would be rowing, of course. And here – no, there – is the window with Corinne's favourite view." She stepped out on the little iron balcony. "But where is it? You don't see the lake or any of the mountains. Do you suppose that she liked to look at that so-called garden better than the Alps? Anyhow, there's Billy down there. Let's go on out."

They walked up and then down the allée of plane-trees that led to nothing but a high stone wall, and then sat down on a bench at the edge of the little fish-pond, whose possibilities Billy had already investigated and found negligible. He was now exploring farther afield, and the garden, except for the sound of their own voices, was quite still.





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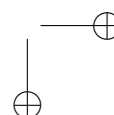
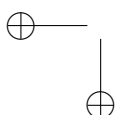
“You may have thought I didn’t hear what you said about not forgiving Byron for talking about his love-affairs; but I did,” Pierre told her. “I have been wondering if you could forgive me. I have been a fool, I know, and I suppose it is pretty hard to forgive a fool.”

“I am afraid it is not very hard to forgive you, Pierre, for anything you do,” she said, “though of course I am sorry sometimes.”

He looked at her in silence, then looked back at the long straight line of trees where they had been walking, whose leafless branches laid their stencilled patterns on the grass. “I don’t want you to go away,” he said suddenly. “I don’t know what I am going to do when you have gone. I am really terribly unhappy.”

She gazed at him in genuine surprise. The young libertine – the man of the world he had made such an effort to appear to her a few short months before – had abandoned his role completely. He seemed to her not much older than Billy and looked not unlike the way Billy did when he was about to cry.

“But, Pierre,” she exclaimed, “you must remember that it will not last. I am sure you will miss me – I want you to miss me – for a while; but the sadness of parting passes quickly. And, besides, I haven’t gone yet; there are still lots of days – two whole weeks even.” She picked up her bag and her book from the seat beside her and began to look round for Billy.





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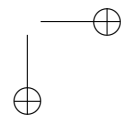
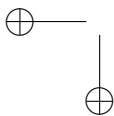
“No – please don’t go,” Pierre said. “I am not making love to you – you know I am not. I am only trying to tell you how I feel – and it is beastly.”

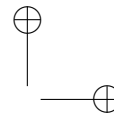
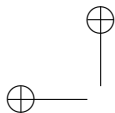
“Don’t try,” she said. “I am sure I understand already. But when people have been friends and have really tried to help each other —”

“But when they haven’t – haven’t helped each other, I mean. There was no way in which I could help you, because you had everything already. You are beautiful, and good – and have your husband – and Billy – and your United States. And you have not helped me; you have made me suffer horribly.”

She did not say anything for a minute or two, then saw her opportunity and took it. “Perhaps it is only right for you to be unhappy,” she said; “perhaps that is the only way you can be taught something that I shall try very hard to teach Billy before he is nearly as old as you are. I believe you have all your life been treating lightly – and disrespectfully – one of the most serious things you will ever have to deal with. And how can you know how much you may have made others suffer – someone, for instance, who was being terribly in earnest all the time you were just amusing yourself?”

“Of course I know whom you mean,” Pierre said, “and I might as well tell you that I have been worrying about that too. It seems to get worse instead of better. She is always writing me letters and trying to get a chance to talk to me. I believe after you go I better move away from Mme Contenson’s and not let anybody





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know where – only then she might begin coming to the bank to find me, which would make a frightful scandal.”

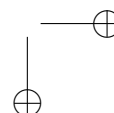
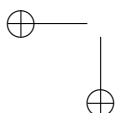
“But surely it will be better after I have gone,” Mrs. Roberts said.

Pierre shook his head. “That can make no difference now,” he said. “But here I go, being childish, as you say. I am worse than Billy – worse than Byron even.” He smiled dejectedly, and when she gathered up her things once more and rose to go, he did not again detain her, but looked at his watch instead and called to Billy that it was time for them to catch their train.

It was crowded going back and they neither laughed nor sang as they had done on their way up. They sat almost in silence looking out at the mountains, still crowned with rose, but down whose stupendous valleys the darkness was already marching, and the lake that from moment to moment gave up some heavenly reflection in favour of the human lights now starting up along its shores.

“We must try not to hold it against poor Corinne if we were not very cheerful in her old home,” Mrs. Roberts said as the city began to gather about them again.

“And you must try not to hold it against me,” Pierre said. “I think I shall have a motto worked on my sleeve, like Charles d’Orléans: ‘*Me voici, madame, tout joyeux*’ – so you can look at that instead of at me and not be in such a hurry to go away.”





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IX

"We are going to take Billy to Chillon on Saturday to see the prison," Mrs. Roberts said on an afternoon in the week following the trip to Coppet. "What do you think of them telling the children at school – those little things – all that dreadful story about poor Bonivard?"

She appealed to Colonel Jabrowski without much hope of sympathy. She thought she knew already what he would say and only wanted to hear how he would say it. She had grown really to like her tea *tête-à-tête*, as she called their almost daily arguments. The little table was often set out in the garden now, its cups and spoons twinkling in the spring sunshine.

"It is not a story, Mrs. Roberts; it happens to be a fact," Colonel Jabrowski said.

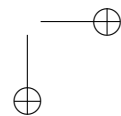
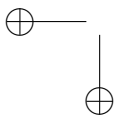
"All the more reason, then, to tone it down some for a child Billy's age."

"Do you imagine seeing the prison will make him feel better about Bonivard?" Colonel Jabrowski inquired.

"Oh, he doesn't seem to feel in the least bad about him. Billy has got to be terribly callous over here. I don't know whether it is a good thing or not."

"And how has our crude acceptance of reality affected Billy's mother? Has she grown 'callous' too?"

"I believe you know as well as I do about that," she answered. "Better, perhaps. You are a pretty good mind-reader, Colonel Jabrowski, and I hope you sometimes read in mine that I am more grateful than I have seemed to be for some of the things you have





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taught me. I have often wondered why you thought me worth your efforts.”

“My perseverance is no doubt to be attributed to an incurable taste for dialectics, though never again do I hope to have so charming a disciple – or adversary would be better, perhaps, since in most things we have fundamentally disagreed.”

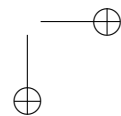
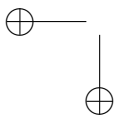
“Maybe after I get home and think them out better, I may agree more,” she said. “In which case I hope you will still let me say so. I want to write to you sometimes; you have all been so lovely to me – to both of us. I believe I have never been as happy as I have been here – in the sense of feeling ‘appreciated.’”

Colonel Jabrowski bowed his acknowledgments. “The pleasure, dear Mrs. Roberts, has been ours. Think how by shining upon them you have brightened our dull days! And if at times the rays have been excessive and burning has ensued —”

“Please, Colonel Jabrowski – you promised —” she reminded him.

“It was only what you said about being happy in Geneva” – he tried a new beginning. “I was reminded of the circumstances that you are not in every instance leaving happiness behind you. Through no fault of your own, naturally; shall we rather say through an excess of virtue?”

“Very well,” she said; “I might as well admit it and get it over with, since you will not keep off the subject, I suppose, until I do. You have been right in a good many things you predicted, and I have made a lot





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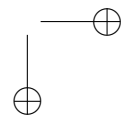
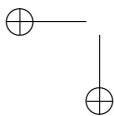
more trouble than I ever intended to make; but I still don't see how I could have acted differently, even if it did have to cause unhappiness."

"And as long as the unhappiness was that of others," Colonel Jabrowski suggested.

"As long as the wrongdoing was that of others – why not?" she said, curbing a rising sense of irritation. "Please don't let's argue any more, Colonel Jabrowski. You are always talking about letting people be the way God made them; why can't you let me be that way too?"

"In your case," he said with another inclination, "it would be ungrateful to do otherwise. It is not you, Mrs. Roberts, but your approach to actuality that I seek in some degree to alter. You have in you more than a little of the puritan, but something of the missionary as well, and it is not too early for you to learn that when, acting in the cause of virtue, as you always do, I am sure – your virtue – you set others' passions free, they do not fly out like pigeons and come home again, bearing each the appropriate retribution in its beak. They fly farther than you think, and often they do not come home, and the evil they have gathered falls where it will. Who knows what ears will hear the beating of those wings?"

"You see," he continued after a pause, when she did not speak, "as always, you bring out the poet in me. Perhaps in answer to one of those letters you say you are going to write me, I may some day send you a sonnet."



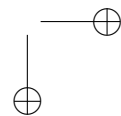
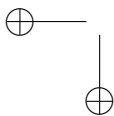


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Mrs. Roberts was fond of poetry and she was a good deal impressed with the figure Colonel Jabrowski had chosen to strengthen his argument. She recognized that its implications were new to her, and made up her mind that some day she would explore them further; but in the meantime she would just have to go on thinking the way she had always done, except that never again would she be so certain of herself when it came to dealing with other people's problems. She was even willing to admit that someone else might have handled this particular problem better – or done best of all perhaps by letting it alone. Maybe it was always best, she reflected, to let these affairs follow their normal course, whatever that might be: some sort of natural death, she supposed, instead of the violent one she had insisted on. The human heart seemed to be a wider territory than she had imagined.

Billy wanted to see the dungeon where Bonivard had worn his life away, but before Saturday came he had decided to relinquish this thrill in favour of a school excursion under the leadership of the younger and more agile of his two teachers. Though scheduled to be brief, because of the early season, and to extend only through the sunniest hours of the day, it would still comprise a picnic lunch in a moderately accessible pine forest and a prodigious amount of marching and singing, and Billy's choice was quickly made.

"But we will go just the same?" Pierre looked at Mrs. Roberts beseechingly. "It is probably the last afternoon I will ever have to be with you; and anyhow,





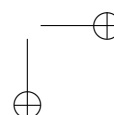
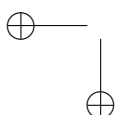
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to spend four months – or is it five? – this near the Château de Chillon without ever going to see it, is something you could never live down.”

“Nobody would know,” she said. “I have already sent postcards of it to everybody. But I really do want to see it. What time ought we to start? I want to get back rather early – before dark. Billy will be so crazy to tell me about his excursion.”

Sunlight was dancing on the groined arches of Bonivard’s dungeon, reflected from the lake that washed the walls outside. Mrs. Roberts thought Billy would have been disappointed at finding it so comparatively cheerful. It was even a little confusing for her – though she was glad for Bonivard, of course – to connect this interior of superb and immaculate masonry with Byron’s sombre poem. “An American millionaire would adore to have it for his dining-room,” she told Pierre. “You ought to see the lugubrious things they are building at home in the name of Renaissance; this is gay by comparison. Let’s go back upstairs and take another look at the fireplaces; they are simply overwhelming. And then let’s go outside. It is too lovely to stay inside of anything.”

It was almost the first day of real spring she had seen in Switzerland and it seemed to her, as they came out, to feel so much like spring at home that she had only to shut her eyes to imagine herself back in Kentucky; but to open them again was so unlike it – so unlike anything that belonged to earth – that it almost frightened her. The whiteness of the snow – *la*





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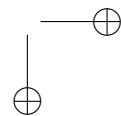
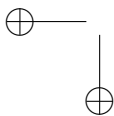
neige perpétuelle – that lay along the Dent du Midi, and the intense blue of almost everything else, made her catch her breath, and she was sure as she looked down that no water was ever as beautiful as the lake that mirrored those serene and perfect walls. Built in an age that knew little of serenity, and with their dark history since, why were they so much more uplifting to the spirit than the rocks and sloping meadows of more innocent shores?

She chose a place where she could sit down and try, as she was apt to do in the presence of anything that moved her, to find a “meaning” in this excessive loveliness.

“It seems wrong not to do something about it,” she said earnestly – “to just drink it in this way and not give it out again somehow.”

Pierre turned his attention definitely from the landscape. “What do you think you are doing all the time?” he said, and then, as she picked up her gloves: “Yes, I know you are going to say it is time to go; you needn’t look at your wrist.”

“The truth is,” she said, “I don’t feel a bit happy about Billy, up there in the woods with everything slipping and sliding the way it does in this weather. Switzerland is really about as perilous as it is beautiful. When we were in Zermatt I went through the little English cemetery there, and almost every tombstone had some sort of a calamity on it: the people who hadn’t fallen off of something had all had something fall on them. I could hardly sleep that night for fear the Matterhorn was going to come and get me.”





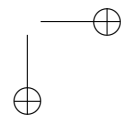
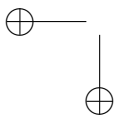
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“Maybe the English are not as good at dodging as the rest of us are,” Pierre suggested. “But those things happen in the high Alps; they don’t happen around Geneva; and anyhow Billy is out of the woods and on his way home by this time.” He looked at his own watch and found it really was time for them to start if they meant to get home before dark.

Colonel Jabrowski, to their great surprise and to Mrs. Roberts’s instantaneous alarm, was at the station to meet them. He had been meeting all the trains coming from that direction for the last two hours, he said. Billy had had an accident and was at the hospital. “But there is hope, Mrs. Roberts; the doctors have assured me there is hope.”

It was difficult to make her understand, so full were her thoughts of melting snow and falling rocks, that Billy had returned from his excursion safe and sound. He had been playing in the garden, Colonel Jabrowski told her, and then had evidently gone next door to visit the animals – though, as she knew, he had not been going of late. “I do not know why he should have gone today —” he hesitated an instant – “unless perhaps he noticed that Mme Savarin was about to feed them; she may have called to him.”

The accident had happened when they were giving the najas their bowl of milk. They were in a double cage and were never admitted into the outer one except to get their food; but Billy must have gone too near, or perhaps the door was not securely fastened – nobody knew anything about it yet; there had been no time,



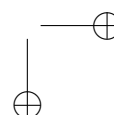
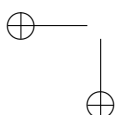


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Colonel Jabrowski said. He had heard Billy scream when the snake struck his arm, and had rushed over to help Mme Savarin. Not a moment had been lost; they had been fortunate in every way. Over and over he assured her there was hope.

And on this hope, which did not brighten much during the hours of that night, she somehow managed to live through them; and there in the little hospital room, just as in the sunlight on the mountains, the words that had fallen on her childish ears came back, their meaning plain: *Joy cometh in the morning. . . . Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh. . . .* And she knew this must be prayer, for it was answered.

The doctors were wonderful. They told her about the treatment they had used, the chances they had taken – the narrow margin by which they had been able to save her child. And her heart, already full of gratitude to God, made room for science too. But in Billy's presence all reference to his accident was forbidden. The imagination repercussions of such a shock, Dr. de Rham explained, were sometimes as severe as the shock itself – as one might observe in the case of the elder Mme Savarin, who had been completely prostrated by merely hearing of the occurrence. "And the heart at her age, madame – one could indeed see little in her favour except the tireless and unceasing devotion her daughter-in-law – *cette femme admirable. . . .*"





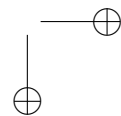
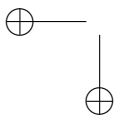
A WINTER IN GENEVA

X

“Sit down a minute, Colonel Jabrowski, please; I want you to talk to me a little while.”

Mrs. Roberts had been trying ever since luncheon to get Colonel Jabrowski where she could talk to him alone. She had really been trying a good deal longer than that. Since he had met her at the train, the day of Billy’s accident, he had avoided all conversation with her except in the presence of others, and now Billy was well again – well enough to travel, at all events, the doctors had finally agreed – and they were leaving for Italy the following day. The time had come, she thought, to say the things she had no intention of leaving without saying.

It had a curious reversal in their behaviour; she was now the one who sought an occasion for the exchange of confidences, and he the one who evaded it – with a skill and determination of which she had been incapable. He had given her no opportunity whatever to question him on the subject of Billy’s accident or lead him into saying anything about it to her that he did not say to others. She could not even surprise him in a glance – a momentary flicker – that betrayed a different knowledge from the one he openly expressed. He dwelt continually on the good fortune that had enabled them to act as promptly as they had done: the fact that he had been within hearing of Billy’s first outcry; the other fact that Mme Savarin had shown such presence of mind. The naja, it appeared, had in some way



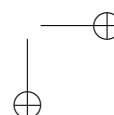
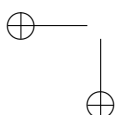


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managed to get out of its cage, and in some way she had managed to get it in again before it could do any further harm or even escape and hide. Billy was alone in the potato cellar at the time. He had gone down ahead of Mme Savarin with the bowl of milk, though he should of course have waited for her. . . .

So the days of Billy's carefully prolonged convalescence had passed, and this was their last afternoon. She could hear him in the room above, laughing at the *Histoire de Monsieur Vieux-Bois*, which Pierre was reading to him. The door into the garden stood open, and Colonel Jabrowski had been there ever since luncheon, sitting on the little iron seat with his cigar or walking back and forth on the gravel paths – lightly, in order not to break the spell of his sister's music: all the favourite pieces of the paying guest being played to her for the last time. Mrs. Roberts had been sure he was only waiting for the concert to be over, for Mme Contenson to go upstairs and for her to follow, before he would come in and settle himself with his paper in his accustomed corner of the salon. She had only had to keep her seat and do a little waiting too.

It was an easy ambush. She was not prepared for the start he gave at seeing her there or for the look almost of panic on the face she had so often thought of as cynical. He had picked up his paper from the table and, saying something about his glasses, was moving towards the hall when she stopped him.





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He sat down now with visible reluctance. He looked very serious; she even thought, and it amazed her, that he looked a little pale.

She tried a moment in her mind for a good beginning; then decided there was none. "Mme Savarin did call Billy to come and watch her feed the animals," she said.

"I thought perhaps she had." Colonel Jabrowski folded his paper carefully without looking at her.

"The naja was already out of its cage when she sent him down there with the bowl of milk," Mrs. Roberts continued. "She did send him. You knew that."

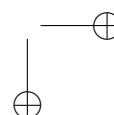
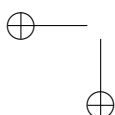
"Yes," he said.

"I have tried – I have really tried," she said earnestly, "to believe it was an accident – that she did not mean it. If you can believe it, you must tell me. You must make me believe it too, before I go away."

He had not looked at her while she was speaking, but now he did, and she thought she saw an expression on his face she had not seen there before.

"It was not an accident, Mrs. Roberts," he said. "She did mean it. When I got there the door was locked – on the outside; she had, thank God, left the key in it. She did not come until she knew I was there."

He had watched her closely while he said this, and now went on with what seemed more assurance. "I will tell you what I know. You have more strength than I believed." He paused and then began again in his usual measured way.





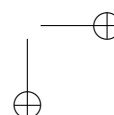
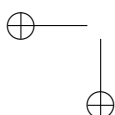
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“When people are desperate, Mrs. Roberts, they are always incalculable. One would naturally suppose in a case like this that it was the faithless lover who ran the greater risk, but I have had little fear for Saint-Leger. It was the extraordinary violence of Maria Savarin’s feeling towards you that kept me apprehensive and led me to do what I could – my poor best, Mrs. Roberts – to be at least on the alert for a danger you made it increasingly difficult for me to ward off. I had no means of knowing by what avenue she would seek to injure you, but I have tried to watch them all. Certainly I had never thought of the najas as an instrument of vengeance, though I was continually watchful to see that Billy did not go over there alone. I was, as you have probably guessed, crossing the park to look for him when I heard his cry; though it is difficult for me even now to believe that she would come to the gate and lure him – to his death, Mrs. Roberts; we will call it that, since that is what it was.”

There was not much that was new to her in this outline of iniquity; she thought she had grown used to facing it; but she was terribly shaken. It may have been some unexpected light on goodness rather than on evil that found her unprepared. For the first time since the tragedy she abandoned herself to her tears.

“You have been so patient with me,” she sobbed, “all this time, while I have been so egotistical – and calling you a cynic. . . .”

He made no effort to restrain her; he sat quietly refolding his newspaper while she finished with her





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repentance and her handkerchief and her little enamelled vanity-case. It was some time before he spoke again.

“Would it perhaps divert you,” he said at length, “to have me make a fable of these things? Let us say that because you have been disposed to deny to evil any place in the world you have created for yourself – as an improvement on an earlier work – you have been brought face to face with evil in its first and, according to Scripture, its final form. We have here the serpent and the woman; and while the allegory is not complete, we may for our purpose call it so.”

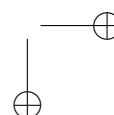
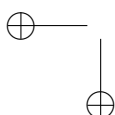
She looked at him earnestly. “And there really is nothing we should do?” she asked. “I do not mean for me; I am going away, and Billy is safe; but for —”

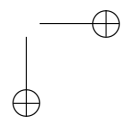
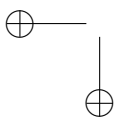
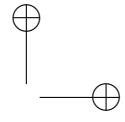
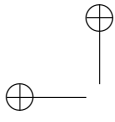
“For God – for morality? Poor child, haven’t you already done enough? Suppose you let them look out for themselves a while.”

“I know,” she said, “but I was thinking a little too of Pierre.”

“Saint-Leger, I am afraid, will also have to look out for himself – a thing he has succeeded in doing remarkably well up to the present. Certainly from America you can offer him no protection other than your prayers, and to warn him before you go would be, I assure you, superfluous. He is, as you know, a reader of several languages and will have no difficulty, I imagine, with the writing on the wall.”

She was glad to see, as he said this, that Colonel Jabrowski’s colour had returned.

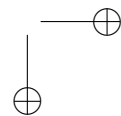
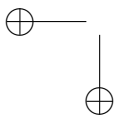






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The live-oaks on the place Mrs. Howard had rented for the winter were colossal. They had drawn her from the first, irresistibly – just like the Ancient Mariner, she said – by their long grey beards and everything. She had walked round their vast circumference and gazed up into their vaulted branches with a sort of blind wonder that was more like feeling than seeing. She could not have given anybody afterwards a single detail concerning them – not even what kind of leaves they had, or whether the mourning banners that swung incessantly in the blue air about them whispered as they did so or were still. She knew there were a great many of them, but it would never have occurred to her to count them, as Matilda immediately did, or even to notice the conspicuous and unusual fact that all of them had names. Somebody had named them for the English poets – the great ones – and Mrs. Howard had never realized how many great English poets there were until she read their names all clearly stencilled and firmly fastened on these other giants. They were appropriate too; she saw at once how easy it was to





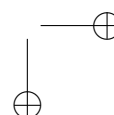
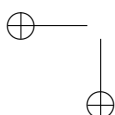
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imagine the poets with their accumulated years and laurels evolving into forms like these.

In the two months that she had now watched this procession of the immortals across her sloping lawns, it pleased her to think she had, without really trying, learned the names of most of them, for, after all, they were in their magnificence much alike. Matilda, who was her daughter, aged eleven, had by an instantaneous process she employed in such matters learned them all, and discovered at the same time that the wooden plaques on which the names were painted gave her a wonderful foothold when it came to climbing. She was at present dangling her legs in the branches of Wordsworth, where she could, herself unseen, look down sociably on the brown braids and the grey bob of the two ladies sitting in the shade below and listen to their conversation. Her mother and her mother's friend Angela Warren had been for a walk and were now resting on the grass beneath the tree, and beneath Matilda, saying complimentary things about the weather. It was, they said, for December – and even for southern Mississippi – beyond anything they could have imagined.

"If it keeps up like this," Mrs. Howard speculated, "Christmas ought to be about like early spring at home. Matilda can have the whole winter out of doors – and on horseback, if she wants it. I do wish you rode, Angela.

"Suppose your gracious landlord could rustle me up another horse? Or lend me his hunter?"





ONE ABOVE

"Of course he could get you a horse. He wouldn't lend Come Seven to anybody – and besides it would be nice to have him along sometimes. I know you don't like him, but 'gracious landlord' or not, you are bound to admit he knows how to ride – besides knowing the country."

Angela was silent.

"And anyhow," Mrs. Howard continued, "he's been a whole lot better as a landlord than I ever expected, after what the agent said. I really believe he wants us to like the place. Certainly he is not trying to make us get mad and go back home, the way he did the last people that rented it from him, according to the agent; I don't altogether believe it."

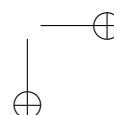
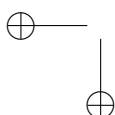
Angela was still silent.

"Of course, I don't blame you for not liking him," Mrs. Howard said. "He can be as rude as the dickens —"

Angela Warren, who was literary (she wrote plays) and had a cultivated voice, now employed some of its best intonations to say: "Lydia, I am surprised at you."

"Why?" Lydia Howard demanded, with less culture but with real surprise.

"I don't know whether you are childish enough to think you can fool yourself," Angela said, "or whether you are trying to fool me; in which case you would have to be more childish still. You know perfectly well the state of mind that man is in – about you and all your works. And I can tell you, the trouble he has





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made for his other tenants is a small matter compared to what he can make for you – if you keep on. You don't know the type; I do."

"For goodness' sake, Angela," Mrs. Howard exclaimed, "don't keep putting me in a play! Talking about 'all my works' and my 'keeping on' – keeping what on?"

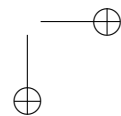
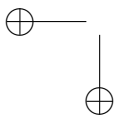
Angela shrugged her graceful shoulders. "If you really wanted to look at it in anything like an adult fashion, you would begin by considering the position you have put Mr. Dabney Ashe in, by renting his home from him and relegating him to a cottage off on a back road that used to belong to the overseer or somebody."

"But Angela —"

"Yes, I know he had to rent it to somebody, but doesn't it occur to you that it would have been easier for him if it really were somebody he could get mad at, as the agent said, or at least keep away from, instead of you, chirping like a robin the way you do – just filling the place with sweetness and light! You go horseback riding with him; you even ask him to dinner. You know how that must make him feel. Not that I care particularly about his feelings. Down-and-outers never did interest me – even in the movies. Certainly I would never choose one as material for anything of my own."

"But that's exactly what you're doing now, Angela – making 'material' out of Dabney Ashe. You simply can't help dramatizing people."

Angela shrugged again. "Very well; I may be seeing it as a play, but this time I'm not the one that's writing





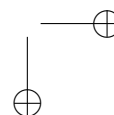
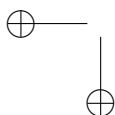
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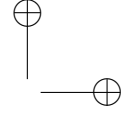
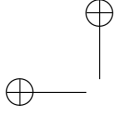
it; and what I'm asking you now is to look out for the third act. Even God can't do much to help it then."

Lydia leaned over to thump an insect from her friend's white silk sleeve. "Imagine grasshoppers," she said happily; and then after a moment: "While I think of it, Angela, I wish you would stop saying 'God' before Matilda. She picks up everything so."

"But suppose I mean God? Give me another name, then. 'One above,' my grandmother used to say; I can hear her now: 'There's One above who knows all.' I wonder if He does —" Angela looked in the direction indicated and saw Matilda's sandal swinging like a pendulum on high. "God!" she gasped. "I didn't know the child was there. What else have I said?"

Lydia Howard, who was a young widow and rather used to being thought of as younger than she knew the fact to be, was not accused of being childish — not openly at least — by any of her friends except Angela Warren. It was not intended as a compliment, she knew, and while she did not take it that way, she did not let it hurt her feelings either. She really took it as another proof of Angela's active imagination, but in any case she felt that it could be explained by her having always lived with people who were older than she was — men into the bargain. She could not remember her mother. The brother who had taken her father's place while she was still a child had been ten years her senior; and his friend, whom she had married, had been nearer his age than hers. How much these



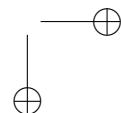
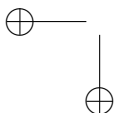


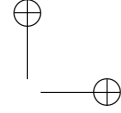
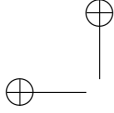
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disparities had prevented the normal development of her character she could not, in spite of Angela's assurances, be sure, but she needed no one to tell her they had not detracted from her happiness. Perhaps that was what Angela meant: she had been too happy, too protected. Until now, life had overtaken her, loss had overtaken her — and it looked as if Matilda was about to overtake her; eleven, all of a sudden, and nearly as tall as she was and twice as intelligent.

It was because Matilda was growing tall and intelligent too fast that a southern winter had been decided on, instead of school; and Lydia was sure that even Angela couldn't say she had not been sensible about picking out this place for her child. Out of doors all day, and a horse to ride, and as little reading as possible —

The horses and the man who looked after them "went with the place," the agent had explained to them. They either were the property of Mr. Dabney Ashe or were procured by him for his tenants' convenience. It was a delightful arrangement; quite the nicest part of their life down there, Lydia thought, and it seemed too bad that Angela preferred to stay in the house and write plays while she and Matilda explored the country. She had never seen a place, she told Angela, where you could ride so far in almost any direction without being "interrupted." Even the public roads were not bad for horses (these days she thought in terms of horses), and there were any number of lovely wagon roads, sandy and soundless, leading off into the





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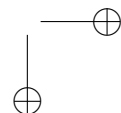
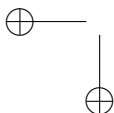
pinetrees, where one seldom met even a wagon, much less anything that honked.

She and Matilda hardly ever missed a morning, and sometimes she went again in the afternoon with Dabney Ashe. That depended. He never asked her beforehand; he would just ride by the stable and have Lonny saddle her horse, and she would see him coming under the live-oaks, leading both of them. Then if she could go, she would, and if she couldn't – but she generally could.

“Maybe when Bertie comes he can teach you some new card games.” Lydia was sitting on the wide veranda smocking a pinafore for Matilda, who had spread her pack out on the floor and arranged herself on the steps conveniently for putting red sixes on black sevens. She knew that Matilda could not remember Bertie; he was her cousin by adoption and was coming to spend Christmas with them, which ought to be nice for her. He was grown by this time, of course; Bertie must be twenty-one or two; but he was younger than the rest of them.

Matilda shook her corn-coloured locks back from her face enough to look up at her mother. It was a pointed little face and her eyes, set wide apart, had taken on the thoughtful look they wore in conversation. “He is very superficial, isn't he, Mother?” she inquired.

Lydia seldom permitted herself to smile at her daughter's choice of words, or even at the way she chose to pronounce them. “I used to think so,” she said, “but





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he was really very young then, you know." She held her needle up to the light while she threaded it, then brought her eyes down casually to meet Matilda's.

"I don't like adolescent men either," Matilda said.

Lydia reverted again to the needle. "What kind do you like?" she asked.

"I like an experienced type," Matilda said. "I really think Mr. Dabney Ashe comes about as near —" A run in the cards just here kept her slapping away until her mother thought the topic of her masculine preferences was not likely to be resumed; but the board finally won as usual and Matilda gathered up the pack and the subject and started over.

"Doesn't he remind you quite a lot of Heathcliffe?" she asked her mother. "Mr. Dabney I mean."

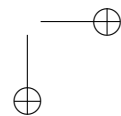
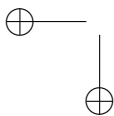
"Well, I hadn't thought of it. Do you think so?"

Matilda nodded. "I am sure he is; he is exactly my idea of somebody that is morose and — you know — taciturn. You knew he killed a man once, didn't you?"

"Where did you hear that story?" Lydia asked.

"Mandy was talking about it to Edna May. She said there didn't nobody blame him" (Matilda lapsed too easily into the vernacular) "but that was one reason he didn't have much money any more — because he had to hire such a fine lawyer to get him off. She said it was because the lady he was married to was just a bitch, anyway."

"Matilda, that is not a nice word for you to use," Lydia said. "I am surprised at Mandy saying anything like that before you."





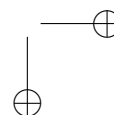
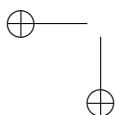
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“She didn’t,” Matilda explained. “I was up in Tennyson – you know – right by the gate, when Mandy was going home; Edna May always walks a piece of the way with her. Mandy said Mr. Dabney was such a good shot he could shoot an acorn off’n a tree and then hit it again whilst it was fallin’.”

When Dabney Ashe and Lydia took the back road, they had to go by the little house he lived in while his was rented. There were no live-oaks anywhere near it; only scrubby pines. Two rooms and a porch, and a kitchen at the back where Mandy presided, were what Lydia saw as they rode past, and she always wondered how any dwelling in so wide a setting could have so little charm. It did not indicate the extreme degree of human discomfort the negro cabins so picturesquely proclaimed; was probably quite livable; and yet she thought she would prefer the cabin.

Mandy was in the yard hanging out the washing one afternoon when they went that way. She had a line stretched between two trees and looked very gay out in the sunshine in her bright bandanna, waving a sock at them by way of greeting; but Lydia, though she waved back, did not feel gay. A man’s shirts and khaki riding-breeches hanging out to dry look so different from the ones he is wearing – so sort of defenceless and revealing.

Dabney Ashe, looking neither, gave a short unpleasant laugh. “I bring you this way on purpose,” he said with the slow intonation that came so easy to him she





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knew it couldn't be the affectation it sounded to her; "it's my nearest approach to that hospitality we are so famous for down here."

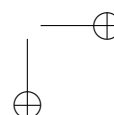
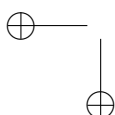
Lydia glanced at him a little uneasily; for a moment she couldn't think of anything to say.

"You and your friends can hardly expect me to ask you in," he added unnecessarily.

"You ask Matilda in," she said, "or does she just come in? I heard about a wonderful game of draughts the other day when it rained. She says Mandy's cookies are a lot better than the ones we make." The robin was chirping again, but it didn't seem to do much good. "And anyhow," she continued, "we feel all the time that we are enjoying the most beautiful hospitality. We have never liked anything as much as we like it here."

If he had looked at her he would have seen the charmingly earnest expression with which she said this, but he was looking ahead where the road branched off through the low palmettos and the none too lofty pines. That was the way they usually took, winding for miles among the stumps where the giants once had stood. They took it now, with one of their odd silences between them.

At any time in her life before she came here it would have seemed unbelievable to Lydia that she could ride as she was doing now – as she had done on several other occasions, and in the name of pleasure too – with a man who didn't even take the trouble to talk to her, no matter how well he knew the country or





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how well he rode. Why couldn't he act like other people? He was really good-looking when he smiled; but try and make him do it. She studied for a moment with impunity the unseeing profile. She had always liked people to have dark hair and grey eyes – but not narrowed down that way till they were hardly anything but slits. What would he say, she wondered, if he knew Matilda thought he was like Heathcliffe? Maybe he didn't know Heathcliffe.

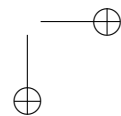
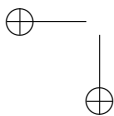
Lydia had never been able to make out how much he knew – or had forgotten – about books. He got along without referring to them. There were plenty of them in the library, which she was always having to shoo Matilda out of. Perhaps his father had spent too much time reading them; if somebody had shooed him out, the place might not have got so run down. It was his father who had named the trees.

“Matilda and I were trying to decide this morning which one of them we would choose if we could have one,” she said as the unbelievable boughs closed over them again at the end of the most unsociable ride they had taken yet. “I believe I would choose Wordsworth; he is more and more my favourite.

There is a tree, of many, one...

Your father would have known the rest of that.”

He turned the narrowed gaze her way. “I suppose you know you could have all of them,” he said, “to quote poetry to, or to split up into firewood when you got tired of them.”





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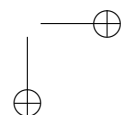
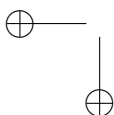
“What makes you think I would get tired of them?” she said, as lightly as she could manage.

“Because I think you are a woman.” He leaned over to fix something about her bridle. “That curb strap,” he said; “I’ll tell Lonny not to put it on your horse.” They had almost reached the house now. “Matilda tells me you are expecting company,” he remarked apropos of Matilda, who was coming down the steps to meet them. “Her cousin, I believe she said. That will be nice for her; I imagine she must be lonesome sometimes, with only grown people.”

Lydia laughed. “I don’t know; it’s a little hard to tell about Matilda. I doubt if Bertie is going to mean a great deal in her life. He’s really a lot older, and living abroad – I suppose she told you – will make him seem like a foreigner, I’m afraid. Matilda is very self-sufficient anyhow. She likes you, by the way; did you know it?”

“I hoped it,” he said, looking suddenly likeable – as he probably did all the time with Matilda, Lydia thought.

Bertie’s coming made a big change in their life – whether for better or for worse Lydia had not decided, even after he had been there for nearly a month and had stopped saying anything about going away again, ever. The holidays – which he might as well quit calling that, since they were the only kind of days he knew anything about anyway – had been much enlivened by his presence, she had to admit, but they were now receding, and Bertie was not.





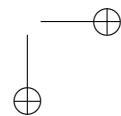
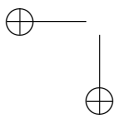
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“My, but he’s a stunning youngster!” Angela was given to exclaiming. She said “My” now instead of “God” whenever she could remember; Angela really was considerate. “It’s easy to understand the way your brother felt about him.”

That always had been easy, Lydia thought. It had been Bertie’s feeling for her brother, who had adopted him, who had adored him, and in the end, she felt, had really died for him – living over there in Paris and eating all sorts of food, ill as he was, just so Bertie could study singing – it still was Bertie’s feeling for the “dear Dad” he referred to so feelingly that seemed to her to need explaining. Anything so frankly selfish as Bertie simply had to be explained before anybody could believe it.

“But even so,” she said to Angela, after saying some other things, “it isn’t all his fault – that he is selfish, I mean. Edward indulged him terribly from the start. Bertie’s whims were the most important things on earth to him. That’s enough to ruin any child.”

“Nonsense, Lydia. In the first place Bertie isn’t ruined, and in the second place your brother didn’t do it. He has probably turned out pretty much as God intended.” Angela always took up for him. He was an artist to his finger-tips, she said, and had a marvellous sense of the stage. He had recognized in a minute what was wrong with that scene in her first act; she was doing it another way entirely.





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Nobody was doing anything just the way he did before Bertie came, Lydia thought. The pattern of their days had shifted.

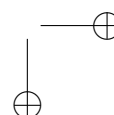
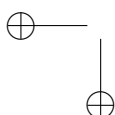
“Tea? Oh, good!” Angela put down her book as Edna May came in with the tray, and drew closer to the big wood fire. She considered this the nicest part of the day – the *heure exquise*, she said. Tea had been Bertie’s innovation; the big fires, the weather’s. They were now having all the winter they could expect to have. “Come on in and toast your toes, *Robert*,” she called, hearing the front door slam, and pronouncing Bertie’s name quite as if they were in Paris.

He paused in the doorway leading to the hall while he pulled off his gloves. He looked altogether too handsome in his English riding clothes, and Angela fairly beamed on him. “I want you to tell your aunt that story you were telling me about the Comtesse de Noailles,” she said. Calling Lydia his aunt was one of Angela’s and Bertie’s little jokes, and so as usual Lydia smiled.

Bertie laid his gloves and his riding-crop on a chair and pushed up another one for himself, taking a preliminary sandwich as he did so. “I’ve got something better than that to tell both of you,” he said. “I’ve been having an adventure in local colour.”

“Oh – what?” Angela demanded eagerly. God! How she had been needing that very thing!

Bertie took the cup Lydia handed him. “Two lumps? Sure?” he inquired. “Well, listen, my children – you





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too, Matilda; come on in.” He waited while Matilda helped herself to cakes and settled down on a pile of cushions at the corner of the hearth. Then he began again: “Have any of you seen that little graveyard – I guess it’s what they call a ‘family burying-ground’ down here, but it’s miles from any house now and must be a hundred years old – off all by itself in a pine thicket?”

Lydia shook her head. “No, but we can imagine it. Go on; ghosts?”

“Come again,” Bertie said. “Ghosts aren’t local colour; you can see one of them anywhere; they flit. But law-breakers have to stay where there are laws to break – down here for instance, where they have prohibition.”

“Moonshiners!” Angela was radiant.

“There’s the dramatist for you,” Bertie said approvingly. “You’ve simply got to see it, Angela – I’ll take you up behind me. The most fascinating thing you can imagine: a big copper contraption boiling away, with negro men standing around poking a fire – did any of you ever see a still?”

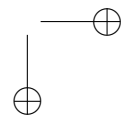
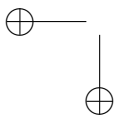
“I have,” Matilda said from her cushions.

“Where?” Bertie asked her.

“I’ve seen that one.”

“Why, Matilda,” Lydia exclaimed, “when did you?”

“One day when I rode over there; the day you had your bad cold —” She stopped suddenly. Bertie was looking at her.





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"Maybe Matilda can tell us whose little enterprise it is," he said. "I only have my suspicions."

Lydia was about to say "Can you, darling?" when she caught the glance Bertie exchanged just then with Angela, so she said: "Nonsense, Bertie," instead and reached out for his empty cup. "There are a lot of those little enterprises round here, I believe," she went on. "Could you really get one into your play, Angela?"

"Not without getting some of the neighbours in too," Bertie said. "That's one way to make a living, you know, and livings down here are scarce."

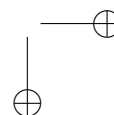
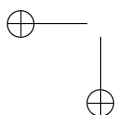
"Mother," Matilda said a little later when Edna May had taken out the tea things and finished coming back for the ones she had forgotten and Angela had taken Bertie for a walk, "the more I see of Bertie, the gladder I am that he is not a blood relation."

Lydia, who had been looking thoughtfully at the fire, now looked, still a little thoughtfully, at Matilda. "Why, darling? Because he said —"

"No; not what he said to me. I do know whom that still belongs to; it belongs to Mr. Dabney. He was over there the day I discovered it."

"How did you happen to, Matilda?"

"Blazer acted so queer. I thought he was afraid to go past the graveyard — you've heard how animals are about graveyards — but then I smelled the mash myself and wondered what it was, so I made him go right on up. And then I saw those coloured men, and Mr. Dabney was standing there by Come Seven."





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“What did he say, Matilda?”

“He laughed and told me to wait a minute and he would ride home with me. And so we did.”

“Did he explain anything about it?”

“Not particularly. He said that was the way they made their Manhattans down here. He said they were not as good as the ones you made.”

Lydia did not smile. “I see,” she said. “And did he tell you not to let me – not to say anything about it?”

“Of course not, Mother.” There was indignation in Matilda’s tone. “He knew I would have more discretion. I am not like Bertie, I hope.”

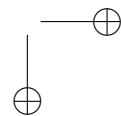
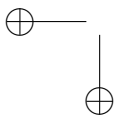
Dabney Ashe had been away most of the time since Bertie’s arrival. He was down on the Gulf, fishing, Mandy had informed Matilda – “an’ you jus’ wait till he gits back, honey, an’ see them kingfishes! One of them Mr. Dabney caught was so big they didn’t have no boa’d in Mobile big enough to fasten in on to after they done stuffed it.”

“How does he catch them?” Matilda had inquired.

“Jus’ the same way Jonah caught the whale, honey,” was Mandy’s satisfactory reply.

That was naturally something to look forward to, but Matilda wanted to see Ashe for reasons of her own. Bertie, she told her mother, was “getting on her nerves.”

“He is feeling very high about something, and I can’t make out what,” Matilda said.





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“Don’t try, darling,” Lydia suggested. “Just let him and Angela amuse each other.”

“But I’m afraid you don’t see my point, Mother. Bertie is up to something.”

She was playing hopscotch against herself on the back veranda one afternoon some days after Bertie had made his great discovery, when she saw a figure she knew was not his coming under the live-oaks from the gate. “Mr. Dabney’s come, Mother,” she called excitedly into the house, and leaving the door open, ran to meet him.

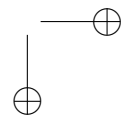
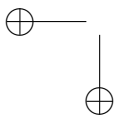
He was not only without the kingfish, but without any other sign of having been away. He was wearing riding clothes as usual, though this time he had no horse. “I didn’t know whether you would want to go,” he said, looking up at Lydia from the bottom step; “it’s a little windy —”

“Suppose you come in then,” Lydia said. “We have the loveliest fires these days.” The robin was still chirping; he would not notice the difference.

Matilda, who did not notice it either, waited a minute to be sure he was coming in, then returned to her game.

The fire in the beautiful old room blazed immensely, and Bertie, who had had the piano moved upstairs, was filling the house with song. It had all seemed so lovely, but now, coming in with Ashe, Lydia felt ill at ease.

“Do sit down,” she said, indicating a chair opposite her own. She began at once to talk about the weather;





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a subject on which he expressed no opinion; and from there she went to salt-water fishing, of which she knew nothing and certainly learned nothing more. He looked shades darker, she thought, and his eyes – what she could see of them – were greyer than ever.

“Has everything been all right?” he asked at length. “Horses behaving themselves? Pump been giving you any trouble – or Lonny?”

She told him nothing had given her any trouble. “And I believe Bertie is as crazy about it as we are,” she added, the end of *Manon*, which happened just then, seeming to make it necessary to speak of Bertie.

Ashe, to whom it apparently did not seem necessary, made no comment.

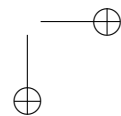
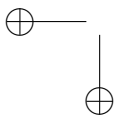
“He has never been in the country very much,” Lydia went on, with a vague idea that, besides the intrusion she knew about, Bertie might have been in other places where he was not supposed to be and might need a little explaining.

“Will he be in the country very much more?” Ashe inquired.

Lydia was surprised to feel her face flushing. She would have said that Dabney Ashe had already tried all the known ways of being impolite, without ever making her mad.

“I really haven’t asked him,” she said, and felt immediately madder than ever, because she realized that now she did sound childish.

“Would you mind if I asked him?”





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“But why should you?” She knew her cheeks were flaming. “Would you mind if I told you it was none of your business?”

“Yes,” he said, “I would, because it isn’t true. You know that what happens here is my business. For me, you are a business proposition, my visible source of income. If I wanted to borrow money tomorrow, you are what I would have to borrow it on.”

He spoke more quickly than she had ever heard him, and his face had taken on what she thought of as its “hateful look,” but he did not look away, until gradually there came into it another expression altogether. “And aside from that fact,” he said in his usual deliberate voice, “something tells me that from now on, you are the only business I am going to have anyway.”

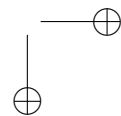
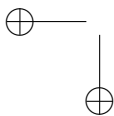
“I certainly didn’t tell you,” she said stiffly.

There was a brief silence, which he employed in looking at her, more thoroughly, she knew, than people were supposed to do. “No, you wouldn’t have to,” he said.

He was walking towards the gate leading to the back road when he saw Matilda swing lightly down from the lowest branch of Tennyson and stand waiting for him.

“Squirrel!” he called.

“I’ve been waiting here all this time to tell you something,” she said, as soon as he was close enough to hear the almost whisper in which she said it. “It’s about Bertie. You knew he had been over there, didn’t





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you?” Matilda indicated a direction with her head, and added: “To the graveyard, I mean.”

“Well?” Ashe inquired.

“Well, what I want to tell you is that Bertie is not trustworthy.”

There were times when any man who preferred to keep his feelings out of his face, even before children, might have found it inconvenient to be confronted with Matilda. Ashe would have said this was one of them; he gave himself a moment to think.

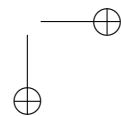
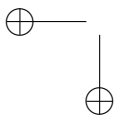
“Of course I know what you are talking about, Matilda,” he said presently, “but I would a whole lot rather you wouldn’t worry. Suppose we just let that precious cousin of ours —”

“But he isn’t,” Matilda interrupted, “not really. That is something else I wanted to tell you. I don’t want you to think Bertie is a blood relation; he is only adopted.”

“What do you mean?” he asked her. “I thought you said —”

“Yes, but not really. You can ask Mother. Mother didn’t like him either, before he grew up. But now, even if he does have a divine voice and keep her and Angela amused all the time, I think we were much happier before he came.”

Ashe gave himself another moment. “Well, suppose you let me think about it for a while,” he said; “about all these things you have told me. Suppose you let me do the thinking and you climb the trees. That’s the kind of thing you came down here for, you know. And





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the next time you ride over, I'll show you something I brought you from the Gulf."

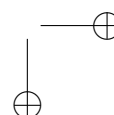
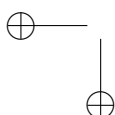
Whether they had been happier without Bertie or not, certainly with him they were never dull. It seemed astonishing to Lydia that anyone could be so idle and so active at the same time. He didn't even sleep late in the morning, the way artistic people were supposed to do – the way Angela did. Often when she and Matilda came down to their hot waffles and bacon in the sunny dining-room, Edna May would tell them Mr. Bertie had done had his'n an' gone. But that never kept him from wanting to go again, with her or Matilda, on foot or on horseback. It was a pity he didn't hunt, Lydia thought, or do some of those other outdoor things about which she was herself a little vague, but which she felt might have made a difference in Bertie.

"Has anybody told you lately what a beauty you are?" he said to her one afternoon when they had been for a long walk and were now walking home with the sunset on their faces.

Lydia laughed. "Now that you mention it, I don't believe they have."

"I never realized before," Bertie went on, "how becoming God's great out-of-doors would be to a woman. – We cut through here, don't we, to get into the back road?"

Lydia did not want to get into the back road. One reason she had not been riding as much as usual lately was that they always seemed to go past Dabney Ashe's





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house. With him she hadn't ridden once since he came back. He had not asked her.

"Let's go the long way," she said. "I want to say something to you before we get home. I don't want Matilda to hear it." She might have started improvising this, but she realized that it was a fact. She did want to say something to Bertie and she didn't want Matilda to hear it.

"Better pass up the shortcuts, then," Bertie said cheerfully. "'Saying things' to people usually takes time."

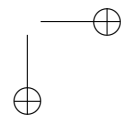
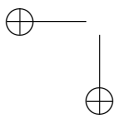
"This won't," she said. "I want to ask you if you ever went back to that place – that still – you were talking about?"

"Did anybody say so?"

"No, but that is not the question – not my question. I have been thinking, Bertie, that maybe you don't realize our position down here – in a part of the country we know so little about. There may be things that seem funny to us, or even wrong – illegal anyway – but we are not going to be here long enough to do anything about it, and there's no use making any kind of trouble for people – these coloured men, for instance."

Bertie was watching her with interest or unmixed with apprehension while she got through this little speech.

"What makes you think I ever had any such idea?" he said. "You can't just be talking on general principles."





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“No; but I know you and Angela get a lot of fun out of what she calls the natives – and local colour. I just wanted to be sure you understood —”

Bertie gave his beautiful laugh. “My much respected aunt! Where do you think I have been all these years and years not to learn anything about life? And the first lesson is that it’s always pretty much the same anywhere you find it. There’s. precious little difference between a temperamental Frenchman with a chip on his shoulder and your temperamental landlord with one on his. The only difference is in the chips.”

“We are not discussing Dabney Ashe, Bertie.”

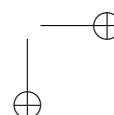
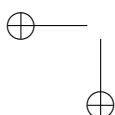
“Nor Dabney Ashe’s little enterprise either, I suppose? Those negroes over there are working for him; I’ve found that out. I’ve found out several things that might surprise you.”

“Then you have been back?”

“And why not? He doesn’t own the woods, or the graveyard either, even if he does own the still – a fact I intend to mention in his presence before long.”

Lydia was silent. They had come to the gate, and as he let her through and fastened the chain behind them, it was very much as if they left the topic on the other side. She could see that nothing was to be gained – nothing ever had been – by arguing with Bertie, and when he caught up with her and fell into step beside her once more, he was his most engaging self.

“But whatever I do,” he said, “I don’t want to worry ‘little Liddy.’ Dad always used to call you that when we talked about you. We talked about you such a





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lot, all that sad time over there. How far away we were! And now I am as near as this." He put his arm about her leather jacket, slipping his hand into its open, swinging pocket, and began to march her towards the house, the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust* ringing out under the trees.

Matilda came down the front steps to meet them. "We saw you coming," she said. "Mr. Dabney has been waiting to tell you about the pump, Mother. It seems to be too complicated for Lonny. They've been trying to fix it."

Lydia disengaged herself from Bertie's arm. "Where is he, darling – at the well-house?"

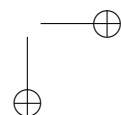
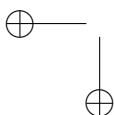
"No, in the parlour," Matilda said. "We've been playing gin-rummy."

Lydia ran up the steps and, shedding her jacket in the hall, turned at once into the parlour, but it was empty.

"May I speak to you a moment, Mother?" Matilda had been standing in the doorway waiting for Angela to finish her sentence; she was polite even when she was excited.

"Yes indeed, darling; what is it?" Lydia hurried out into the hall. She could see that something was the matter; Matilda was pale – even her freckles. "Let's go in here where we can sit down," she said, taking her into the library and closing the door.

"It's about Bertie," Matilda began, her anxious eyes fixed on her mother's face. "Mr. Dabney is fixin' to shoot him, Mother."





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

“Why, darling, what on earth are you talking about? What has Mandy been telling you now?”

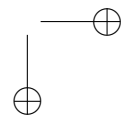
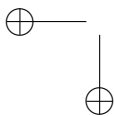
“It wasn’t Mandy, Mother; I heard him. I was up in Swinburne – you know – in the corner by the stable. Bertie went to get his horse, and Lonny wasn’t there, and just then Mr. Dabney rode up. You see, Mother, somebody told the sheriff about Mr. Dabney’s still and he broke it up and took those coloured men and put them in jail, and Mr. Dabney told Bertie was the one that did it.”

“And so they had a quarrel,” Lydia said soothingly. Matilda’s little hands were cold; she rubbed them gently with her own and spoke as lightly as she could. “People often quarrel, darling, and say all sorts of things they do not really mean.”

“But he did mean it, Mother. He told Bertie he wanted him to keep out of the woods, and if he ever saw him there, he was going to shoot him.”

“But he would never do it, darling – never in the world!”

“Oh yes he will, Mother, if Bertie goes on being headstrong. Mandy says Mr. Dabney’s troubles have all been because he was so quick on the trigger – she means shooting people. He’s had a lot of troubles, Mother: but Mandy says everybody has done learned by this time that he can’t miss, and so they mostly let him alone. But Bertie doesn’t know that, Mother, and so you ought to tell him right away; because Mandy says they ain’t any lawyer Mr. Dabney can get to save him if he ever does it again.”





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It would certainly have taken anybody else longer than it took Matilda's mother to gather from this reasoning just what was in her mind, and anybody else would certainly have smiled. Her imagination had apparently left Bertie lying in the woods for the birds to cover up with leaves – as far away as a fairy-tale – while she sat there shedding realistic tears for his murderer. Lydia, her arm around her, could see the ones that were rolling down her off-cheek and feel the others soaking through her blouse, but she did not smile.

"Don't cry, darling," she said. "Nobody is going to get hurt. I will talk to Bertie."

"Will you tell him not to ride in the woods, Mother, unless we are along?"

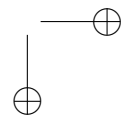
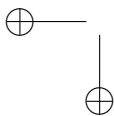
"Indeed I will. Where is he? Do you know?"

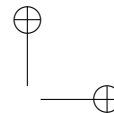
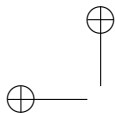
"I think he went upstairs." Matilda lifted her head from her mother's shoulder. "But I don't hear the piano."

"Never mind; I'll find him. Blow your nose now – here, take mine – and wipe your eyes."

Bertie was in his room. He was putting something in the bureau drawer as Lydia opened the door, after having tapped on it and been told to come in. "Oh, come in, Lydia," he said gaily, shutting the drawer and turning towards her. "Want me?"

He didn't look a bit upset; it was very reassuring – after Matilda. She came in and sat down on the wide window-sill.





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

“Matilda says you have had a quarrel with Dabney Ashe, Bertie.”

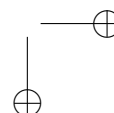
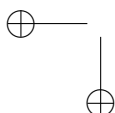
His face flushed, surprisingly. “What does Matilda know about it?” he demanded.

“Everything, I am afraid. She was up in one of the trees – right where you were standing. It might be a good idea,” she went on as Bertie did not answer, “if you would tell me what it is all about – just how much you have been interfering in Mr. Ashe’s affairs.”

“I haven’t been reporting them to the sheriff, if that’s what you mean,” Bertie said. He looked just the way he used to in the boyhood she remembered with so little pleasure. “The only thing I have done since I have been down here was to go where I pleased and see what I pleased. I supposed, since it’s a free country – according to you – I might be allowed to do that. I even thought I might be allowed to think what I pleased.”

It would do no good to argue, Lydia reminded herself; better just state things. “I expect it’s not so much what you’ve been thinking as what you’ve been saying that may have caused trouble,” she said. “You have probably talked to people. I wish you would realize how little we know any of the people around us here.”

He had been looking out of the window, but now he turned towards her. “How would you expect me to ever know them if I never went where they were and never opened my mouth? It beats anything I ever heard of! Give me Europe every time – give me Russia. I’ve lived out of this country for six years,





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almost, and nobody ever told me once I couldn't ride where I pleased."

"But why should you please to ride on other people's property?"

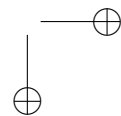
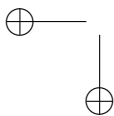
"Other people's property! What other people?" Bertie's resonant voice was rising. "I like the idea of a man who couldn't even hang on to his own farm laying down the law for the whole county! Telling me to keep to the public roads or take the consequences."

Remembering scenes like this before, Lydia had not forgotten how they sometimes ended. Angela had been right in saying Bertie had a marvellous sense of the stage. She waited a little before she spoke again.

"What do you think about going to New Orleans for that week or two you have been talking about?" she suggested pleasantly, "and giving all this a chance to blow over? If you really do want to know more about the South, you ought not to miss its most interesting city."

"Lydia!" She had heard of lips that curled in scorn, and wondered vaguely if that was what Bertie's were doing now. "What would you think of me – what would anybody think – even Matilda – if I turned and ran to New Orleans just because a loud-mouthed ruffian threatened to shoot me if he ever saw me off of, the highway? Once let him get away with a bluff like that —"

There was an element of logic in this that made Lydia feel suddenly more disposed to look at Bertie's side of the case. After all, he was not a child, though





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bringing to mind so vividly those scenes of his childhood; and while she knew that loud-mouthed was not the word he needed to describe Dabney Ashe, she was not so sure about ruffian, and in calling his threats a bluff, she was convinced that Bertie was right. But even if they did nothing worse than quarrel, she reflected, surely that was bad enough. It was altogether too bad for Matilda. It would have to stop. She would send for Ashe and tell him —

She was still wondering just what she would tell him as she went down the stairs and met Matilda coming in the front door. Mr. Dabney had gone to Gulfport, Matilda said. “He’s got to see about those coloured men, Mother, and Mandy says sometimes it takes two or three days to get somebody out of jail.”

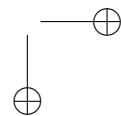
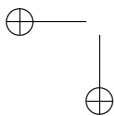
Bertie was on his last waffle when Matilda came in to breakfast.

“Aren’t you up early?” he asked her. “Lydia still asleep?”

“She’s got a sore throat. She told me to let Edna May bring her up some coffee and that was all she wanted. I’ll be through in just a minute myself,” Matilda added. “If you’re going riding I’d like to go along.”

“Come ahead,” Bertie said cheerfully. “I’ll wait for you. I’ll just go tell Lonny.”

It was a lovely morning, not misty and soft, as most of them had been. It was clear and almost cold, and the pine-needles along the edges of the back road looked dry already. They could hear Mandy singing





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as they rode by Ashe's house, and Bertie took up the monotonously repeated notes and repeated them some more. "Listen – that interval doesn't exist in music," he said.

Matilda didn't say anything until just before they reached the place where the road branched off into the pines; then she remarked quite suddenly: "Mr. Dabney's back, Bertie."

"Is he indeed?" Bertie was playfully sarcastic. "From where, if I may inquire?"

Matilda told him Gulfport.

"And since when has he been away?"

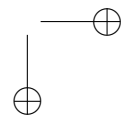
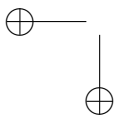
"Ever since that day," she said.

Bertie looked at her. He was smiling in the way she didn't like, but by that time they had passed the place and she felt better. "Blazer can beat Cantilever to the bridge," she said.

Blazer won. "You're pretty good, Matilda" – Bertie tapped her knee approvingly with his crop – "but I think the bridge is a nice place for you to turn back. Lydia might be needing you for something."

"How much farther are you going?" she demanded. Matilda was never stubborn, but she seemed very determined.

"Now look here, Matilda," Bertie said, "you can't do this way. You and Lydia have both got to stop going around with your teeth chattering just because the man you rent your house from loses his temper and talks like a roughneck. Ride on home now; there's a good girl."





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He had drawn Cantilever to a stop; he waited. Matilda didn't say anything, but it took her some time to turn Blazer round and start him off again a slow walk towards home.

She kept looking back; she knew that not far beyond the bridge there was another road that led off into the woods on the left-hand side. She wanted to be sure Bertie didn't take it; but he did.

Mandy was still singing when she got to Ashe's house. Matilda had to fairly whoop at her before she heard and came out to the road.

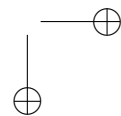
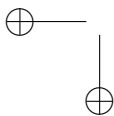
"My, you'se early," she said.

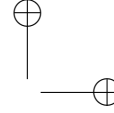
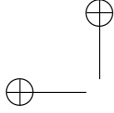
"Has Mr. Dabney gone anywhere yet?" Matilda asked her.

"He lef' about a hour ago honey. He said he had to go an' see Sylvester's wife, what lives about a mile an' a ha'f over there in the woods to the lef' after you crosses the creek. Sylvester's one of them the sheriff got; he ast Mr. Dabney to ride over an' tell his wife he'd be out to-morrow an' comin' straight home. Ain't you goin' to git off, honey?"

"No, thank you, Mandy," Matilda said politely; "I just wanted to ask him something." She had turned her horse again.

She was going after Bertie no matter how mad it made him. She had only turned back in the first place to be polite, and not because she minded making him mad. She wouldn't be afraid of Bertie even if he threw a fit.





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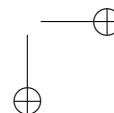
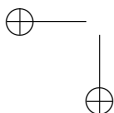
Matilda was thinking fast, and covering the ground again at a pretty good clip. She was soon at the bridge where she and Bertie had parted, and just ahead was the turn to the left that he had taken – and that Mr. Dabney had taken. She took it too; she knew just where that road went. She even thought she knew Sylvester’s wife’s house. What she expected to do when she caught up with Bertie, besides making him mad, was something she had not figured out, but she ought to be doing it any minute now; right after that big clump of palmettos he ought to come in sight.

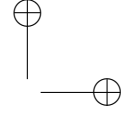
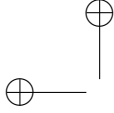
Just at that moment Matilda heard a shot, so close that she almost fell off of Blazer, who had rounded the palmettos without knowing what he was doing and now stood trembling in the middle of the road.

There were two other horses there, and two men. She could see that Bertie was having a lot of trouble keeping Cantilever out of the bushes and holding on with his other hand to the pistol he had just fired. Come Seven wasn’t moving at all; Mr. Dabney hadn’t shot his yet.

He never did shoot it. He put it back in his pocket and rode past Bertie up to where Matilda sat, looking like a small equestrian statue that was about to cry. “Come on,” he said; “let’s go home.”

“I don’t think Bertie knows how to shoot very well, Mother,” Matilda said. “Maybe he would go to New Orleans now.”





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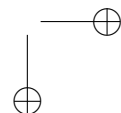
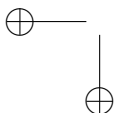
It would be Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Bertie certainly didn't want to miss that. Lydia made a point of mentioning it.

He said he had never had the slightest idea of missing it. Every prospect seemed pleasing to Bertie these days; he had been in the highest kind of spirits since the episode in the woods. Banging away intrepidly, however prematurely, with almost anything is very invigorating. Bertie evidently considered that Ashe's bluff, whether or not it was one, had been sufficiently called.

"And so, as usual, brutality has won," Angela remarked.

Lydia didn't say anything. She knew how Angela felt about having Bertie go. People always did. She knew she was going to miss him herself – especially the music. But she couldn't see, when it came to brutality, that Bertie had used very much finesse either, or that anything had won, unless it was Matilda, whose efforts to get Bertie away alive seemed to have been rewarded. She wondered how much he realized about Matilda. She had mentioned that part to him as little as possible. It still made her cold all over to think about it.

She was not the kind of woman who liked to "go into things." Nobody, not even Angela, ever called her shallow, but she knew herself it was the things that happened on the surface of her life that held her attention, or reclaimed it, most insistently. Why should she drag the depths when she could watch the lights and shadows on that changing stream? She had





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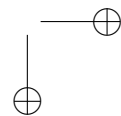
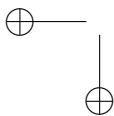
been spinning a little with the current these last days and had the sound of rapids in her ears, but now, with the relief of Bertie's departure, the sunny reaches lay ahead once more. It would not be long before the Southern springtime would be gone and they would be going too; she made up her mind to enjoy every minute of it she had left.

It turned out to be remarkably easy for all of them – even Angela – to take up again the pleasant habits Bertie had interrupted with habits of his own. Everything soon fell back into place, with the exception perhaps of Dabney Ashe, who, although he came and went very much as usual, directing Lonny and seeing that “everything was all right,” still left Lydia wondering just how much was wrong. He seemed to have forgotten all about their rides.

And then one afternoon he came leading the horses. “It's such a pretty day,” he said tentatively when she came out on the porch.

It was almost summer now in this queer land. In the house they still had fires, but the world outside had burst into wild bloom; pink honeysuckle everywhere and sheets of Cherokee roses. This time it seemed to Lydia nicer not to talk; breathing was enough.

“It was the loveliest place you have shown me yet,” she said when they got back. “Were you waiting for a day like this?” She was half-way up the steps and stood looking down on him, there between the two horses.





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"I was waiting for several things," he said. "I am waiting now to see if you will ask me in."

"Oh, do," she said, glancing at the horses.

"No, you don't have to ask them," he said. "I see Lonny over there; he'll take them."

The fire in the parlour had burned down and Ashe went to work on it, automatically, as men who live in the country always do. Lydia had taken a low chair in front of it and was soon catching the light from the pine-logs on her bright hair and her polished boots. "Isn't it lovely?" she said contentedly.

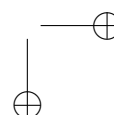
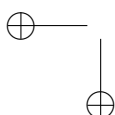
Ashe, still holding the poker, leaned his arm on the mantel and looked down at her. "May I tell you something," he said, "before I tell you something else?"

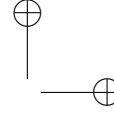
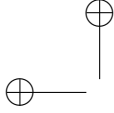
Lydia watched his face a little anxiously. There were many things to be explained, she knew – unpleasant things; but he did not look unpleasant, only serious.

"First I want to tell you," he said, "that when you come back the next time, you are going to find a lot of things better down here. Some of them have been pretty bad – and getting worse – but from now on they are going to get better. I am going to see to it."

"But I would never have noticed that anything was wrong – not by myself," she said. "We have liked almost everything."

She did not go on and so he did. "That's just it. By yourself, as you say, you would not be apt ever to see things that were bad, or dangerous; that is why they have to be got out of your way – before you hurt yourself." He put the poker back by the side of the





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chimney. “Lest you dash your foot against a stone,” he said.

“Isn’t that in the Bible?” Lydia looked so surprised that he had to smile.

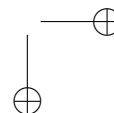
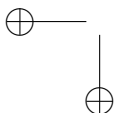
“And while I’m making improvements,” he went on, “there’s a man down here that’s going to be changed considerably by the time you get back; I would like for you to believe that.”

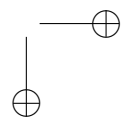
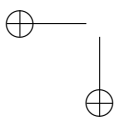
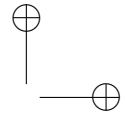
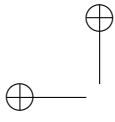
“But I haven’t minded nearly as much as you think I have,” she said. “I know what it must have been like for you to see us here – in this house that your father and mother – that you —”

“You do not know at all,” he broke in, almost roughly. “You cannot possibly know until I tell you – I am coming to that – what it has meant to me to see you here. It meant so much that I knew it couldn’t be true – that I would wake up. I couldn’t bear to have anybody touch it – to breathe on it even. And to see that nephew of yours, that wasn’t your nephew —” He stopped. Lydia’s face had a bewildered look. “I expect you didn’t know there were men around anywhere who felt that way,” he said. “I dare say you never ran across one before. Well, you’re not going to find him here either when you come back.”

“What makes you think I am coming back?” she asked.

He really was good-looking when he smiled. “Matilda told me,” he said.



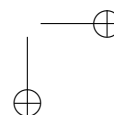
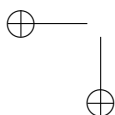




DIVINE FIRE

The hotel at Gardone was new and pretentious, running to bathrooms in a way that struck me as being too hopeful of the American tourist in a place so far off his regular beat. I remembered how few people I seemed to have met who had ever been to Lake Garda. Even the ones who had “done” the Italian lakes with the most enthusiasm had for some reason usually left this one – the last and loveliest – undone. Nor had I been there either until now, this summer, though I had always meant to come. Not alone, however; I had never thought of being there by myself, just as I had never thought of being anywhere alone. That was what had happened, though, and now the question that lay deepest in my mind was whether I could make it pay. *Giving them beauty for ashes. . . .* How much beauty? About the ashes I already knew. I went out on the balcony of my room to take a look at my bargain.

Everybody has seen blue water, and I should have thought I had seen more than most, my life’s fair voyages having cast me on so many azure shores, but the highly improbable shade of the water lying there



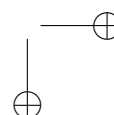
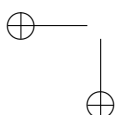


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beyond the little clipped garden of the hotel reminded me of none of them. My memory, emptied of all its rivers, lakes, and seas, went back to one thing only: the bluing in the laundry tubs at home. Went back and stayed; I could never believe that light or reflection had anything to do with it or that Lake Garda even on the cloudiest day – even in a bottle – would not be still blue. This first afternoon was very clear, however; the high and broken rim of the mountains that enclosed the lake seemed transparent; the palisades of oranges and grapes about their base, invitingly substantial and near.

Nearer still, from the garden just below me, in fact, came the sound of voices – American voices, two women evidently. I could not see them, but I could tell they were what is called educated and I was sure they must be young. They were talking about d'Annunzio, whose poetry they admired and whose moral outlook seemed to baffle them. . . . Perhaps more Americans came here than I had supposed. Not too many, I hoped, in the selfish spirit of travel, going in and starting to unpack.

The two young women sitting at a table near the window when I went in to dinner would have surprised me more if I had not somehow imagined beforehand how they would look. I was prepared to find them attractive; it was the contrast between them that I now found startling – the more so because I had already settled it in my mind that they were sisters. One of them – the younger one, I should have guessed, and



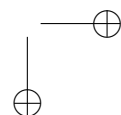
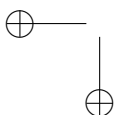


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guessed correctly – was quite lovely in the English manner, tinted and tall; the other was thin and sallow, with eyes and hair that seemed alike determined to reject the light, or maybe to absorb it; a face always in shadow, where the continual play of feeling gave the impression of music rather than anything fended merely for the eye, and provided an access to emotion rarely in the gift of any except the greatest actors.

I have seen few of the great actresses of my time. I don't know why this should have been so, but I have always ranked it high among my deprivations and have gone round with a sort of compensating image of the two or three most regretted ones fused together as a type. Sitting there in the hotel dining-room, I now confronted this synthetic masterpiece with the face of Xenia Lewis, who was not an actress, and decided I could use it instead.

She was the daughter of a history professor in a Mid-Western university and had, she told me after dinner, brought her "little sister" (who topped her by her whole blonde head) down to see Italy while the aunt who had "brought" them both to Europe was taking the cure at Wiesbaden. They had been at Gardone almost a week, she said, and had decided to just stay on until they died. They were the only Americans so far – "but no farther" – she gave me a glance and the arpeggio accompaniment to a smile. They were trying not to mind it, though, for after all I did have a certain right to come.





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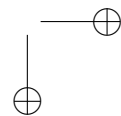
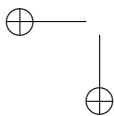
We were having our coffee in the garden, and the little sister, whose name was Barbara and who had finished hers, now turned to the waiter taking her cup and said something to him in French, in so low a tone that “English lady” were the only words I heard. “No, mademoiselle, I believe not,” were the only ones he answered, after which he passed on and the two girls looked at each other and then at me. They wanted to tell me something, I could see that; and of course in a little while they did.

The English lady was a mystery. She was the Woman in White – employed no doubt by the management to make it interesting for the guests. She rarely came downstairs, for her meals or anything. She had not been down this evening; the waiter had just said so; nor yesterday. And yet she roamed about upstairs in the corridors; she wasn’t sick. Their room was on the third floor; where was mine?

We figured it out that it must be directly under theirs.

“Then if you hear anything like two people being murdered in their sleep, you might just step out on your balcony,” Xenia suggested.

I did step out on it when I went upstairs, at the summons of the moon, which had just then stepped over the rim of the mountains with the obvious intention of drowning in the lake; but I did not stay long. I had not bargained for that.

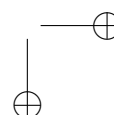
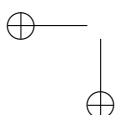


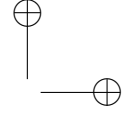


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“Barbara and I have both got to go home speaking the ‘Eyetalian’ language. Father will expect it of us,” Xenia said the next day. They were showing me the town, as they had volunteered to do the night before. They had even volunteered to show me d’Annunzio, who in those days was not only living, but living in Gardone, among other places; he had a villa up on the hill, they told me, but it required quite a bit of stalking to catch him where he could be seen. Not that he was worth it; they could hardly bear it the first time somebody pointed him out to them – sitting on a bench in a Palm Beach suit and a Panama hat, looking red and hot and not even like an Italian, to say nothing of an archangel. All the same, they had been stirred to the depths when he noticed them. Maybe I would drive up to his villa with them some evening in a *carrozza* – just to the gate. “Not one soldo shall it cost you, signora —” Xenia’s hands and shoulders came into play – “even the tip shall be paid by me.” Then changing into primness: “Though I doubt if either of us gets asked in, with you along. But perhaps Father wouldn’t want us to go in, anyway.”

I had made up my mind at the outset to guard as much as possible from infringements of other people’s choosing the solitude I had not chosen, and particularly from the tourist entanglements that are apt to beset a summer spent abroad. I hoped these beguiling damsels were not going to make it too hard for me. I hoped they were really serious about learning the language, in which case they would be less tempted, and would





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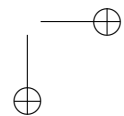
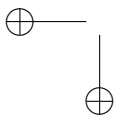
tempt me less, to hunt up the sights of the place, including d'Annunzio. Stalking the Italian pronouns had been known to furnish occupation before now and would undoubtedly outlast any sport likely to be afforded by the battered quarry in the villa on the hill.

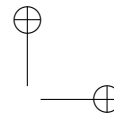
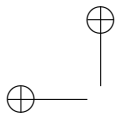
And they were serious about it. The concierge had recommended a teacher: Professor Eduardo Rossi. Maybe I would interview him for them and see if he would do; he lived just over the drug-store – or should they tell the concierge to ask him to come to the hotel?

I thought it would be better not to send for him, for fear of making him too hopeful too soon, and since they were willing to trust my judgment in the matter, I told them I would make a point of going the very next day, which was Sunday, to pass on Professor Rossi.

The bells in all the churches were ringing for Mass as I went up the little cobbled street that led to the pink stucco house where his apartment was located. A woman dressed in Sunday black and holding her missal in gloved hands came out of the big arched doorway as I approached, and told me, when I asked her, that the signor professore's apartment was number six. She added the further information that she was his mother and that she had left him still in bed. "He studies far into the night, signora, but go right up and do not hesitate to wake him."

I had a foolish impulse to ask her if I should use hot water or cold, but I managed not to smile as I thanked her, and went on in and up and was shown into the





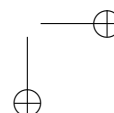
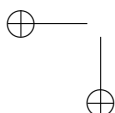
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dull little *salotto*, where Professor Rossi, awake now at all events, soon joined me.

He was younger than I had hoped he might be, and the round tortoise-shell glasses made him look younger still, as they always do, I have noticed, up to a certain point, when they all at once make their wearers look preternaturally old – and he was like d’Annunzio in the respect that he did not look like an Italian. Xenia would probably call him a medium blond, I thought. He expressed his willingness to teach the two American signorine and named his modest price – even more modest because they were two. I had come directly to the point because everything in his appearance and his surroundings was in his favour. Books in any sort of bindings make a flattering background, especially for the person to whom they belong; and in Italy, where morocco and gold-leaf and heavy tooling seem an answer to love rather than money, even the beginnings of a library fairly reek of richness. We had passed at once through the open door of the *salotto* into his study, where I was given the chair in front of the desk, and I now noticed, lying open on a pile of manuscript, a copy of William Blake.

“You read English, then,” I said.

Too little, he told me, for the work he had undertaken to do. He was collaborating with a friend who knew the language well in making a translation of Blake’s poetry into Italian verse. Those were the *Songs of Innocence*, there on the desk.





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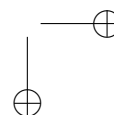
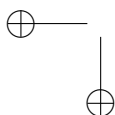
I looked at the grey eyes behind the round, earnest glasses, saw the faint flush rising to the medium blond hair. It seemed to me I had come very far to meet this familiar ghost.

The girls were waiting for me in the garden when I got back to the hotel, but not to hear anything I might have to tell them; they had a story of their own. The English lady who “permeated” the third floor and who had lately, they now told me, taken to turning doorknobs and also, they suspected, peeping through keyholes – though about this it was more difficult to be sure because keyholes always looked as if they had an eye at them anyway, Xenia said – had actually tried, that very morning, less than an hour ago in fact, to sneak into their room. They had been sitting there reading and had seen the door-handle (knobs being really only a figure of speech in Europe) begin to move, slowly and cautiously, as if somebody were trying it to see if it was fastened.

“But wasn’t it?” I interrupted. “It should have been.”

They couldn’t remember to do it, they said; and anyhow, when it had happened before, they had always thought it might be the chambermaid. But this time they kept still and watched, and, sure enough, the door came open, ever so carefully – they could hardly see it move – and there stood the Woman in White, looking pretty white herself when she saw them in there.

“What did she say?” I asked. “Did she explain —?”



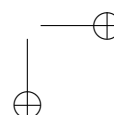
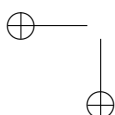


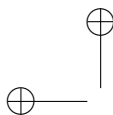
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“She tried to,” Barbara said. “In French at first. She started begging our pardons; and then when we answered in English, she began to say something about thinking it was her room, which of course was not true at all, because she had been thinking it too long. I am sure she is after something.”

“What are people usually after?” Xenia said thoughtfully. “Our money or our lives, I suppose. I find it very stimulating.”

My own theory was different. I had seen so many derelicts in Europe, many of them my own countrymen, most of them women, living at the mercy of hotel-keepers because their friends at home did not seem to have any, or possibly because they had no mercy on their friends and refused to go where they could be taken care of. I classed them conveniently in my own mind as Undesirable Relations, and had always thought of them as harmless, whatever they might be besides. The lady in question slipped immediately into this category so far as I was concerned; and being harmless was all I really asked of her under the circumstances – that and the assurance that I was not going to be drawn into altercations with “the management” – managements in Italy are never harmless – about the propriety of keeping such an inmate in the hotel. My mind went back to things I had been told about queer happenings in hotels: lunatics smuggled in and corpses smuggled out, while the guests – the other guests – went on serenely ignorant that anything was up. Xenia might have found these stories “stimu-





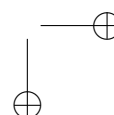
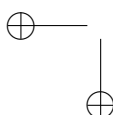
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lating” too, but she was not going to hear them from me. I would never tell them to anyone in Italy, where most of the events were supposed to have happened, for that was the one place above all others where it was impossible to believe them.

I did, however, impress upon the girls that they should keep their door locked, and when I went out on my balcony the last thing before getting into bed, I looked up at their open windows and pictured them lying there asleep. It was no night for sleeping. How did young things such as they were manage about the moon? I believe I have been asking that question ever since I stopped being young myself.

It must have been about seven o'clock the next morning; I had been awake for some time and was considering whether to stay awake and ring for my coffee or to try for another nap, when I suddenly found myself out of bed and making for the door as fast as my bare feet could carry me. I had heard a terrific scream coming, I was sure, from the room over mine, and now as I flew along the hall and up the stairs I kept hearing other screams and saw that other people were running too, but by that time I felt sure that it was not either of the girls we heard. I didn't know, of course, how they would scream, but I knew somehow that it would not be like what I heard.

The door of their room was open, and I reached it almost as soon as anybody did. They were standing in their nightgowns, one on either side of a tall woman who leaned over their wash-basin in a state of acute





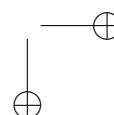
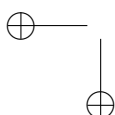
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physical distress; they were offering her their towels and their water-glasses – to no avail whatever. So far as I could see, she made not the slightest effort to control either her sputterings or her shrieks.

“She came in and drank our hair tonic,” Xenia said grimly, catching sight of me. “She thought we were asleep.”

“So now we know,” Barbara said when we met in the garden after everything was over and Miss Vivian Stickney had been got into a carriage and taken to the picturesque hospital to be cared for by the picturesque Blue Nuns while she awaited the coming of whoever it was that had to come. She was very highly connected, the management had explained, as if that should make us all feel better. Everybody seemed to be feeling very well as it was, however, excited and important; even the people who hadn’t got there in time to do very much were all nodding and smiling at us with a new cordiality. Meeting people again with their clothes on after seeing them running around with most of them off is, I believe, one of the friendliest things that can happen.

“Yes, now we know,” Xenia echoed, “and isn’t it dispiriting to see that people will be just as heroic for the sake of a little alcohol – twelve and a half per cent, it says on that bottle – as they will for any of the great issues they are always being called on to die for: love or religion, ‘God and their native land.’”





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“Xenia is really disappointed,” Barbara explained to me. “She has been sniffing about for something dramatic ever since I’ve known her, and the only thing we ever run into is some kind of slapstick comedy. That performance in our room, for instance.”

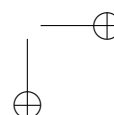
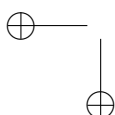
“Perhaps if you had locked your door —” I began.

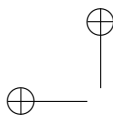
“We might have gone on hoping to be murdered?” Xenia said. “Well, we really did forget it, or rather we each of us thought the other had locked it; but even so, it seems too bad to have to stay locked in yourself in order to keep ridiculous things out. But I speak metaphorically, madame,” she appended stiffly.

“We haven’t told her about Count Bolognesi yet,” Barbara said; “that’s another case.”

“Yes; let’s tell her. I’ll begin.”

I had just missed Count Bolognesi; he had gone the day before I arrived, they said, and wouldn’t wonder why he didn’t stay on when I heard about their boat ride. He had hired a boat and a boatman for the whole afternoon, and it did seem for once in their life they were sailing into romance; that lake was as blue and still as a china plate when they started out, and he really was good-looking, besides being mentioned in Dante – at least his family was. He had showed them the place in a little pocket edition he carried round with him, but of course they couldn’t read it. Anyhow, his ancestor, whoever he was, was in the *Inferno*, and he seemed to be especially proud of that.





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I said naturally he was, and that I didn't see what could possibly have occurred to take away the glory from such an illustrious voyage. What had?

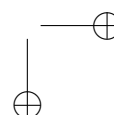
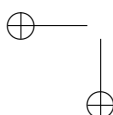
"If the bowl had been stronger, my tale had been longer," Xenia quoted. "We weren't shipwrecked, of course – we never are – but anybody else would have been. We ran into a terrible squall – he and the boatman kept calling it a *burrasca*, but it was really a squall – and we have never been as seasick in our lives. I know how Barbara looked and how I felt, and that was only half of it, of course. We were both of us lying in the bottom of the boat, trying to pray or something, for hours and hours."

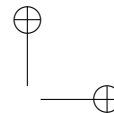
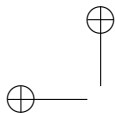
"Oh, you poor children," I said. "And what did Count Bolognesi do?"

He had done everything, they told me. He had talked to them, both in their language and in his own; he had pleaded with them and exhorted them; he had even sung to them: "*La donn' è mobile*," *Santa Lucia*. They assured me they would never be able to hear either of them again, even over the radio, without disastrous results.

"And what finally happened? – when you got back, I mean."

"What can happen – after the end?" Xenia said bitterly, and was going on to tell me when Professor Rossi, a grammar and a small dictionary under his arm, appeared at the end of the gravel walk, piloted by the concierge, who waved his hand in our direction and disappeared.

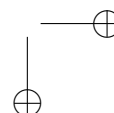
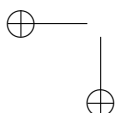




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It is an unhappy thing to see an animal of any description run into a trap – even a man, who is supposed to have an understanding of such mechanisms and methods for avoiding them. My unhappiness in seeing Professor Rossi do it was naturally increased by the knowledge that I had helped rig up the pitfall into which he had so immediately plunged and where I now had to behold him. Or even if I were not actually as responsible as that came to, I had at least been in a position to see what lay ahead of him and might have snatched him back from the brink. My only consolation now was the conviction that the two girls together were in reality only half as fatal to him as either of them alone would have been. On the same principle, I suppose, that made him cut his price for teaching two young ladies at once, the price of falling in love with them both at once was also reduced.

I was not often present at the lessons, and never very long – though the lessons were – but I was given ample opportunity for my speculations, and I thought a good deal about how fortunate anyone is, even in misfortune, if he is not likely ever to be called on to make up his mind. I could see nothing in Professor Rossi's immediate predicament that could by any stretch of the imagination be thought as painful to him as the anguish of having to choose between the two girls would certainly have been. I had occasion to notice also with what lightness devotion can be accepted, once it has been doubled or trebled or made to go round a bit. It is as different as possible from the



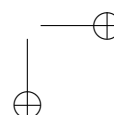
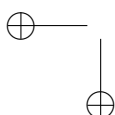


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loaves and fishes; nobody is impressed; nobody is even fed. It has been said that whether we are multiplying or dividing, there is no real number but One, and King Solomon, though I believe he did not say it, certainly understood it very well in that matter of the baby. A divided lover, I now noticed, counted for about as little as a divided baby. Neither of the girls seemed to feel the slightest responsibility for either half of Professor Rossi.

And yet, except for the defect that it had a double object, which was not a defect outside of human systems of calculation, the thing he offered them seemed to me as nearly flawless as any passion they were likely ever to awaken. In the first place, he was a poet. I do not know whether William Blake would have selected him as his mouthpiece and intermediary (if the translations were ever published, I have never seen them), but speaking for himself and as the intermediary of the divinity who that summer had him by the throat, his was the authentic accent. I was sure the world would hear of him; instead of which I have hardly heard of him again myself, above the noisy wars. But wars, though they may drown the poets' voices, are courteous to them in some other ways and enable them often to die young.

"Eduardo says he used to see Eleonora Duse walking round here just the way he sees us now – just the way he sees Xenia especially. He thinks she looks like Duse." Barbara surveyed her sister from this new angle. "What do you think?" she asked me.





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"I don't have to think; I know," I said.

"*O mare, O gloria, O forza d'Italia!*" Xenia said.

"Imagine having somebody like d'Annunzio writing pieces for you to speak," she continued. "No wonder she was wonderful."

"No wonder she was miserable – the way he must have behaved to her," Barbara said. "Eduardo told us —"

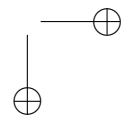
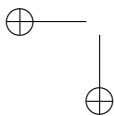
"And no wonder Lesbia was popular," Xenia went on, "with Catullus writing about her the way he did. His villa is here on the lake too, you know," she reminded me. "Maybe you will go there with us some time. But isn't he dead? It seems to me I heard he was dead."

"Oh, shut up, Xenia," Barbara said. "Eduardo told us he had seen some of Duse's books, with her name written in them, in with a lot of old junk that he was sure must have come from d'Annunzio's villa. He bought some of them for just a couple of lire. Doesn't that seem like a thing that ought never to happen?"

"Maybe it's the comic element intruding again," I suggested. "A little slapstick for the gods this time. You remember what Shakespeare said about lovers' perjuries making love laugh."

"And what happened to Catullus, Xenia – besides being dead?" Barbara asked.

"Want the low-down on all the neighbours, do you?" Xenia said. "There certainly seem to be a lot of great in among them; I don't wonder they liked the place. Great lovers too – or is it the same thing? I wonder





DIVINE FIRE

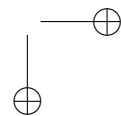
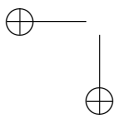
if the love just sounds great because the poetry does?
I would like to know about poets and love; what are
they to each other, anyhow?"

"Perhaps this is a good time for you to learn," I
said – "both of you. I think you have a teacher."

They looked at me in astonishment. "You don't
mean Eduardo?" they gasped.

It took less than an hour of easy rowing to go to
San Vigilio. That was the name of a church and a villa
and the island that contained them, and contained
nothing else except the villa's gardens and a few damp-
looking little houses huddled against their walls. We
went there often in the afternoons, sometimes with
a boatman, but more and more with Eduardo, who
didn't row as well, but whose accent, Xenia thought,
was "purer." Her ear was extremely sensitive to those
fine distinctions, she said; which was funnier than it
sounds, for the dialect of the boatman was something
formidable.

There was no one in the villa of San Vigilio but
the caretakers that summer, and any visitors who
came and went were free to enjoy the gardens and
the blue enchantment of the terraces, or to expend a
lira on the housekeeper and be shown the rooms; but
there never seemed to be other visitors than ourselves,
and we tried to be so quiet that we could imagine
even ourselves away. It was all beautiful and to me
at least, familiar, bringing back so many sounds and
smells of my youth that I would sit for hours on the





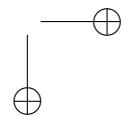
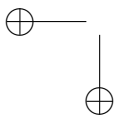
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

terrace, thinking about backgrounds and latitudes and wondering why all old southern homes were so much alike, no matter in what land they were, or even for what grandeur they had been designed. Even this, even the Alhambra, were not out of the picture always in my mind, and could only, by the multiplicity of their rooms and terraces, multiply without changing the memories they awakened. The pigeons flying in and out through the windows in the high well of the staircase made me think of the way the birds were always getting in at home; the Catalonian jasmine in the pot beside me was exactly like the one my mother had, growing on exactly such a little wire frame. But the lake – ah, the lake. Water is never alike, never the same.

Eduardo's poems were often about the lake, and one of them I tried very hard to translate – for my own pleasure, not for his. It did not give me much, and it was the only thing of his to which, so far as I was concerned, this indignity was ever offered. He called it *Legend*:

*Two were silent in a boat;
Her dress was like a heron's wing,
Folded, blue.
She sat as still as anything –
As you.*

*Like an old picture where there leans
A lady in an empty place
And on her face*





DIVINE FIRE

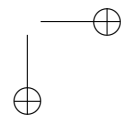
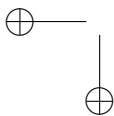
*No light from star or candle pours,
Her hands were idle as a queen's –
As yours.*

*The tower lay mirrored in the lake,
Brown as laudanum in a glass;
She watched its shadow stain the prow
And through her trailing fingers pass –
As you do now.*

*She saw their chamber lying deep,
The image of the door was there
And of the stair,
Asleep.
A ripple touched the goblet's rim,
The vision broke, the tower shook,
And with her darkened gaze she looked at him –
As now you look.*

There were of course three people in that boat, not two: the blue dress was Barbara's, the darkened gaze Xenia's, and the man rowing (not counting), Eduardo.

In one of the immense bedrooms of the villa – the one that had belonged to the old Contessa, whoever she may have been – there was an enormous bed with a bedspread made of the most minute fragments of silk I have ever seen dealt with in any form of needlework; they might have been the seeds of the flowers that had by some miracle bloomed from them. It was the old Contessa herself, the housekeeper told us, who had whiled away the years of her husband's absence

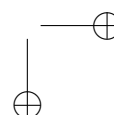
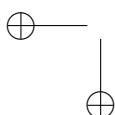




A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

in some long war or other by tending this intricate garden. And did he come back when it was over, to stretch himself in safety under her flowers? I inquired. But the housekeeper did not know.

I have sewed a great deal in my life. I have been on some long seam or other almost ever since I can remember, and in this way I have had more time than most people for reflection on such subjects as sewing – the merits and disadvantages attending needlework in general – and to wonder just what it is in women that makes them do it. I have wondered too how different their history, and perhaps all history, might have been if they had chosen to do something else instead – or even to do less of that. No one, it seems to me, can doubt that it has been an occupation of their own choosing, because of the lavish way in which they have followed it, though necessity has certainly taken a hand in it too, as she does in most things. *La dure nécessité, maîtresse des hommes et des dieux*, can hardly, however, have been in any epoch such a mistress of women that she could keep them from wearing fewer clothes, or force them to festoon their houses as they have always done with fabrics which until quite lately they have always had to weave or even to spin with their own hands. I am convinced that there is a mystery here, and necessity, however hard, is at least not mysterious. There is an imaginative quality in the whole business of cloth, from beginning to end; something allied to art, but even more to magic. The Parcae worked with thread; so do spiders, and so





DIVINE FIRE

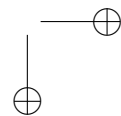
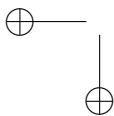
did Penelope. Women in all ages seem to have been darkly sure that if they stayed at home and bound their wild heart to the wheel like the bird in the Sicilian idyll, they could draw their wanderers back.

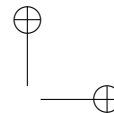
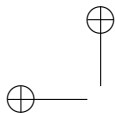
“Barbara and I were not named for anybody we ever heard of; not anybody in the family certainly. Father named us because he felt that way – about life in general, I suppose, and Kansas in particular. We are both ‘strangers’ in Greek, I believe.” Xenia glanced towards the other end of the terrace, where the blue dress and the gold head were visible; Eduardo was reading to them.

I had been asking her a little about their family. I was always trying to account for things in them that seemed to me different – charming. I wondered how much having no mother to remember was really a loss to a girl. Mothers have such a tendency to form second editions of themselves, which is not bad for their sons in most cases perhaps, but monotonous in daughters. It was plain to me that they adored their father. “And think of the poor darling having not only life and Kansas to depress him, but those everlasting freshmen,” Xenia said.

“Does he write too, besides teaching?” I asked.

“Don’t all professors? I have never known one who didn’t. But Father is a lot more interested in other things than he is in history. He is really an artist at heart – but then, who isn’t? That’s about the same thing as saying he is a human being; that is really what is the matter with all of us.”





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

“Makes us all strangers?”

“Doesn’t it? And homesick. Look at Eduardo – you told us to look at him.” Xenia turned again to where her sister sat, unprotected from the storm of Petrarch’s passion in Eduardo’s voice, “I have decided,” she said, “that the trouble about poets and love is that they expect too much from it, and from beauty too. They think of them as an unfailing passport to – wherever it is they think they want to go – home, I suppose.”

I did not say anything. Her face was full of changing shadows, and so was the lake. I watched them both in silence for a while.

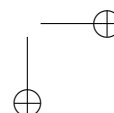
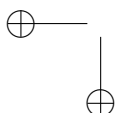
“But the thing I can’t understand,” she said, “is why they always do fail. You would think anything ought to come up to expectations some of the time.”

Eduardo went with us to Catullus’ Villa, as they call it still. Empty arches now, framing, in every direction of both sky and shore, the same intensity of blue. We had brought our lunch along and sat down under an ilex-tree that had grown from the very keystone of a gateway, to consume our sandwiches and Chianti.

“*How sweet it is*” – Eduardo had brought the book and showed us how near the Latin was to his own tongue – “*after long wandering to come home...*” Xenia looked at me. “Poor homesick Catullus,” she sighed.

“I suppose there aren’t any pictures anywhere that show how it used to be,” Barbara said.

Eduardo shook his head. “No, signorina,” he said, “no pictures; only words.”



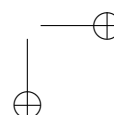
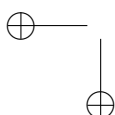


DIVINE FIRE

“Only eyes are enough,” Xenia said, “and a little imagination, plus a little of that long wandering, in the case of us Americans. How far is it from Rome, Eduardo? I suppose he could run up here just any day. Whenever Lesbia got on his nerves, Lesbia and her sparrow. Why did he want to waste his time on those two city birds – one of them old and the other one dead – when he could have all this?” She waved comprehensively. “Poets are funny – *non è vero*, Eduardo?”

Eduardo had found out soon that she was funny; but he laughed because she looked at him whether the joke was good or not, in Italian. It was charming to see how he trusted her – not only her wit, but her kindness. I had noticed that not quite to understand the girls never made him uneasy, as such uncertainties are apt to do. Their intention at least was not mysterious to him. A rose could be trusted to be sweet, he must have thought, or an apple to be favourable. Strangers their father may have named them, and they had come from far enough away, but in Eduardo’s soul a place had been prepared for them, and there they were. Beyond the shadow of misunderstanding or the fear of loss. Why were things not worked this way oftener, I began to wonder, seeing how successful the *coup* had been. If he had asked for anything, he would have been refused. How much better just to say nothing and take all!

The idea is often advanced, and quite effectively too, that if it were possible for human beings to see into

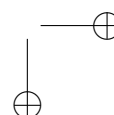
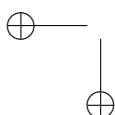




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each other's minds they would find it in most cases an appalling experience. I have wondered for some time now why this should be so, and if it really is. Do minds differ from one another so much more than faces do? Seeing a face as different as possible from one's own could hardly be appalling, though it might be unpleasant. It is easy to imagine turning away if we didn't like its expression, or even getting out of the way altogether if it expressed too violent a dislike for us; but this is a natural and wholesome reaction and not at all the sort of horror supposedly experienced at the sudden revelation of another's thoughts. On those hypothetical occasions men are said to shudder and to swoon, even in cases, I believe, where the thoughts are not concerned with them at all.

I am sorry I can no longer feel this way about people, whose depleted stock of mystery seems to get lower for me all the time. I am at present convinced that the most I could ever hope to bring back from any clairvoyant expedition into the minds of my friends would be a mild surprise; and even so long ago as that summer on Lake Garda, though I found myself trying more and more to keep the girls from seeing too plainly some of the things in Eduardo's thoughts that not clairvoyance but a longer experience made plain to me, it is not because I imagined anything very much worse than surprise befalling them. But I didn't want anything to befall them; and as the time drew near for their departure, I was almost afraid to breathe for fear of the least alteration in the exquisite unconsciousness of their technique.





DIVINE FIRE

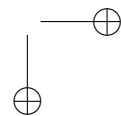
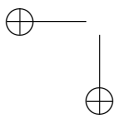
It was not the end I dreaded. I understood – or thought I did – enough of a poet’s soul to fear departure less than withdrawal where Eduardo was concerned. Their departure would not kill him, or even damage him irreparably, I believed. It would be one of those perfect sorrows with which poets know perfectly well how to cope, having, if I am not mistaken, invented them; but the slightest sign of shrinking in either of the girls, the least wariness in the words and looks they addressed to him, would, I felt sure, have done something to him that I did not want to be there to see.

I need not have feared.

“I am dreadfully sorry for Eduardo,” Barbara said. “I just don’t see how he is going to stand it to have Xenia go. He is really crazy about her, you can see that; and she is the kind of person that leaves a terrible emptiness. I have never been away from her for more than a week or two at a time, when one of us had the measles or something and the other didn’t, but I know what that vacant feeling is like.”

“And I believe I can guess,” I said. “I am not looking forward to it for myself either. The best we can do – the best that one ever can do – is to try to keep the shadow from darkening the last days too much.”

“I know,” she said, “and I am trying. I am being as nice as I can to Eduardo, for one thing. I listened to him read for two hours, it must have been, yesterday. Carducci. I don’t understand Carducci as well as he thinks I do.”





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

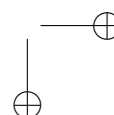
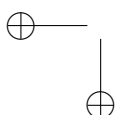
Barbara and I were in the garden saying these things. It was later, in my room, that Xenia touched upon the same theme, from a different conception.

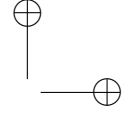
“Do you suppose it would do any good,” she said, “for you to talk to Eduardo? This is one time when I really would like to feel that things were not going to end in a mess. You say he is a real poet – maybe even one of the great ones. If you told him that, it might keep him from being completely bashed over Barbara’s going away.”

“I believe he knows it already,” I said. “That is a great deal better than anybody telling him; more fortifying.”

“Well, let us hope it is fortifying enough,” Xenia said. “If it really is the divine fire, he ought to be able to keep it going without Barbara.”

“He will,” I said. “I am sure that for him it takes more even than Barbara.”

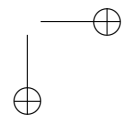
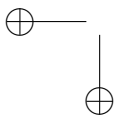


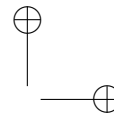
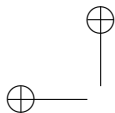


MANY WATERS

When the Winchesters went back to Arden to live and began doing all the things that had to be done to make the old place liveable, the days were full of discoveries for all of them. It was only the children who were seeing things for the first time, or at least with no conscious light of memory about them; but memory does not always forestall surprises. Their father remembered almost everything and was now discovering that he had remembered most of them wrong. "I could have sworn that there used to be two windows opening on that porch," he would say; or "I remembered the beech-tree on *that* side." The children were amused to see that he still believed it must somehow have been that way. They thought he would not even be surprised to wake up one morning and find just as many windows as there "used to be" and the beech-tree back where it belonged.

In their mother's recollections, since Arden was her old home, there was naturally no such confusion as this. Being away, and sometimes very far away, had not kept her from looking out of all the windows at



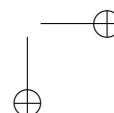
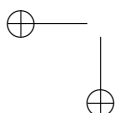


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all the trees so often that she had forgotten nothing. To her, coming back, nothing looked different; her discovery was finding that so many things were. It was as if, during the years she had been absent, living her own life, they had been living theirs, gathering within themselves a meaning they had never had back in the days when she would have thought she knew them best.

The days of her youth. . . . What a shallow time is it! *Remember now thy Creator.* . . . But why especially then? Why would God choose to be remembered at a period of so little understanding? It was only after youth had abated a little that one's reflections on almost any subject began to be worth while. Certainly one looked back on one's parents and one's home more intelligently later on. The meaning of life in general, its real value, seemed to shine through it better as it wore a little thin.

She was in the parlour cutting out the new slipcovers as she formulated this theory, and it occurred to her that it was not without application to the rosewood chairs; they had been her mother's and her grandmother's too; she knew that they were "good," and had always assumed that they were good-looking, but she saw now that they were also something else – something in their own right, not associated with periods or styles or even with grandmothers. They had a relation to life almost as significant as statuary, in its inverted grace; that arm, for instance, curved inward to meet the contour of the living arm; that slight depression





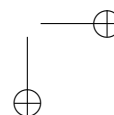
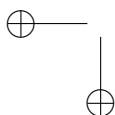
MANY WATERS

where the shoulders touched; even the garland of fruit and flowers carved carefully to crown the sitter's head. Never again, she thought now, would she ever think of them as just chairs.

And it was the same with the room – with all the rooms; the high ceilings, the windows reaching to the floor; the profound intention of coolness evident on every hand. Wherever the architect had lived, he was feeling the summers here, the endless afternoons, the shadows creeping towards the east, taking for ever to reach the porch and come into the hall.

Climate was really an æsthetic principle, when you came to think about it; you could trace its influence in almost everything people did; in their poetry and their music almost as much as in their houses. Nobody could read the Bible and not see that it was written in a hot country. “*The shadow of a great rock in a weary land...*” Not a bad inscription to go over the door of these big Southern houses.

It was when she began landscaping about in the garden and on the terraces and coming across the grave-stones again that she realized how different was the feeling she had about them too. It still seemed natural to see them there, making part, and always the whitest part, of the low wall and the wide steps that led down from the garden into the hollow where the spring-house used to be, but it did not seem natural any longer to see them there without remembering what they really were – or at least had been. And can a gravestone ever cease to be one, even when



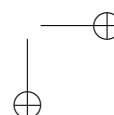
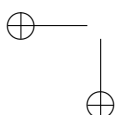


A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

turned carefully with the plain side out and used for something else? She had never stopped to think of that either. They had always been there, as far back as she could remember. They had been hauled over from the National Cemetery, a couple of miles away (in the course of a sweeping renovation that had swept them out of that hallowed precinct), and dumped on the lawn at Arden instead of being dumped in the nearest gully, as directed by those in charge of the operation, the federal government having for some reason suddenly decided that the graves of the men who had died for it must all be marked alike.

These stones were not alike. They were as different perhaps as the taste and the circumstances of the families who had bought and paid for them had been; but they were all marble and had certainly all cost enough in one way or another to save them from the rubbish-heap. A few wagon-loads had been saved by bringing them to Arden, though it was for no such consideration that Mrs. Winchester's father had them brought; he was merely thinking of the usefulness of stones in a stoneless land.

They had been widely scattered by their various functions and by the years. She could imagine them being blown over the place like leaves, so far afield she would sometimes find a lettered fragment. Many of them were deep in the earth themselves by this time; every now and then a spade would ring on something hard, and a name or a date or part of an inscription would be turned up to the light – always to be carefully



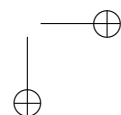
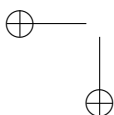


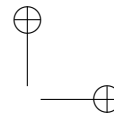
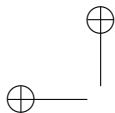
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turned down again in some other place. It began to be rather a superstition with her; she had a dim feeling that by doing this she was protecting something. Not a person, certainly, nor even a thing; an emotion perhaps – one somewhere long ago, that had wanted to be fixed and permanent in stone, nor scattered and made senseless this way.

The danger of superstition, and perhaps its greatest interest, lies in its extraordinary ability to provide itself with everything it needs to live on. Given a fair start, it can go right on without asking help from either mind or matter. As the spring advanced and she worked more and more out of doors, Mrs. Winchester began to notice many curious things in connection with her epitaphs. Coincidences, of course; she would only call them that.

For instance, one lovely day in April she was trimming back the periwinkle from a green bank where she meant to have violets instead, when she came across a flat stone with an inscription she could read entirely except for one broken corner that left the verse from the Bible cut across: *Man that is born...* it said, and then below: *...few days*. Few indeed she saw they had been for this boy of twenty-two, and the last of them, she read with a kind of shock, this very day in April, 1864. She had the gardener move the stone and put it, right side up for once, under a honeysuckle-bush in the garden. And then there was the other one, a headstone too, that they found when they were cleaning out the spring. It had a sculptured willow, worn away to less



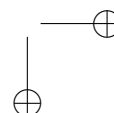
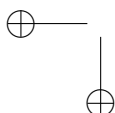


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than the shadow of a tree, with lettering above it and below, but so effaced that only three words were clear enough to read – and there again, how strange that it should be those three! *Many waters... love...* And at the bottom of the things.

The National Cemetery was a beautiful place. Even the repeated renovations could never rouse it permanently from the appearance of profound, almost stylized peace that is always found, or found returning, in the shadow of magnolia-trees. There must have been hundreds of them in that walled enclosure, grown, as invariably happens, far beyond any original intention, having to be continually lopped and pruned to let the sunlight in on the grass and the rows of interminable white pegs, now all alike, spaced, with mathematical precision on the even ground. Mrs. Winchester never failed to notice the kaleidoscopic effect from the road as she drove past. The iron gates were almost always standing open, but it had been years since she drove in. Some day she would. She had been remembering lately that a part of her past was there. She had been remembering Colonel Hawley, who had been superintendent of the cemetery when she was a child.

The first time she ever heard the expression “an officer and a gentleman,” somebody had said it about Colonel Hawley. On that occasion it had been used to temper the preceding epithet of Yankee, but she had never heard it since in any connection without giving it back to him in her mind. Cavalry too – chevalier; he never walked if he were going anywhere a horse could

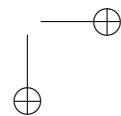
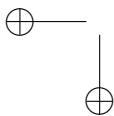




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go. It hurt his leg, he said. He had been wounded at Gettysburg; or maybe it was Shiloh; one of those “old wounds” people used to talk about. It made him limp a little sometimes, and that hurt his pride. He rode over to Arden quite often; on almost any summer afternoon they would see him approaching under the trees from the gate, the very model of an equestrian statue in the park. She remembered how her mother in her white dress would stand out on the porch, calling to him to “light and hitch,” and how they could always tell even before he did it whether he had been drinking, as people said then, because of a sort of steely correctness it conferred on his attitude and behaviour. The old wound was responsible for the drinking too, she supposed. And the drinking – for how many things was it responsible? For his being where he was, perhaps, among the rest.

She must have heard it mentioned many times that the government position he held was entirely out of line with his background and attainments, and that anyhow a man who had rendered such distinguished service in his unrighteous cause might at least have received some more righteous reward and not have been relegated to the corner of a cemetery until after he was dead; there was something odd about it. So people must have said, for she could hardly have formulated such ideas for herself. In order to know what is odd, one must first know what is usual, and Colonel Hawley was the only superintendent of a cemetery she had ever seen, and almost the only Yankee. It seemed to

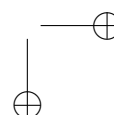
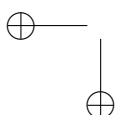




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her now, looking back, that he had probably liked his job. Its responsibilities were not excessive and were the very opposite of confining; there was a very pretty brick and mansard lodge in the corner to which he had been relegated, and there were stables and horses, with men to look after them – things that he loved and might not have been able to afford if the government had not relegated them too. And he liked the South; the climate suited him, he said (the old wound again perhaps), and the darkies amused him almost as much as they exasperated him. There was some romantic reason too; some episode connected with the war, but not with a girl; at least she had never heard of a girl in the story, though there should certainly have been one – young as he was at the time, and everything else besides. He had been taken prisoner down in Mississippi somewhere – Vicksburg, as she recalled it – and had been treated so much to his liking that he always referred to the experience rather as if it had been a house-party. He would bring the incident forward in support of a theory that war, though it might be hell, was a gentleman's business. Dear Colonel Hawley. That would probably have been his definition of life too – and of death – if he had ever infringed on philosophy so far as to express an opinion of either one of them.

The years when they saw him so often had been the ones when she was growing up, as the saying is, and in her case it was true in every sense. Almost all the growing she ever did was somewhere between



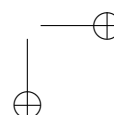
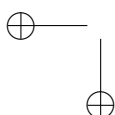


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ten and twelve. She had seemed all at once to be leaving everything behind her, and Colonel Hawley was perhaps the first person to show her some of the things that lay ahead. There had been few thrills in her life that ever equalled the one she felt the first time he got up from his chair when she came into the room and stood until she sat down on something – the floor it might well have been, so great was her surprise.

They had known him for some time – some months perhaps – before it ever occurred to anybody that he was not the elderly bachelor he seemed, nor yet the elderly widower they might have supposed him; and then it was really Mrs. Hawley herself who occurred; they had no knowledge of her existence until they heard she was there. It was in the early spring – February probably; Mrs. Winchester remembered the big bowl of jonquils on the table the afternoon she and her mother drove over to the lodge to see her.

At that period of her life she had seen comparatively few people of any kind, and certainly no one like Mrs. Hawley. The impression she had of her was so confused, and remained confused for so long, that she could almost think she saw her better now, after all the years, than on that afternoon when she and her mother were shown into the little parlour by Cindy, the Colonel's cook, and a large lady with a lap full of bright wools rose from her chair to greet them. She, was quite beautiful; even a child, given as children are to ignoring beauty in people they consider old, could not ignore it in such size and colouring as Mrs. Hawley



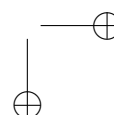
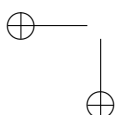


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displayed. There was something vivid and insistent about it that suggested, in spite of the scale of the design, the beauty of a doll: the full, dark eyes and the naturally-curling hair, not yet white; what was called then iron-grey, both in ladies and in horses; and not yet yet beyond glinting in the sunlight that came in through the windows opening on the lawn, where there were flowers but no trees. The room was full of colour: Mrs. Hawley in her "changeable silk," her jonquils, and her needlepoint.

It was a pleasant visit, so far as conversation went; and so far as she remembered; her mother could always be trusted to see to that. She did remember that Mrs. Hawley had offered them tea, which they declined, knowing, as she apparently did not, how far such an effort would have been beyond Cindy's powers. In the matter of her domestic limitations she had much to learn; more than Cindy and the Colonel together ever succeeded in teaching her, during this or any of her subsequent visits to the lodge. For it was only a visit. She made it very plain to them that she had not come to stay.

The fact itself however, to the mind of a child, was anything but plain. This matter of the visits was the thing about Mrs. Hawley that confused her most, and longest. Why did she never come to stay? Mrs. Winchester could not remember ever seeking direct enlightenment on this point, but she must have heard the question asked many times and many answers given. Alcohol was not among them. The Colonel's tendencies



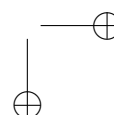
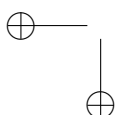


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in that direction seemed always in abeyance when his wife was there. Whatever he drank during those periods nobody could call drinking; the old wound may have troubled him less when he was not alone; certainly he didn't have as much time to think about it. The visits while they lasted made a very radical difference in his routine.

There were many things Cindy could not learn to do the way Mrs. Hawley wanted them done; many more that she was never there to do at all. Cindy left early and came late because her road, which led through the whole length of the cemetery (she lived just outside the back gate) could only be travelled, without the risk of perilous encounters, in the broad light of day, and Mrs. Hawley liked her morning chocolate well before sunrise. So whether ghosts were about at that hour or not, the Colonel always managed to be, and she would find, on waking, her little tray prepared. Coffee would have been better for her figure, or tea. She was much heavier than was supposed to be becoming, even by the more generous estimate of those days, but chocolate was the beverage she preferred; sweet, with cream. Colonel Hawley had learned to cook in the army, she explained; and an army in the unrestricted enjoyment of hot chocolate was a picture that clung to the imagination, Mrs. Winchester discovered, long after reason had abolished it.

The Colonel rode much less when his wife was there. Even when Cindy was in the house he couldn't be out of it as he was accustomed to be. His foot in



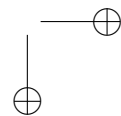
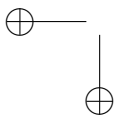


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the stirrup, he would be called upon to take it out again and come back for something – very often some linguistic difficulty that had arisen between his wife and his cook. “What does she mean,” Mrs. Hawley asked him on one occasion, “by saying she will dust the parlour ‘to a certain extent’?” And the Colonel found some difficulty in explaining to her just what Cindy did mean, though he knew she had certainly not meant to come so near the truth. Mrs. Hawley was reluctant to accept the theory that Cindy was merely affirming her intention of giving the parlour a certain and extensive going over.

In the end she and Cindy managed in spite of verbal entanglements to become friends. Her position at the lodge was a lonely one so far as neighbours were concerned. Cindy’s little house on the “dirt road” that ran by the far gate of the cemetery was perhaps the nearest habitation and Cindy’s associates almost the only visitors who came and went informally about the place. The situation was strange, to say the least, for a woman of Mrs. Hawley’s probable outlook and experience, and led to at least one strange and unexplained event. But that was later on, during a subsequent visit, after her surroundings had become somewhat more familiar to her – and after as many of rumour’s thousand tongues as could be mustered locally had made themselves familiar with her name.

It would have been difficult, perhaps, for her to have gone anywhere out of the range of admiration, if not of curiosity, and the National Cemetery, already



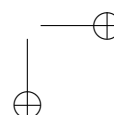
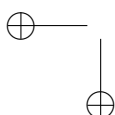


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esteemed an unsuitable residence for her husband, must have seemed almost fantastically inappropriate for her. It was soon felt that any of those matters which, in the Colonel's case and before she came, had required explaining were now of minor interest, and possibly comprised in the larger mystery she suggested.

It was a day when news, even bad news, even scandal, travelled so slowly that one stood a very good chance of going almost anywhere and getting back again without being overtaken by communications about oneself; in which case (and in case one wanted to avoid them) the only thing one had to do was not to go back the second time. This, however, Mrs. Hawley did, and before she made her second visit people had begun to "find out things." It was already being reported pretty freely on all sides that she had what was called then "a past." Many people were saying that they might have known it – a woman who looked like that! Some were even saying that they did.

Mrs. Winchester could not remember that her father or her mother had made either of these claims, but she did remember a good deal of lively interest in the subject that had been manifested at home, on various occasions. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say she remembered the occasions and estimated the interest at a later date. One afternoon she had been sitting on the porch steps making a dress for her doll; and she recalled the way her mother, who was sewing too, in a wicker rocking-chair beside her, had suddenly leaned over and picked up from the assortment of





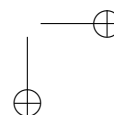
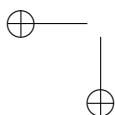
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scraps on the floor a piece of silk Mrs. Hawley had contributed for the doll's wardrobe. Her mother looked at it, holding it against her own skirt where a strip of sunlight fell and where it glowed almost as if she had held a match to it. It was the colour of a tiger-lily, she said putting it down again.

"But you do think it's pretty, Mother?" she had asked, a little anxiously.

"Not for a dress – not for a lady," her mother said, and there was food for thought in this opinion, for the silk was a piece of one of Mrs. Hawley's dresses.

Then there was the question of the Colonel's leg. It had been very bewildering to discover that in some way Mrs. Hawley was supposed to be responsible for the old wound, though how she could have been, since she was certainly not at either Gettysburg or Shiloh, was something any child would have found difficulty in determining. And especially since it seemed to be the one subject above all others that nobody would ever discuss when she was around. They were everlastingly careful not to mention it in her hearing; she could hardly believe now, looking back, that the knowledge she finally gained of actual events in this connection could have come to her through her ears. In one way or another, however, the fact at last stood out that the old wound was younger by quite a few years than any wounds sustained at Gettysburg or in any later battle of the war. It was authoritatively asserted to have been acquired, not in a military engagement at all, but in Mrs. Hawley's bedroom, at the hands of a



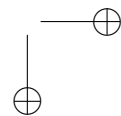
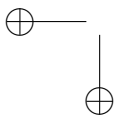


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man whose idea had been not to cripple the Colonel but to kill him, and who, in falling short of it, had been killed himself. It was plain that Colonel Hawley's action in the tented field, as Shakespeare called that gentleman's business, had not been confined to the making of chocolate, since the bead he had drawn on his adversary had a precision that denoted experience.

The results that usually follow an episode of this nature were in this instance reported to have been got around, or at any rate got over, with unusual ease and swiftness. The facts were too plain for gossip to thrive on for very long; the Colonel too well within the unwritten law to be molested with longer processes. He found himself almost immediately a free man again, and Mrs. Hawley found herself a "forgiven woman" without ever being asked, at least in open session, to what extent forgiveness was required or how much she herself forgave. So far as the community in which they resided was concerned, the incident was closed, though it remained, like the bullet in the Colonel's leg, something that could be painfully revived.

It had often seemed strange to Mrs. Winchester that a story as old as this one was before they ever heard it – and transplanted into the bargain – should have held, and held so long, such interest for everybody, whether or not they even knew the Colonel or had even seen his wife. There must have been in those same years other dramas nearer home, other scandals in which nearer friends had played a part. She wondered if the very fact that they were strangers – Northerners,

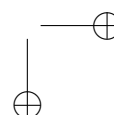
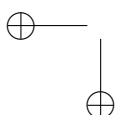




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Yankees – might not have lent to anything concerning them the touch of strangeness that keeps interest alive. There had even been a feeling that the story was not finished, that something might yet happen in these two ageing lives to stir their depths again. People spoke of love and hate; of pride, and of money too, which is another stormy thing; distributing these elements evenly between the Colonel and his wife, giving to Mrs. Hawley the money and the hate, the better ones to him. His job as superintendent they felt could now be satisfactorily explained as a self-imposed exile.

Mrs. Winchester had been aware for a good many years of how sensational all this was. She had felt it long ago perhaps, even as a child; but now she was aware of something else; she felt what seemed to her a deeper truth. Wasn't there always a meaning underlying the things people considered, or dismissed from consideration, as sensational? She knew now, or thought she did, that without reality of some sort they would not be capable of causing a sensation, which was, when you came to think of it, quite an important affair – an experience one was apt to remember and speak of, if only to call it negligible. The more she thought about Colonel Hawley, the *preux chevalier* of her young imagination, and his strangely beautiful wife, the less she was inclined to feel that anything they represented could have failed to be in some way important. Browning's poem "Love among the Ruins" occurred to her. What had there been besides love,



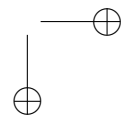
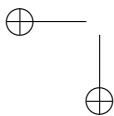


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there in that corner of the cemetery? What distrust, what bitterness, living on so near the dead?

It was on a windy afternoon in March, during her third visit to the lodge, that Mrs. Hawley went to Cindy's house to meet the fortune-teller, a recent arrival in the neighbourhood of whose occult accomplishments she had already, like Desdemona, by parcels something heard, and wanted to learn more.

Cindy, who claimed this oracle as an aunt and was now entertaining her as a guest, had arranged the meeting for Sunday, which was the only day when she and Homey could both be there, she said; meaning by "there" her own house, consisting of two rooms and a smoky chimney, and by Homey the aunt, who "give herself that name," Cindy explained without explaining why. It was under the circumstances a misleading one, since the life of a transient seemed to be the one Homey preferred – or may have considered more appropriate to a vocation so often accompanied by restlessness. Since her childhood, according to Cindy, her aunt had lived "out of the mouth of the Lawd," which was to say she had lived on her friends and paid them back in prophecies; somewhat as Elijah might have done, or even at times Cassandra, though she was perhaps less unwelcome than they had been, through being less believed. This mode of existence having now brought her to the back gate of the cemetery, Mrs. Hawley, who was interested in psychic matters, could hardly have been dissuaded from going to test for herself the powers reported to her.



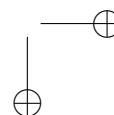
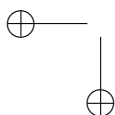


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Not that anyone had tried to dissuade her. Quite the contrary. Cindy had been encouraging to the point of some deception concerning the amount of walking involved. The distance from the front gate to the back one under the dark trees, so often qualified as endless in her conversation, was now minimized to the point where she could speak of “steppin’ over”; and the Colonel, who knew how little Mrs. Hawley cared for stepping, had laughed and offered her his horse.

The experience awaiting her in Cindy’s cabin turned out to be one worth going a good deal farther to meet, since she was interested in the psychic. It impressed her so much that in telling about it, as Mrs. Winchester had often heard her do, she seldom omitted a number of little details that had no connection with the experience itself, but had taken on a kind of importance to her by having been noticed at the time. She always spoke of how dark the house had seemed to her when she went into it out of the sun, and of the way the fire was smoking, so that she could hardly see which of the two women was Cindy and which the aunt. She even described the patchwork cushion in the rocking-chair they gave her.

This was not like Mrs. Hawley, whose disposition was always to pare her topics down rather than to build them up, but since the occasion, because of events that followed it, acquired a certain notoriety, Mrs. Winchester had always taken deep satisfaction in being able to visualize it. She liked to imagine Cindy’s room as it must have looked to Mrs. Hawley;





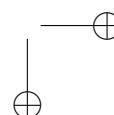
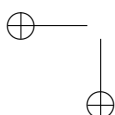
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she liked to imagine Mrs. Hawley as she must have looked herself, coming into it out of the windy sunlight in her blowing veils.

Cindy's Aunt Homey, she told them, was not in the least what she had expected. She looked very little older than Cindy herself, and had nicer manners, though her grammar as well as Cindy's, Mrs. Hawley thought, left much to be desired. Still, she reported her as very "polite and pleasant," and they had talked for quite a while on subjects of general interest, such as the weather, and what made the chimney smoke, before she mentioned having her fortune told. When she did this, Cindy, with much discretion, got up and retired to the other room, and her Aunt Homey came over and sat down by Mrs. Hawley in Cindy's chair.

She sat there for a while without saying anything and then asked Mrs. Hawley to hold out her hand, which she did, palm upwards as required on such occasions, but without feeling that Homey, whose eyes had assumed a vague and far-away expression, was getting very much assistance from the operation. She held the tips of Mrs. Hawley's fingers with her own, but seemed to be looking at something else. This went on for a few minutes, and then in a voice that sounded different from the way she talked before – thin, somehow, and as if it, too, came from far away – she said: "I sees water."

The statement, astonishing enough in itself, was especially impressive, Mrs. Hawley thought, because of there being so much smoke in the room. It was



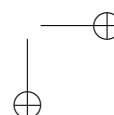
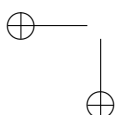


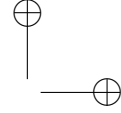
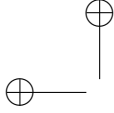
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almost as if the prophetess had the idea of fire in mind and was thinking of something to put it out. But this was not the case; the water she referred to was rising. "It's comin' up," she said; "it's gettin' deeper an' deeper; the branches of the trees is lyin' out on it like green grass; there can't nothin' live in it cep'n fish, or maybe somethin' like a turtle. The possums an' the bobcats is climbin' up to the highes' limbs."

Mrs. Hawley, whose sense of humour where negroes were concerned was not in the least like the Colonel's, saw nothing amusing in this, though she imitated Cindy's Aunt Homey rather well; and there may have been nothing. Dealing with the future is an awesome business, even when we undertake it for ourselves, with no special endowments to fit us for the job. Homey's fitness, though as yet unproved, was something she had no doubt about herself – which is always convincing to others – and Mrs. Hawley assured her listeners that she was so convinced of the visible presence of water that she kept trying to draw up her feet and locate them on the rung of her rocking-chair, until she discovered it was minus that spare part.

But though apparently feeling, and certainly conveying, the terror of a rising flood, Homey gave no indication of knowing where or when it was likely to happen, or who beside the bobcats and the possums was supposed to be endangered by it. Mrs. Hawley thought she remembered asking her these questions and getting no answer. Homey may not have heard her



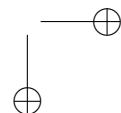
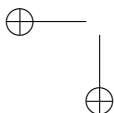


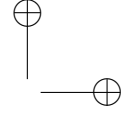
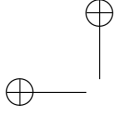
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— she just kept on describing the flood, and warning her about it.

More than one of Mrs. Hawley's listeners had been impressed with the fact that she, too, showed a certain indisposition to be pinned down with questions about the way in which the prophecy ended and just how Homey emerged from her trance. Her fancy for detailed description seemed always to leave her suddenly at about this point, which, as an artistic ending, might have been considered admirable, but considered as merely holding back something that she didn't want to tell was exasperating and left but one recourse open to anybody who felt obliged to know whether Homey had really not said anything more. The recourse, naturally, was Cindy. Whatever anybody else believed about Cindy's discretion, Mrs. Winchester, child though she was at the time, had never had the slightest idea that she had left the room with any intention of missing a word that might be spoken within it. Besides key-holes there were always cracks, and though as a well-bred child she would have scorned the use of either at first hand, she had no hesitation about accepting Cindy's second-hand gleanings, imparted as they were without hesitation or apology, and even (or almost) without invitation.

And Mrs. Hawley had held something back. For after Homey finished with the water, leaving the flood at its highest, the danger at its greatest — after she had ceased to see it altogether she had seen, or at least heard, something else. "She sot there jus' as still,"



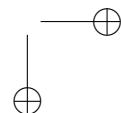
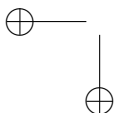


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Cindy said, “like she was listenin’ for somethin’; an’ then all of a sudden she heard it. She hollered out real loud: ‘Shootin’! I hears shootin’!’ An’ it look like it mus’ have done woke her up, because after that she begun to come to.”

The immediate result of this shadowy adventure, as it affected Mrs. Hawley, was to provide her with a topic of conversation whose interest could hardly fail in any company, and also with a determination to avoid as far as possible any body of water bigger than a bath-tub. She gave up the idea of going to New Orleans for Mardi Gras by boat, as she had planned to do, and went by train instead, letting her friends go off on the *Kate Adams* without her, much to the Colonel’s amusement. But this time he didn’t offer her his horse, for he was going duck-shooting. He might have been waiting a little impatiently for her departure; certainly he was off as soon after it as he could whistle for his dogs and the darkie who usually accompanied him on these expeditions.

Among the departed blessings of those years that Mrs. Winchester had heard deplored, it seemed to her the mallards that once nested on Cypress Island were mentioned as often as any. How had the relative proportion of ducks and people hunting ducks managed to be so completely reversed? She had often heard Colonel Hawley speak of Cypress Island as if it were his private game preserve, where the perfect understanding that existed between him and the ducks was rarely interfered with by any other man or dog or gun.



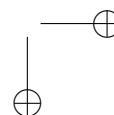
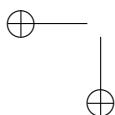


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The name was given locally to a low-lying strip of woodland on the other side of a tawny little stream known – also locally – as the River, and it could never have been called an island except by someone who did not know what an island was, or had not investigated it enough to see that it was not one. There were sometimes days, or even a week or two, in the spring when it might be said to become one, but that was only in very high water when the stream had overflowed its banks and become for a few days a river. And on the day of Mrs. Hawley's departure, as soon as the Colonel came within sight of the terrain, he saw to his disgust that this was just about to happen. Another day or two and the water would be out in earnest and his hunting spoiled – for the rest of the year perhaps.

Because she had always known what followed – what was bound to follow – Mrs. Winchester had been considerably tempted to believe that the Colonel must have known it too, and that he just ran head-on into prophecy to show how little he respected it. She was sure he would have liked nothing better than to do that very thing if in the first place he had remembered about the prophecy (which, with his mind on ducks, was unlikely), or if, in the other places, he could have thought of it as having any sort of application to himself, or to a shore and stream with which he was so perfectly familiar – or to a situation he felt so capable of handling.

The River, however, behaved on this occasion in a way with which nobody was familiar. The water

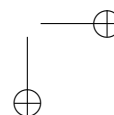
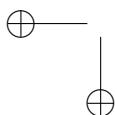




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was already deeper than he had supposed before his horse stepped into it, so deep, in fact, that the negro boy coming behind him on his mule – and taking the mule’s advice perhaps – decided against the crossing. Having the Colonel swear at them from the other bank did little to change the mind of either of them, and after waiting a decent interval – long enough to see him give them up and ride on into the wood – the wet dogs sniffing excitedly under his horse’s feet, they turned towards home.

The boy, whose name, at least to the Colonel, was Nimrod, did not learn until the forenoon of the next day – for the simple reason (a reason of his own, no doubt) that he did not ask – that the Colonel had not returned and that the island, for the first time in twenty years or so, had “gone under.” Nobody else, not even Cindy, knew where he had gone. It was afternoon before a boat was found, with somebody to row it, and nearly night before the Colonel, wet, hungry, and exhausted, rode in again through the iron gates of his domain. Like Mrs. Hawley, he was provided with a subject of enduring interest for future conversation – the other half of hers, if one chose to take it that way – but his sentiments with regard to water did not seem to have undergone any change. There had always been other things he liked better, he said, and there can be little doubt the bottle in his hip pocket had lightened his ordeal. He had not, however, been forced to share a tree with the bobcats and the possums; there had been just room on the island’s highest point



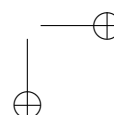
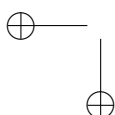


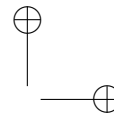
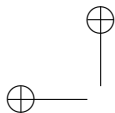
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for a man, a horse, and two dogs. The thing he could not understand, he said, was why nobody paid any attention to his gunfire. All night long he had let go at regular intervals – “And you’d think any fool would know it meant something to hear shooting when it was too dark for ducks. . . .”

Driving by the cemetery as she did and never going in, Mrs. Winchester wished sometimes that there might be something to go in for, besides the expectation of meeting her own memories. It would be nice, she thought, to go one day with an armful of flowers to put in the little parlour of the lodge where Mrs. Hawley always had them, since there seemed to be nothing of a more commemorative nature that she could do. How strange it was for Colonel Hawley to have lived so many years in that cemetery and then be buried somewhere else – beside his wife, no doubt – in a spot that she would never see. Green be the turf above thee, friend of my better days. . . .

Only they were not better; they were not nearly so good as the ones she was living now. It struck her that she must have spent them almost exclusively in collecting the raw impressions she was only now beginning to digest. Perhaps that was what the middle years were for. Certainly it was the only time in our life when we could look toward its beginning and its end from a supposedly equal distance and form an opinion of both. It was probably the only time too when living seemed to be so terribly important to us; the period of that bloodthirsty clinging to life which religion and



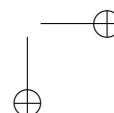
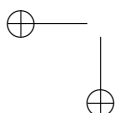


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philosophy spoke of so disparagingly. Youth for some reason was much more detachable. Young people as a rule wore their lives rather lightly; they probably couldn't imagine being without them, for one thing; and old people might be tired enough of theirs to be willing to try something else. But in the middle – *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* – there wasn't anything else. Everything we had was right there; we were all of us invested in something up to the neck – children, business, art, science. Like the man in the parable, we had planted our vineyard and set our hedge about it, and dugged our wine-vat and built our tower. We couldn't afford to think of them as less than terribly important – as something deep and rich and full of meaning.

And of course the more one understood the meaning of anything, the deeper and richer it became; in the same way that colours came out in painting or embroidery as they took their place in the design. One said "as red as blood" and then, seeing it to be blood, saw a different colour altogether. One thought of love and then, seeing it was not lovely, gave it a different name: one saw its colour change.

Perhaps, instead of taking flowers to Colonel and Mrs. Hawley, or the intention of flowers – or taking them, as she was always doing unintentionally, her unformed, youthful recollections – she ought now, at this period of her life, to offer them the tribute of a maturer understanding. She had always said they were like people in a story; suppose now, instead of reading

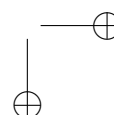
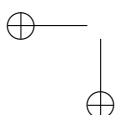




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the story, she tried to see how much of it she could write.

It would be one with many illustrations. She recalled an afternoon when she and her mother had been visiting at the lodge and were just leaving; Colonel Hawley had put them into the surrey and given them his half-playful military salute and then, as the horses started, turned back again to the porch where his wife was standing. She was brilliantly arrayed as usual – this time in the silk from which Mrs. Winchester had arrayed her doll. The colour may have been like that of a tiger-lily, but it was not unlike the heavy clusters of the trumpet-vine growing over the porch. She stood, as she so often did, exactly like a statue, and Mrs. Winchester, leaning out of the surrey and looking back, thought she had never seen her look so tall; but not in the least like marble – never anything white; one could not even imagine Mrs. Hawley wearing a white dress. Since only one of them could have “the money” people talked about, it was a good thing for Mrs. Hawley to have it, on account of her clothes. The Colonel couldn’t need so much to be always immaculately the same. As he stood there at the foot of the steps, straight and slender, uncovered before his wife, the only thing he needed, it seemed to Mrs. Winchester, finishing out the picture, was a sword. If she wrote the story she would have to say more; she would have to tell that happened next: whether he went back up the steps and stood beside his wife, putting his arm around her, looking with her down the long





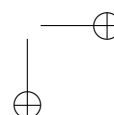
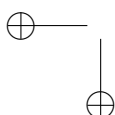
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avenue of magnolias at the sunset, maybe taking up her hand and holding it against his face as married people sometimes did; or if he only waited a minute where he was and then walked away. The surrey had gone too far by that time for her to see, but she didn't have to see; she knew he walked away.

Yet people said "the love" was on his side. Would any woman keep coming, time after time, year after year, for love like that? To be treated always as a guest – like Queen Elizabeth stopping overnight, waited on hand and foot – and then walked away from? The story would have to explain this – or would have to try.

"I trust Mrs. Hawley will honour us with a visit some time when the Cape jessamine is in bloom," Colonel Hawley had said once to her mother, glancing at the rose his wife was wearing in the bosom of her dress, thinking no doubt of a richer blossom pinned there instead – but not of pinning it. There was always a suspicion of light mockery in these ceremonious speeches; she believed she must have seen it even then; what she saw now was that both the mockery and the ceremony were in defence of something – the pride, perhaps, that people gave him too?

This arbitrary allotment of qualities would find no place in the story – all his, all hers. The money, which was not a quality, might very well be Mrs. Hawley's, but things like love and hate and pride, to be at all – at least for any length of time – must certainly be shared; they were in their essence mutual. This was the bond between the Colonel and his wife: that they





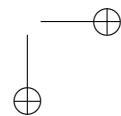
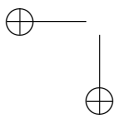
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must share these things. She knew that now. And it was what people meant (without knowing it) when they said there was blood between them. Everything was between them; wrong and violence with the rest. Even the shadow of the coming danger Cindy's aunt had seen (if you took it that way) had fallen on them both. Mrs. Winchester was aware that lives had been entangled like this before; the phenomenon was not new, though it might every now and then be given a new name. Before one called it anything else, however, one had to call it love. No one wanted love to be like that, but it was.

The last time she saw Colonel Hawley was the afternoon he came to say good-bye to her before she went away to school. It was her first long trip away from home, and nobody knew then that it would be so long – measured by the years she was to be absent. She was going to stay with an aunt who lived abroad and go to school in France. She took him into the garden where the Cape jessamine, still unexperienced by Mrs. Hawley, was trailing its ghost beauty up and down the walks while breathing the things of earth. Perhaps they could send her some, she suggested.

Colonel Hawley shook his head. "It doesn't pay," he said, "Flowers always get there in a mess."

She told him her mother often sent Cape jessamines to her friends. She had a special way of packing them, with each one of their stems stuck in a piece of Irish potato. Everybody always said they got there beautifully.





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“And do you always believe them?” Colonel Hawley asked her. “People hardly ever tell the truth if it is disagreeable and they know they are not going to be found out. Suppose your friends wrote back: ‘Greens and potatoes arrived just in time for lunch.’”

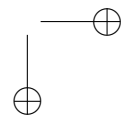
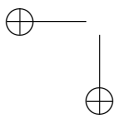
She always laughed at things like that, which was no doubt the reason he was hardly ever serious when she was present.

“So you are going away to be made a young lady of – and a French young lady at that,” he said after they had taken a few more turns in the garden and had sat down on the stone bench by the gate. “Do you know the language already? Will you be able to ask for what you want over there?”

She told him she knew some – that she had been studying it this last year; whereupon he began saying something to her in French – a long sentence, quite fast – and she found she didn’t know a word of it. She was terribly confused, and he apologized by saying he had learned French before he did English; his father had been American Minister to Switzerland.

“And did you go to school over there?” she asked, feeling less homesick already. Somehow he always lifted the doubts from her future this way.

He told her he had gone to school at Vevey, and went on to describe the funny fires and the winters and the snow, and to talk about his Swiss boyhood more than she had ever heard him talk about himself before. If he had known how interested she was, he might have gone on much farther – all the way to Mrs. Hawley



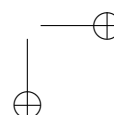
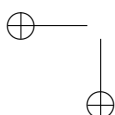


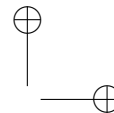
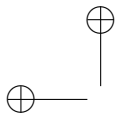
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perhaps. There were so many things she wanted to ask him. She could still regret that she had known so little of a young manhood that nobody, it seemed to her, could have contemplated, even in retrospect, without delight. But something always interrupted, and this time it was the supper-bell. How many times in her life she had been called away for food from something she liked infinitely better and probably needed more; selling her birthright over and over again, for fried chicken maybe, or ice-cream!

So they got up and went in to supper, out of a garden where they were never to walk again together; but first she picked a Cape jessamine – a small half-opened one – and put it in his buttonhole. She was tall enough to do it now, with him standing straight and still, and when she finished he said, slowly this time: “*Je vous remercie, mademoiselle,*” to show her he still accepted her on a cosmopolitan footing.

It was later in the summer now. Since she began her gardening, the vines and shrubbery had grown so much she hardly noticed the gravestones any more or thought of them at all. The *few days* recorded on the one she had put in the garden lost their poignancy somehow under the pink cascade of the honeysuckle-bush; even when she found a stone still stranded out of summer’s reach she didn’t feel about it as she had done at first. Instead of thinking those broken bits of sentiment were wandering and lost, she was beginning to indulge a fancy that they might be safer than other





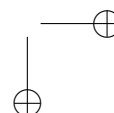
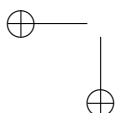
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sentiments she knew. What if they were the ones that had not wandered – that had only disappeared? To be or not to be... to change or not to change...

There was a game children used to play when she was a child – perhaps they played it still – one of the running, catching games, whose rules she could not recall, but in which the object was to get back to the starting-point without being caught. She had been thinking lately of the shout that always accompanied this return: *Home free!* They used to shout it at the top of their voices. She did not shout it now, but she remembered it when she came across some one of these old engraved emotions that had vanished long ago no doubt, but had gone free of change.

From battle and murder, and from sudden death... and why not from change? It could not go in the same prayer, of course, since death was the only thing that could deliver us from that. So long as we had a breath of life in us, it was going to be different from any breath we ever had before. One had to accept life as a moving thing, as one did a river, or a journey. But no one wanted love to be like that.

These were strange thoughts to be going with her about this familiar place, where she believed they had never been before. Was it only inanimate things that stayed with us long enough to be really familiar, really ours, as our thoughts and feelings could not be because we were always having new ones? We had a perfect mania for replacing them – even the ones we liked the best. Any poet who imagined he had

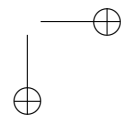
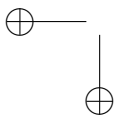


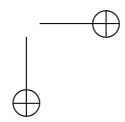
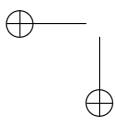
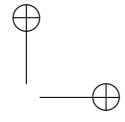
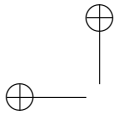


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written something more enduring than bronze had better publish it right away, or lose it – or at any rate stop thinking about it; for if he kept it in mind, as people say, he was absolutely sure to change it, that being apparently what one's mind was for. One could hold a beloved object in one's hands, at least for a while, without doing anything to it; one could even imagine holding it so until it and the hands had both grown old; but the mind was not respectful like that – not even of beauty, and less than anything of love.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. . . . But she was thinking of what we did to it ourselves.



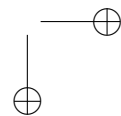
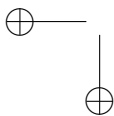




THE RING

I

My grandmother's friend Mrs. Falconer was a beautiful woman. I was told that so early and so often that I accepted it like any other natural fact; which was just as well, I suppose, since it was already a little late for me to look into it. It was certainly too late for the "statuesque figure," which was now more on the monumental side; the "chiselled features" had held their own much better, I believe, and the hair so frequently referred to as her crowning glory was still, as I remember it, only very lightly streaked with grey. Children are supposed to give but a vagrant attention to most of the scenery with which they are confronted and to skim through landscapes, rooms, or faces with a casual and wandering mind; but this, I think, is because they have so immediately fixed upon some one point of interest that their minds really never wander over the rest of the ground at all. When I looked at Mrs. Falconer, what I saw was her water-waves, and I hope that everybody has at some time



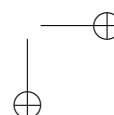
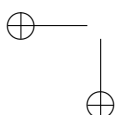


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or other already seen a water-wave, either in life or in portraiture, for it would be a thankless task to describe that plastered lacework that once adhered to ladies' foreheads and looked like almost anything more than their hair. Mrs. Falconer's forehead was high and the waves were deep, and there my gaze was drowned.

She lived in a spacious house in the country, and I seem to have visited her a good deal. I must have been, if not a good child, at least a quiet one, or my grandmother would not have taken me with her so often when she went to see her friends. We drove to Mrs. Falconer's in the barouche, and the visit always began in the parlour, though it might move on, to the dining-room perhaps, or to the garden. There was a piano in the parlour, and also a harp, for Mrs. Falconer was musical and had borne off prizes from the Academy at Columbia, Tennessee, where she and my grandmother had gone to school. She had often been likened to an angel, playing on the harp – the angels of her youth were credited with curves – and the harp still lay easily against her firm shoulder and the bosom whose grace had since been swallowed whole, when old friends like my grandmother asked her to play.

I was always glad when this happened. She would take off the green cloth cover and stand there perilously tightening and tuning the strings – which I always expected to hear go off like firecrackers, and which sometimes did – while she and my grandmother went on talking. It always took a long time, but I knew the climbing fingers would climb out at last, on the





THE RING

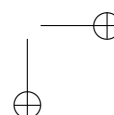
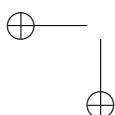
smallest sound; then she would give her stool a turn or two, sit solidly down on it, and after a few chords, like questions, to which my grandmother would reply by naming some favourite piece, the concert would begin.

It was not confined to instrumental selections, for Mrs. Falconer had sung, too, in her youth – especially Tom Moore: “The Young May Moon,” “The Harp that Once. . . .”

I remember too “The Messenger Bird,” “with words by Mrs. Hemans” – once so highly regarded as a writer of words – for whom she had herself been named Felicia. “My father considered her, as a poetess, far superior to Mrs. Browning,” she said more than once, apropos of “The Messenger Bird.”

When I think of Mrs. Falconer’s youthful endowments – her beauty and her harp and her name, which meant happiness – it seems that they should have taken her farther into the realm of romance than they did – or not have brought her back so soon. One short flight only did she have: her nuptial flight, to Boston.

Colonel Falconer lived in Boston; he had come south in the interests of a commerce badly dislocated by the Civil War when he met the fair Felicia, and though it is difficult to imagine, it is impossible to doubt the ardours he must have awakened, since they swept her so unhesitatingly into a life and a latitude she could have so little dreamed of choosing. They may even have warmed for her those two New England winters, though her letters did not say so. Apparently it took more than “the time and the place and the loved one





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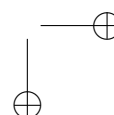
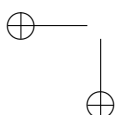
all together” to deflect her pen from lines laid down by the Academy at home.

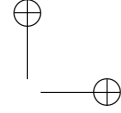
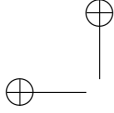
The loved one, whose name was Norton, was referred to invariably in the letters as Mr. Falconer, and though Boston during her sojourn was not without its historic moments, if she had named the streets down which she walked, and told how many degrees Fahrenheit were registered by the thermometer on the wall in the vestibule (and indeed she frequently did both), she would have given as good an idea of the time and the place to which she had been transplanted.

Colonel Falconer’s letters were more pictorial. He was considerably older than his bride, and had had another bride before her; he knew what the situation demanded of a literate gentleman. He spoke of his Southern dove in her new nest; of the warm ripples of admiration that were engendered by that white swan on the surface of Back Bay. She seemed always to evoke ornithological comparisons, from angels down.

It was a pity there could not have been more of Colonel Falconer’s letters; the poetic happiness they indicated, however, was very brief. On one of the icy days recorded by the vestibule thermometer, in the second winter of his marriage, he caught pneumonia, and very shortly after died, leaving the dove alone in her far nest and a little dove expected.

From this point the bare facts of Mrs. Falconer’s life in Boston speak potently enough without assistance from her pen. The baby, beautiful and a boy, came and went, passing mysteriously into legend after a few



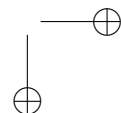
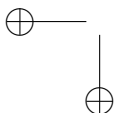


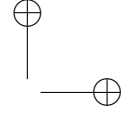
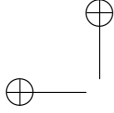
THE RING

weeks on earth, leaving the doctors puzzled. Of one thing only they were entirely sure: nature's provision for the child had been ample; one look at those white chalices had left no doubt of their abundance. But according to my grandmother, speaking from a rather vast and highly successful experience, there had been a mistake about this. She did not blame the doctors too much; she thought it only natural that they should have been misled, accustomed as they were to the "flat-breasted" type their New England practice afforded; but the baby, she believed, could have been saved by a cow, or even by a can.

No one thought it strange that Mrs. Falconer, returning from these experiences in layers of inky mourning, should embark upon her career of widowhood in a house of her own. There were so many widows in those days, so many of them young, so few as "comfortably off" as Colonel Falconer had left her. Then too, a house is no longer considered the social contribution – the refuge, even – that it was then. It would no doubt have seemed selfish to her, perhaps a little frivolous, not to maintain an establishment where servants could be employed and guests entertained; not only the guests who came and went, but the ones, like impecunious relatives, who merely stayed.

The house, as I have said, was large, and there were lawns and a garden with sunny walks; but it was the shadowy places I always chose to play in, such as the grape arbour, where I do not remember grapes, but many spiders of an earlier vintage hanging stark





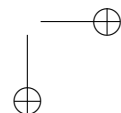
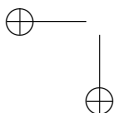
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in their dusty webs. I sometimes wonder what has become of all the shadowy places – the arbours and the trellises, the summer-houses and the carriage-houses.

Mrs. Falconer had given up her carriage, as the saying goes, long before my time, and always returned my grandmother's visits in a hack from the livery stable. This had come about for a succession of reasons: the horses got too little exercise, now that she "went" so seldom, she said at first, and then that Ezekiel drove too fast; and finally that he was too old to drive at all – which by that time was very likely true. But the carriage, though given up, was still there, and might have been seen by anybody as it was seen by me, standing motionless in the dim interior of the carriage-house, proclaiming its abandonment with uplifted shafts. Few of the things that human progress leaves behind it are more melancholy than its discarded means of locomotion – old wheels, old tracks; wherever they went, one knows that it was in vain; and a carriage that nobody is ever going to ride in again should be turned back into a pumpkin or something right away, before it breaks the heart.

Yet I spent delightful hours playin in Mrs. Falconer's carriage; I visited my friends; I drove much faster than Ezekiel; I plumbed the frayed recesses of its upholstery and investigated its intestinal springs. It was one day when I was doing this that I found the ring.

It was a gold ring with a dark flat stone, so much too big for a lady's finger or even for her thumb that I was at first very much puzzled, being unacquainted at



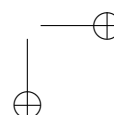
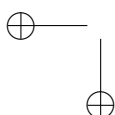


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the time with any gentleman who wore a ring and not knowing even that they did so. But I soon decided that there must have been one at least who did, and that he had lost it in Mrs. Falconer's carriage – or maybe hidden it.

As this last thought struck me, I slipped it quickly back under the lining of the seat where I had found it, feeling for a moment that it left me free to keep it there and not tell anybody about it – especially not Cynthia, who was my grandmother's maid, and a moralist, and was then in the kitchen talking to Mrs. Falconer's cook. I knew instinctively that the issue would fall for Cynthia into one of her two comprehensive categories of wrong-doing: lying and stealing, and that so far as I was concerned, there it would have to stay.

"Lies is tricky," Cynthia said; "they comes true on you." She said it whenever she pleased, certain that I would take it at its face value and be warned, without ever asking her how she meant, or how she knew. What the penalty was that she attached to stealing I have forgotten, but I remember well that neither of them was incurred by me in this matter of the ring, for when my grandmother had me summoned to say good-bye to Mrs. Falconer, I took it in with me and gave it into her hands. I remember it as one of the few times in my life when sticking to the path of virtue turned out to be not only safer but more interesting than the deviations I had contemplated.





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Mrs. Falconer looked at the ring, then took it to the window and looked at it again; after which she sat down and asked quite suddenly for a glass of water.

"Read what is written inside of it, Louisa," she said, handing to my grandmother.

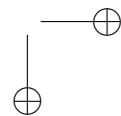
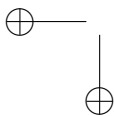
Eleanor to Norton was written inside of it, with a date. Eleanor had been Norton's first wife, but neither of them had ever been in Mrs. Falconer's carriage; and she herself could not have lost the ring there, nor hidden it, for she had never seen it before.

II

I shall now go back to an evening before I was born, when the carriage, still quite new, and black and shining, with Ezekiel much the same, was sent to the station to meet young Mr. Finlay, stopping over on his way from New Orleans to Boston, and recommended to Mrs. Falconer's hospitality by a letter from her stepson in London.

Of this visit, and of young Mr. Finlay, I have been told, I think, all there was to tell and read the little that was written, but a part of what is here set down was not transmitted to me in either of those ways — and that part I believe is true.

The letter, which preceded her visitor by several days, was a surprise to Mrs. Falconer, and in its way a pleasure, although it made her realize as she had not done before how remote the existence of her husband's son had come to seem to her. She had never known

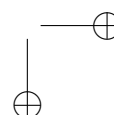
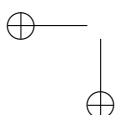




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him; he had been at school in England during the two years of her married life, and since his father's death he had remained there, applying to the English branch of the family's mercantile establishment the English education that had been given him for that purpose. Nor was he in the habit of writing to her. The letters that had passed between them relative to the settlement of Colonel Falconer's estate had been for the most part estrangely legal in tone and, that central topic out of the way, had seemed to leave them nothing to come back to. Now, it appeared, there would be something. In introducing his friend to her, her stepson, whom she had never addressed except as "My dear Edward," lost all at once his epistolary character and became her young relation claiming for the first time the rights of kinship with which she was deeply familiar. It was the longest step he could have taken to bring him to her side, and the friend, who turned out to be a graceful boy of twenty-two or three, looking pale and very tired after his long journey, was received as an ambassador as well as a guest.

He accepted either role with naturalness and charm. Although, even after everything had happened – even after the end – he was never referred to by a less formal name, young Mr. Finlay displayed from the beginning a boyishly informal curiosity about his new surroundings, and at the same time an engaging readiness to turn back and answer questions about those he had left. Mrs. Falconer had told him almost immediately, with her usual directness, that she meant to take advantage





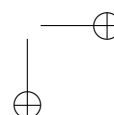
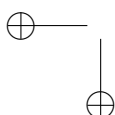
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

of his visit to lessen as much as possible the feeling of distance between herself and her stepson.

“What I want you to do more than anything else while you are here, is to tell me a great deal about Edward,” she said on an evening shortly after his arrival, when she had been entertaining him with music and was now buttoning the harp back into its green garment preparatory to leaving him with his book and his reflections by the parlour fire. She was dressed in the sweeping black silk the young women of that day affected – even the unwidowed ones – and stood looking across with her candid gaze to where he sat at the other side of the hearth. He did not look well, she thought, nor happy, and she was reminded how very little Edward in his letter had told her about him, beyond the fact that he considered him his closest friend. From that point the letter had gone on to express the hope that he might himself be made sometimes the subject of their conversations and that “in this way, better perhaps than in another, you may come to know one who has been denied too long the privilege of knowing you.” That was the elegant locution with which it ended.

“I have regretted many times,” she continued, “that we have had almost nothing in common but business matters. You are the first young friend of his I have ever known, and I do want you to tell me everything about him that you can.”

The dark eyes in the boy’s white face watched her intently as she finished with the harp and closed the





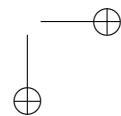
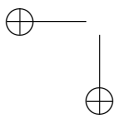
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book on her music-stand. "That is what I want to do," he said – "tell you everything I can."

Yet as the days went by, the enlightenment they proposed did not prosper. It seemed possible for her to learn a great deal about all the phases of English life in which Edward was involved and still learn very little about Edward. Even the question of textile exports, though one of great importance to him, left him unrevealed. She knew these were not the things his closest friend had in mind in saying he would tell her everything he could; she was conscious more than once of an approach to other topics, from which he always withdrew too soon and which caused her a vague feeling of uneasiness. She had known this sort of hesitation and retreat often enough in interviews that had to do with financial embarrassments; it made her wonder if Edward had managed to get into difficulties of that nature – if he might be needing money.

*Come rest in this bosom,
My own stricken deer,
Though the herd hath fled from thee
Thy home is still here. . . .*

It was Tom Moore again, though young Mr. Finlay had asked for Shelley. "I Arise from Dreams of Thee" was, he said, his favourite song. "Did you know," he asked her, "that was the poem – that and the volume of Sophocles – they found still in his pocket when he was washed ashore?"





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Mrs. Falconer was ignorant of these facts, nor had she ever heard the song. Shelley, she told him, was not one of the poets she had been advised to read, either at home or in school.

“But why not?”

“Because of his immoral life,” she said, tightening a string and preparing to play or to sing for him again, as he preferred.

He had been from the first enchanted with her music. One might have thought he had crossed the ocean to sit there, out of range of the lamplight, and listen to her harp, but now he did not ask her to go on. “I would like you to tell me what that song means,” he said – “the one you have just sung. What had he done to make the herd flee from him, do you suppose – committed some crime?”

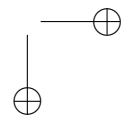
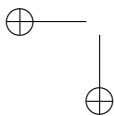
She thought a moment. “Probably,” she said, “because of what it says in the last verse.” She touched the strings lightly and sang the verse again:

*I know not, I ask not
What guilt's in that heart. . . .*

The boy looked at her thoughtfully. “But you do not mean that at all, do you – even when you are singing it?”

“Mean it – in what way?”

“Well – look at Shelley,” he said; “the herd had fled from him, and yet you do not take up for him enough even to read his poetry.”





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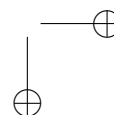
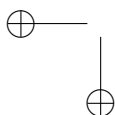
Mrs. Falconer saw no reason why she should take up for Shelley, or even discuss him at all with this young man, but an uneasy feeling that the subject was somehow leading in the direction of her stepson kept her from changing it too suddenly. She mentioned the fact that one could not be too careful where questions of morality were involved.

"But how can you always be sure of what is right and what is wrong? They mean different things to different people, don't they – and not always the same thing even to the same person?" He had moved into the lamplight now and she could see that his face was flushed.

She shook her head. "It may seem that way sometimes, especially to very young people," she said in her clear voice; "that is why they should let themselves be guided. They should not read books that are misleading."

"But it is not the books; it is the things that happen —" He stopped and then began again. "Don't you believe man might see all at once, because of something that happened to him, that what he had been taught before was wrong – about that particular thing, I mean? I know of a case —" This time he did not go on. The flush suddenly left his face and he looked deadly tired.

Except for some possible bearing they might have on Edward, the ethical questions now being raised for her would have had small claim to Mrs. Falconer's consideration. Generally speaking, such matters fell



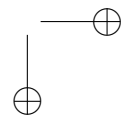
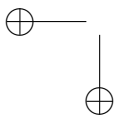


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for her under two heads: not lying and stealing exactly; let us say “freethinking” and “immorality”; equally dangerous, if not quite equally unsuitable as topics for conversation. She had never been interested in either of them, or even in knowing that young men sometimes discussed them, and would not have listened long to the young man at present bringing them tentatively forward if she had not felt that in some way as yet incomprehensible to her she might be listening to something that it was necessary for her to hear. With this thought in mind she continued to sit by her harp, her hands lying in her lap, and without speaking waited for him to go on.

She was disappointed when he did not do this, though she could think of nothing to say – no question she could ask that might lead him to pick up the broken sentence and be more explicit about that “case” of which he knew; for all the serenity of her attitude and expression, her uneasiness was far greater than it had been when she thought she might be called upon for money. That call she would have known how to meet, and meet generously; now she had an odd sort of fear that she was going to be asked for something she would not know how to give – that she did not possess.

These vague suggestions were soon merged, however, in the more practical reflection that Edward apparently had not been wise in choosing his associates, judging by the one before her. However sympathetic they might be with his difficulties, and whatever the difficulties might



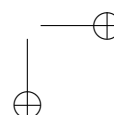
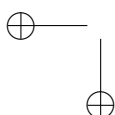


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be, such companions could hardly be fitted to give him the moral support he might be needing. Of the sympathy in this case there could be no doubt. Leaving her music and taking up her sewing-basket together with one of the safe and pleasant topics of conversation that habitually occupied her, she was increasingly conscious of the shadow that seemed inclined to settle on the face of Edward's friend.

It was only a day or two after this that she was greatly startled to get a letter from Mr. Burchard, the legal adviser of Edward's family in Boston. The start came with the letter's arrival, and before she had time to open it, for the reason that she had made up her mind on waking that morning to write herself to Mr. Burchard for any recent news he might have of her stepson. The contents of the letter were inexpressibly shocking to her. It was his painful duty to inform her, Mr. Burchard said, of matters that had arisen making it necessary to cancel young Falconer's connection with the London branch of his late father's firm and request his immediate return to Boston. How immediate the return might be, however, he was unable to predict, since all attempts to communicate with the young man had been up to the present without result. After which introduction he went on to give in some detail an account of the events that had made this radical measure unavoidable.

While the events themselves differed little from some that happen today, the language in which they were

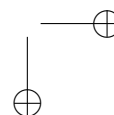
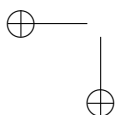


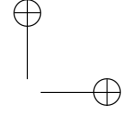


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presented would have to be altered considerably in order to bring them forward for the imagination. Words such as “shameful,” “guilty,” and others which Mr. Burchard employed would have to be deleted altogether in an effort to get Edward’s conduct into any sort of modern perspective. A young man who falls passionately in love with a married woman is not acting wisely in any era, and if the woman happens to be the wife of the executive known today as the young man’s boss, his behaviour is probably considered, from a business standpoint, as ill-advised at present as it ever was. This was what Edward had done, but the gravity of the language used by Mr. Burchard in setting forth the facts seems disproportionate now. One feels that social opinion weighted with such words was a thing less adapted to reform than to annihilate the transgressor.

It appeared further that nothing had been lacking to make his predicament intolerable. The lady, referred to throughout as the guilty wife, after consenting to fly with her youthful lover, had changed her mind, implored her husband’s forgiveness, and been forgiven on condition that Edward – who had challenged him to a duel and done a dozen other desperate things – leave England at once, if not for ever. This step, the letter said, had been taken. The subsequent steps, to be taken presumably by Edward’s family, were, first of all naturally, to find him, and then, since there seemed to be no doubt of the “criminal lengths” to which the affair had gone, to reduce him as speedily as possible



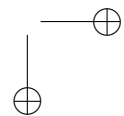
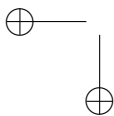


THE RING

to a proper sense of culpability; after which a return to his right mind and behaviour – as well as to Boston – might be expected to follow.

Mrs. Falconer's first impulse after reading this letter was to bury its contents in a secrecy so deep that it would amount to a negation of the information they conveyed. She had been reared in a school where facts by being wholly ignored were conceded to be in part at least undone, and the exercise was not new to her. She soon realized, however, that in this case it would be futile, since there could be no doubt that Edward's friend was already aware of the things she had just learned, and might even know others of which both she and Mr. Burchard were ignorant – such as Edward's whereabouts, for instance. This consideration gained in weight with her as the day advanced, and by afternoon she had made up her mind to show young Mr. Finlay the lawyer's letter.

He had taken his book out to the grape arbour, now almost destitute of leaves, and was sitting on a bench in the sunshine when she came in under the pattern of light and shade, holding the letter in her hand. She might have seen in his eyes as he stood up and watched her coming towards him the sort of hope with which almost any young thing in trouble might have looked at her as she was then; but her mind was intent only on what she had come to say. She sat down by him on the bench and handed him the letter. "It was written to me in confidence, of course," she told him, "but since I feel sure the facts are known to you





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already —” She sat quite still while he read it, in her customary attitude of repose, her hands lying on her wide black skirt. The white collars and the braided hair she wore at that period of her life must have given a great simplicity to the beauty of her face.

He finished the letter and handed it back to her, so quickly it seemed to her he could not have understood its contents. “I am glad you know about it,” he said; “I — he wanted you to know.”

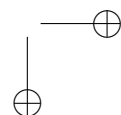
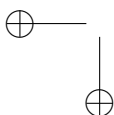
“But where is Edward?” she asked him. “Why does he not return to Boston as his family wants him to do?”

“He thinks it could do no good. They do not understand at all; their letters are all like this — they say the same things over and over. That is why — why he wanted me to come here, to you; he thought you might see — he thought you were different — his father had told him.”

“Do you mean there has been some mistake — that he did not do what they think — what Mr. Burchard says here?”

He looked at her appealingly. “I mean it was not the way they think. They talk as if they cannot bear it — the disgrace. His uncle’s wife — her daughters — he thinks perhaps his young cousins will not be allowed to speak to him. They talk as if he had wronged all the women in the world.” He stopped. “You may feel that way too,” he said.

Whether a young man in Edward’s position could be thought to have wronged all the women in the





THE RING

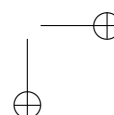
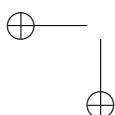
world, or even one of them, seemed to Mrs. Falconer far less important than the fact, about which there was apparently no doubt, that he had broken a divine commandment. She explained this to Edward's friend in her quiet voice, sitting there beside him in the autumn sunshine.

"Did you ever think what it would be like to break a commandment?" he asked when she had finished. "Did you ever wonder what you would do afterwards, especially if you were very young and had a great many more years to live?"

"I hope I should repent," she said.

"But if you could not repent – if you could not be sorry even – and the only person in the world who understood was one you were never going to see again."

The last words were so low she was not sure at first that she had heard them; but anyhow there seemed to be no answer she could make. She was the very opposite of a voluble woman, and had never in her life, perhaps, discussed a serious matter for the mere pleasure of the discussion, or even to clarify her own ideas, which had to be already very clear to her before she spoke of them at all. Now they were not clear. She felt instinctively that in his defence of her stepson the young man beside her had withdrawn almost as completely as Edward himself to a place where, in the words of Mr. Burchard's letter, communication remained without result. It may even have dawned on her that misguided youth might know an anguish all its own, as inviolate in its way as martyrdom.





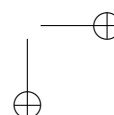
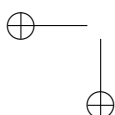
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At all events, she made no further effort, then or later, to impress upon young Mr. Finlay either her anxieties or her convictions. She folded them up very much as she did the letter, and during the short remainder of his stay she was careful not to dwell on any subject that she thought might be painful to him.

As the weeks following his departure went by with no word from him, she was surprised and even puzzled. Etiquette in such matters, however various, could hardly be, it seemed to her, as various as that. Edward, however, who did write, thanking her with much feeling for her hospitality to his friend, assured her that his visit would hold an unalterable place in his memory. He wrote from Boston, where he had by that time returned.

It was by no means the last letter she had from him; he continued to write from time to time, very much as he had written before, and as the years passed, the character of their correspondence changed less perhaps than anything else about them. The tone of letters, once established, takes on a special sort of permanence and comes in time to make them seem less a part of the river of experience than a fixture on the shore. For this reason no doubt we feel their loss, when it occurs, in a very special way. At the time I knew Mrs. Falconer, Edward's letters had long ceased to come; his life, though presumably not shortened by its youthful sorrows, was much shorter than her own.

I believe that from the moment she read the inscription in the ring, there was not the slightest doubt



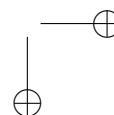
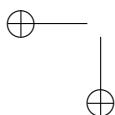


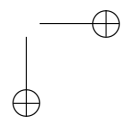
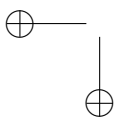
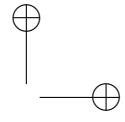
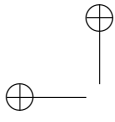
THE RING

in her mind that it was Edward who had lost it in the carriage. From that moment young Mr. Finlay ceased to exist, though it was still necessary to refer to him rather often – as when she told my grandmother she had noticed how very thin his hands were – how much too thin he was altogether for a young man of his age. She had never noticed the ring, which was, as I have said, a large one and no doubt had slipped from his finger on some occasion when he removed his glove. Though there was of course the possibility that he had taken it off intentionally, thinking it might be recognized, and then lost it afterwards. That was one of the small things that had to end in mystery – as all the greater ones are said to do if we follow them to that end.

Even today when I come across in some book, a description of the sort of beauty Mrs. Falconer possessed, and especially when I see what the poets have had to say of it, as a source and a refuge – all the fountains and the feathers of their imagery – I wonder how it came about that she should have so betrayed this fostering ideal. I am glad then to feel sure that at least she never wondered. She was not conscious of her beauty in a way to make her watchful of its effect. Such vanity as she had was applied to other things.

“I cannot understand, Louisa,” she said to my grandmother once when they were talking about this matter of the ring, “why I didn’t know all the time that it was Edward. I pride myself on having made, in the course of my life, so few mistakes.”

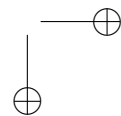
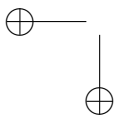


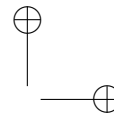
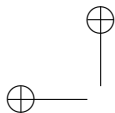




FOR ULISSE

I have never been back to Fort Caswell since we were stationed there, so many years ago that it would be saddening to count them. The house we lived in may not even exist any longer, though it was a new house then and considered rather grand for the army. For a major's quarters it was certainly very spacious; too spacious, standing with the others like it on that wide and windswept stretch of sand between the Cape Fear River and the sea. They looked so much as if they were designed to be blown away, those houses – built of light pine and outrigged with wide verandas upstairs and down – that it is easy to think it might have happened. Somehow I would rather think it than try to imagine the Quartermaster Department coming to its senses and changing them for a form of architecture more suitable and more safe; something like concrete apartments that wouldn't bat an eye when the gales howled off Hatteras. We had French windows that not only battled but blew wide open, letting in the sand by bucketfuls; yet I like them to remember.





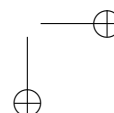
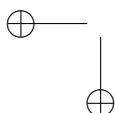
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

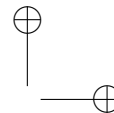
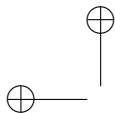
Housekeeping was difficult in a place like that. Even with servants it would have been, and without them —

Across the river, in the little town of Southport, under the live-oaks and out of the wind, everything was as soft and Southern as possible, with no lack of the usual agency to keep it so; but the negroes didn't like to work at Caswell. It was "unconvenient" to go back and forth from their side of the river, and something worse, apparently, to stay on ours. I used to think the spick-and-span arrangements made by the government architect for their comfort might have had something to do with it.

And of course there were no white servants; not even up the river in Wilmington. Nobody had them; nobody ever had had them; so why should they be there? If we advertised for them, everybody told us the newspaper would think it was a joke and put it on the funny page. All the same, we did it. They didn't put it on the funny page, and, what was more, we had an answer. We received very promptly a note from a certain Miss Gray advising us that she had seen our ad and would like to know where and when she could see us. So the next day I took the boat to Wilmington.

Miss Gray was of medium height and slender, with very small hands and feet. She gave her age as twenty-four, and I don't know why I should have thought she was probably older, for she really looked younger. I suppose it was that indefiniteness that is apt to go with being extremely blonde. She was one of the blondest people I ever saw. Even her freckles were pale, and



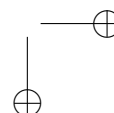
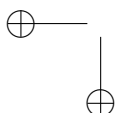


FOR ULISSE

her eyelashes would be known as platinum now. I realized the moment I looked at her that she would never do, and the moment I listened to her – “Did you have any trouble finding the place?” were, I believe, the words – I realized it more than ever. The place she referred to was her sister’s house, both small and poor, in Wilmington. Miss Gray herself lived with her parents in the country. These and other facts she gave me in one of the lightest voices imaginable. I could almost have thought it was blonde too.

She was evidently disappointed when I told her (and it was almost too easy to make it a compliment) that she was not the type I had expected to find and was afraid I would have to go on looking for; but she was very polite about it and asked me, still politely, to describe to her just how she differed from the idea I had in mind. I would never have believed it could be so difficult to comply with this natural request. All the qualities I had failed to find in Miss Gray – qualities so essential – so beautiful in their way, since it was difficult to make life beautiful without them – had to be treated with disparagement in order not to hurt her feelings. I could imagine I saw her fairly preening over looking unused to work; as if cooking, washing, ironing – any of those things that had to be done – could not be done by her. I was ashamed of both of us by the time the interview ended, but we parted friends; and in the next Sunday’s paper I advertised again.

This time there was no answer, but I kept right on (there was a rate as I remember, for six insertions of





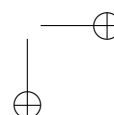
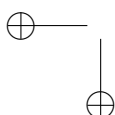
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my plea), and the sixth one was rewarded by another communication from Miss Gray. She had read my ads with interest, she gave me to understand, in the order of their appearance, and still felt that she would like the job. Since we had already seen each other, she didn't think it would be necessary for us to see each other again, the letter said, and so she would "just take the boat and come on down."

I had thought the advertisements themselves were a sufficient measure of my desperation, but I knew better now; it was accepting this answer that showed me where I stood.

Such entertaining as we did on the post was naturally conditioned by the domestic difficulties under which we laboured and was always as informal as our spacious dining-rooms and the quartermaster's spacious mahogany would allow it to be. It also came a good deal under the influence of the weather. There was no furnace in anybody's house, and I am sure we should have preferred to have our dinner-parties sitting in a circle on the floor, as close to the fat-pine fire as we could get, and eating off our laps, but we compromised by pushing the table closer and letting the guests on the farther side get up and get warm between the courses.

Miss Gray, who was learning to "wait," might have found this system confusing if she had had anything past or present to compare with it. Under the circumstances she accepted it as part of the prevailing

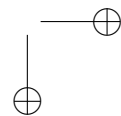
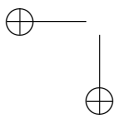




FOR ULISSE

novelty of her situation and seemed to find it interesting rather than odd. She looked very nice indeed in her little starched caps and aprons, but whatever hope I might have entertained that they would somehow turn her into a maid was soon abandoned. She evidently considered them as a disguise which, however becoming, should on no account be allowed to keep her from being herself: that is, social and Southern on all occasions. She could no more help murmuring polite nothings to my guests as she handed them the dishes she and I together had prepared for them than I could have helped it myself had I been doing the handing. "Take one of these, General; they are hotter," she would say; and my husband, carving the roast, would be reminded in her light tones that "Captain Howell likes his awfully rare – almost bloody." Then, the circuit complete and everybody happy, she would select a chair over by the wall for herself and happily sit down.

It had seemed strange to me, her family having always been so poor, and she having been so frank about the poverty that was an accepted condition of life "at home" or "in the country" as she called those under-privileged scenes, for her never to have had a "job" of any kind before. It might have seemed even stranger for her to have this one now, instead of being a clerk at Kress's, or something else regionally respectable. The answer when it came, however, was startling in its simplicity. It was because she could neither read nor write. I never did know why; the

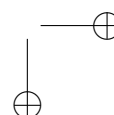
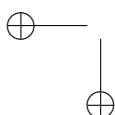




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answer to that I think would not be simple, and she never really tried to give it. "Well, you see there was such a lot of us," she would say; or "You see, I was always sick when I was little." And I did see, but I knew I should have to see a good deal more – more perhaps than I liked to contemplate – before I could understand. Poverty and gentility combine badly in the South; there is too much self-consciousness on both sides, and a child with no shoes and no lunch-basket is not encouraged to appear socially, even at the little red school-house.

And yet, though I had lived most of my life in the South, I had never to my knowledge seen an illiterate white person before (except the ones who were babies) and I think I should hardly have been more shocked if I had discovered that my maid was deaf and dumb. I believe that for the first moment or two the feeling was somewhat the same; she seemed to be suddenly removed from the sphere of verbal exchanges – from human intercourse in general. The absurdity of this being immediately apparent, I was shocked all over again to find I could have felt that way about an invention so purely human as the alphabet, and I have been disposed ever since to suspect it of being something in the nature of a usurper whose claims might easily become excessive. It began to be quite a pleasure to see how pleasantly Miss Gray could get along without it, given her agreeable diction. Not that I didn't offer to teach her, or that she didn't agree to learn, but somehow we didn't get on with it; it lacked





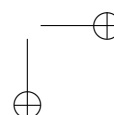
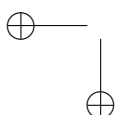
FOR ULISSE

appeal. She was not in the least stupid, but neither was she in the least interested, as she was about almost everything else – making the house look pretty, for instance, and the food taste good.

I had explained to her quite early in our arrangement that for me to address her as Miss Gray would not get us on a working basis; if she didn't want me to use her first name, I suggested, she could give me a fictitious one – a sort of *nom de guerre*, though I was very far from calling it that, that I could use in action – and she had told me her name was Carrie and “that would be all right.” So now I was admitted to a greater degree of intimacy, though I was no nearer, so far as I could see, to getting the table waited on properly. One day, however, I had a bright idea. “Carrie,” I said, “before we have our next party don't you think you could go somewhere where you could see somebody wait on the table? The movies maybe; it seems to me they always do it in the movies; and it is really a good deal like acting, you know: some things you do, and others you don't.”

The idea seemed to please her. She thought a moment, and then she surprised me. She had already seen a “picture” that had a scene like that in it, she told me. It took place in some sort of a castle, and the waitress in question had married some sort of an English lord.

I should have been glad not to follow the subsequent windings of a movie that seemed to have moved already so far from any possible satiation to the case in hand,

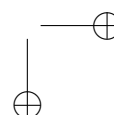
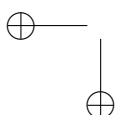


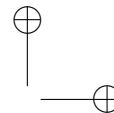
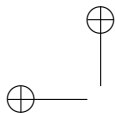


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but I had to, of course, and I found when it was over that we had, surprisingly, come out pretty close to where we went in. “My friends all laugh at me a lot about working down here,” Carrie said. “They say maybe I am going to marry one of the young officers that come to your house.”

There was nothing, or at least I could think of nothing, to say by way of clarifying this confused perspective, but it did not make me in the least uneasy. The bachelor officers on the post at the time seemed peculiarly unlikely subjects for the type of romance Carrie had in mind, and while I knew there were other types, both of romance and of bachelors (and it was easy to imagine almost any young man being goaded by loneliness, or the wind maybe, into some sort of philandering with almost anything young and blonde), I still did not feel called upon to worry about Carrie. I didn’t know how good she was – it takes time to know that – but it had taken only a few minutes to see that she was “refined.” Perhaps I had never thought before how much more trustworthy in a variety of cases propriety seems to be than any code of morals. Morals are so heavily sanctioned that one is led to trust them too far and find out too late about the weak places; but propriety hasn’t any weak places, and though it is never recommended as a bulwark – only as an ornament – it is as efficacious a guardian as a prickly hedge. I felt as serene about Carrie as if Jane Austen and not God had made her.



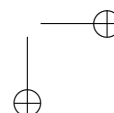
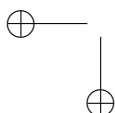


FOR ULISSE

It was spring; it was my husband's birthday, and we were going to have a party. Carrie and I were in the big sunny kitchen making the cake, and a detachment of prisoners from the guardhouse were rolling up the rugs and preparing to wax the floors. I could hear them, above the egg-beater, pushing the furniture around and dropping things much more than was necessary. We always had the prisoners to wax the floors and do other heavy jobs, which they never learned to do because they were never the same prisoners. This time there were four of them, all wearing the blue homespun that is, or was in my day, the prison garb, and I saw them presently, as I was going upstairs for something, waxing the hall in formation – down on their knees and four abreast, while the guard stood looking on and looking bored, as guards invariably do – or did. In all my army life I never remember seeing a guard who didn't seem to me to be getting the worst of it.

"Don't you think," I said to this one as I hurried past, "that they would get along faster if you separated them – put two in a room, for instance?"

He shifted the rifle he held in front of him and looked at me without speaking, so I looked at him. He seemed very young and much too thin, though his uniform, which fitted him badly, may have had something to do with this. His eyes were dark and he had a little dark moustache. "Don't you think —" I was beginning again when one of the four prisoners, who had all stopped waxing to listen, came to my assistance.





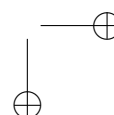
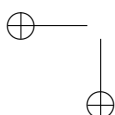
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

“The Major’s wife is asking you to do something you ain’t allowed to do, Jewseppie,” he said. “I’ll explain it to her.”

It was against regulations to “break up” prisoners, he told me; the guard had to keep all of them under his eye all the time. Personally, however (he was kind enough to say), he saw no reason why he and one of his buddies couldn’t start waxing in the parlour while the other two finished in the hall – if that would be more what I wanted; “and just let Jewseppie stand there in the door,” he suggested helpfully, adding in a lower tone the by this time superfluous information that Jewseppie was “a wop.”

I had spent several summers in Italy. For some reason it all came back to me with a sudden clearness, and it seemed to me that the boy standing there in the corner was a long way from home. I spoke to him again, this time in Italian, and was rewarded by that particular radiance human faces seem to reserve for this coincidence. Nothing could be easier, he assured me, than to do what I desired. He deployed his forces accordingly and posted himself, still smiling, in the doorway where he could watch the two rooms at once, while I flew on about my preparations.

I was still in the kitchen finishing off the cake, and Carrie was cooking lunch, when one of the prisoners came in and asked hurriedly for some water. Their guard, he said, had fallen out on them. I didn’t understand at first just what he meant, but when he went on





FOR ULISSE

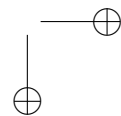
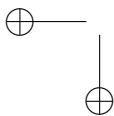
to say he reckoned wops was weak, I did, and hurried after him.

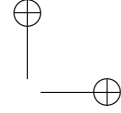
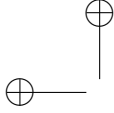
The boy was lying on the floor beside his rifle and the others were holding his head up, which of course they ought not to have done, and making suggestions, which it didn't matter whether they did or not, since he was certainly not hearing them. It was not a bad faint and he soon came out of it, a good deal wetter than he needed to have been, but able to stand once more and hold his gun. He seemed quite bewildered at first, and I felt very sorry for him though I had to smile at the things the others kept saying to him, trying to straighten him out as to where he was and what had happened.

"Feeling all right, Jewseppie?" they must have asked a dozen times. "Then how about a little chow? Mess call's done sounded you know, and we ain't supposed to show up at the jug without you; it wouldn't look right." I could see they meant to be kind, even if they had to be funny.

He hadn't wanted me to call the doctor or to do anything else, so I withdrew and watched from the kitchen window to see them go by, the prisoners keeping step down the concrete path, and the guard keeping whatever he could behind them, his rifle wobbling unsteadily on his damp shoulder. Carrie, who was watching too, said he looked "right pitiful."

"And don't those prisoners look awful," she went on. "Those clothes! I say the only decent thing about a soldier anyhow is his uniform. And even then I don't





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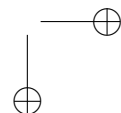
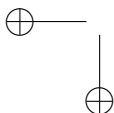
like to go out with them.” She had turned back to the stove and was stirring something. “Their manners are awful,” she said. “Don’t you think so?”

I didn’t know whether I did or not, but I was quite willing to accept her judgment. So it seemed there was nothing to be feared from that quarter either. Carrie was going to stick to the officer class whatever happened – or failed to happen.

I asked Captain Howell about the young man, that evening at the party. He said he had several Italians in the company, but didn’t know he had “anything as raw as that.”

“I will look into it if you want me to. I suppose I might talk a little French to him,” he suggested sympathetically.

I doubted if his West Point French would help the situation materially; I was more hopeful about the sympathy and said I would be glad to have him do what he could – whatever the regulations permitted for homesickness. It ought to come under them somewhere, I thought; there must always be plenty of it in the army, though how anybody so completely foreign as this young Italian ever got there seemed to me to need explaining. Maybe we used to take them that way in those days. At any rate, there he was, and whoever might have been responsible for getting him in, the job of getting him out was about to be handed to me.





FOR ULISSE

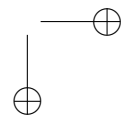
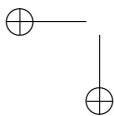
It was only a few days after he had fainted in the hall in the line of duty that he entered it again unofficially, ringing the bell and being admitted by Carrie, who came upstairs to tell me there was a soldier who wanted to see me and she thought it was "that boy."

He was standing right in the same place in the doorway as I came downstairs, and I wondered why he wanted to do it, but he looked better; rather well, in fact. I suppose he had just shaved for one thing. He had the Captain's permission to come, he explained. He would like to speak to me a moment, if I would be so good.

I took him into the study and offered him a chair, sitting down myself at my husband's desk and turning on the shaded lamp. It was early in the evening, before dinner.

I was on the point of asking him what I could do for him when he told me, without preamble, that he had come to ask me to get him out of the army. Not knowing what to say to this, I suppose I must have asked him why he wanted to get out, for certainly he told me, giving me reasons thick and fast, most of them the tried and true objections I had heard before, or knew already, or could have guessed anyhow, but ending with a novelty: he would kill himself, he assured me, if there was no other way out.

Not knowing what to say to this either, I asked him how he happened to get in, which was something I really wanted to hear and now did, though this information he gave me was anything but specific. It





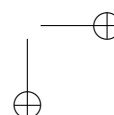
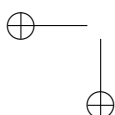
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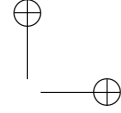
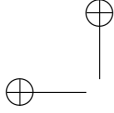
was a mistake, he said; it was ignorance; it was youth. Signora – it was love.

He had abandoned his chair by this time and taken to walking back and forth in front of me; so, having known other Italians, I knew what I was in for. I got up and lowered the blinds.

He sketched in quick succession the usual chapters of a commonplace Latin boyhood, getting himself through school, through the gymnasium, into business, and into love with commendable brevity; but there of course he stuck. At this point his soul got into it – and Dante, whose troubling visions almost any sort of Italian education seems able to impart. Even my own smattering made the rolling numbers sound familiar, and I was not surprised to see how different he looked when he began to talk about the *antico amore*.

What it came to was that the girl had married somebody else and he had felt obliged to “get away from it all,” to chuck the small bourgeois expectations purchased for him no doubt by family sacrifices anything but small, and *launch himself upon the tempest* (the italics are his) – take to the world at large – take to a passage in the steerage, and to the advice of somebody who thought the U.S. Army would be fine. And this of course would have been the place to ask him how he managed it, who in any recruiting office ever thought he would be fine; but there was nothing to be gained by insulting his desperation, so I asked him instead if he wouldn’t please sit down and let us talk it over.





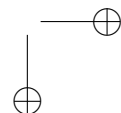
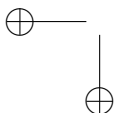
FOR ULISSE

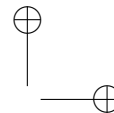
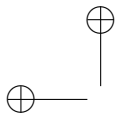
I began at once to indicate what seemed to me the better aspects of his situation, the best one being, naturally, that enlistments, even when let alone, are bound to end. There was no point in suicide, I told him, when waiting a while would do instead, and I wished I could remember something Dante must have said about patience. I did remember plenty of things other people had said about it being extremely desirable when it came to any departure from “regular channels” in the army. Anyhow, I said what I could, and though I am sure it was really what he had said himself that helped him most, he left in what appeared to be a better frame of mind.

Carrie was in the dining-room setting the table for dinner as we passed through the hall. She had on a blue dress, and the light from the chandelier was gilding her considerably. I could see him noticing her hair and I took it for a favourable sign.

His name was not Giuseppe, Carrie informed me some days later. It was Ulisse Valsoldi. Just when she had learned it she did not say, but it was certainly from the most reliable source available at the time – the young man himself. “He has a lot of brothers and sisters just like I have,” she told me. “They live on an island somewhere. I don’t remember the name of it, but it sounds like ‘sardines.’ He says it’s a mighty pretty place.”

Poor pretty place! I have remembered a good many times lately that Sassari was his home town.



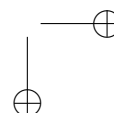
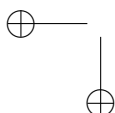


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“He likes books a lot,” she went on to say – and it was the first time I had ever seen a shadow on her face in this connection. “I thought maybe we could sit in the study some time if the Major wasn’t there. He wants me to go to the dance with him Friday night, but I don’t like the way they dance over there.”

So on Friday night and on other “nights” thereafter (Carrie’s “evenings” ended when my afternoons did) I would hear conversation in the study, managing somehow with whatever it could find in the way of a common medium, and laughter that can always manage with none; and did it in this case, I gathered from what Carrie told me, without even anything to laugh at, since the topics they chose seemed to be of a very melancholy, not to say necrological nature. Supposing, as I did, that it was Ulisse who selected them (and even after making all due allowance for existing dissatisfactions), I was sure I recognized the usual Latin approach to romance. The theme of self-destruction was obviously a favourite one, and there were references to a neglected grave upon which – unless Carrie and I were both mistaken – she was requested to plant a lonely flower. Its name he could give her only in Italian, but its colour, he assured her, matched her eyes.

The technique was certainly not new, but then why should it have been? It was new to Carrie; and the very fact that it could live to be so old is no doubt the best possible proof of its psychological soundness. None will ever be needed by me after watching its



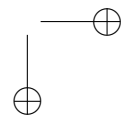
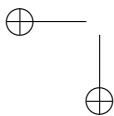


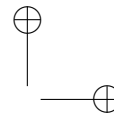
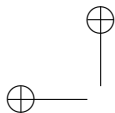
FOR ULISSE

effect on Carrie, who was, I am sure, already won before she even guessed she was being wooed. I knew from her occasional and scant references to “the boys at home” that the direct approach was not the one she preferred, and the process in this case must have suited her exactly.

She talked to me a great deal about what went on in the study; another advantage of the method was that it could be reported without embarrassment. Ulisse was learning English fast, she said, as no doubt he was, and I could see that he knew how to use even more of it than he might be said to possess. I was not surprised that he could be poetic in an unfamiliar tongue; that never surprises me, poetry being a language of its own anyhow; but I was surprised that Carrie should understand it. Here again I was confused by knowing she had never read any, and here again I was pleased to see how little that had to do with it. There was a combination of delicacy and intensity in her response that made me think of Milton, or Spenser, or the pale enchantments in “The Eve of Saint Agnes.” It was not only outside of the class and the locality to which she belonged; it was even outside of the century, and being unable to imagine from what source she could have derived it, I imagined atavism.

There were several things about the odd little idyll that were difficult to account for – none more so, I suppose, than the fact that it had ever come about in the first place. The chances against this, when I began to count them, were so innumerable as to make the





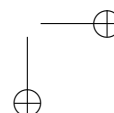
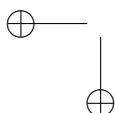
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one chance of its happening seem to require another name. One was bound to suspect design in anything so utterly fortuitous.

There were also light refreshments in the study: cake and milk, and sometimes sandwiches. Ulisse got tired of chocolate cake, Carrie informed me, and this was inconvenient, because the rest of us never did; it meant baking a small plain one for him every time, with no icing. It was astonishing how many things she could think of to do for him, though I was sure he never suggested any of them – for various reasons perhaps, but his good manners would have been sufficient.

I thought it very touching to see the new interest she evinced in the little lesson books I had bought for her. She would bring them in her leisure moments and sit down near where I was reading or sewing and begin once more unravelling the mystery of the written word. I knew, of course, that this was for Ulisse too. She was thinking of the day when she might want to read a letter from him, or to write him one. Those I had received in answer to my advertisement, though they both began “I write to say,” were, I had now long known, penned by a hand not Carrie’s, but I knew now that not being able to “write to say” must darken the shadow of impending separation.

It was not darkened in the least, however, by anything I had been able to do about getting Ulisse out of the army. There was no reason that anybody could see why, being in, he should not stay there. I had thought he might have a chance with the doctors – he





FOR ULISSE

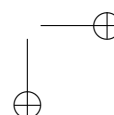
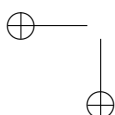
looked so physically unfit at first; but now, what with the cake and milk, to say nothing of the new interest provided by Carrie, that hope was visibly diminishing. I had even gone to see the Italian consul on his behalf, one day when I was in Wilmington, thinking vaguely that something might be started from that end, but nothing had come of this either. Still, I knew from what Carrie told me that he was “as crazy as ever to get out.”

“And what does he want to do then?” I asked her. “Go home?”

She looked up from the pictured page that told – though not yet to her – the story of Ned and Betty and the dog named Nip, a faint flush showing under her freckles. “I think he wants to get a job over here, if he can,” she said.

One evening about this time – it was early summer now, but the wind was with us ever – I went out the side door and started running quickly down the walk to a friend’s house, a scarf tied under my chin and my skirts blowing. It was quite dark, or seemed so to me, just coming from a lighted room, and I did not even see the figure of a man which might otherwise have appeared to me, stepping suddenly out from some deeper darkness, before he spoke to me. “Sweetheart!” was what he said, and I knew at once from the accent, and I think from the word itself, that it was Ulisse.

I believe I was a little sorry afterwards that I knew just as immediately he had mistaken me for Carrie. Women like to imagine impossible love scenes even





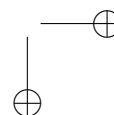
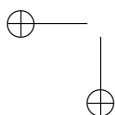
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more than to reconstruct the ones in which they were given a part. Certainly there had never been anything in my repertoire as romantic as this, and I rather wondered what I might have done, or said, or sung – the last by all means it should have been; some aria in harmony with the *opera buffa* circumstance. I wondered too, if even knowing what I knew, I might not have thought of something better than just saying: “Good evening, Ulisse,” and walking on, which is what I did – and saying it in Italian, so he could think if he wanted to that I had not understood him. There was an indefiniteness about such behaviour that must have puzzled him.

I never knew whether he mentioned the episode to Carrie, and certainly I didn’t; so it really counted for nothing in any direction so far as I could see, except perhaps as a sort of punctuation.

Carrie and I were upstairs putting away the winter clothes. So the operation is called, though anyone who has done it must know how much less it is like putting things away than it is like pulling them out. The room looked just like a store, Carrie said; she didn’t know anybody ever had that many clothes.

“One of my uncles was a preacher,” she told me, “and he used to read the Bible a lot, and pray, and when he read the part where Jesus said that about the moths and the rust corrupting, I didn’t see what he meant. We never had to put our clothes away, because somebody was wearing them all the time. But





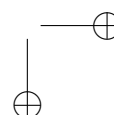
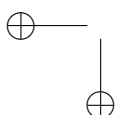
FOR ULISSE

I certainly see now." She looked around her. "This is one of your biggest jobs, isn't it?"

I said it was the one for which I had the smallest liking, especially since I never saw a lot of those things except on these occasions. "That suit, for instance; it just lives in mothballs. An army officer's civilian clothes have a pretty dull time of it; they don't get around much," I said.

"It's pretty, too," Carrie said; she was brushing the tweeds in question; "the Major ought to look nice in this colour." She stroked the fabric approvingly as she got it back into its correct folds and stowed it away again in the bottom drawer of the cedar chest. I remembered it afterwards because of what happened. That was one civilian suit that got around a good deal more, and a good deal sooner, than anybody expected.

"I never will forget one Sunday at home," Carrie said, starting in on the closet where my dresses hung and still enjoying the contrast between poverty and riches, "when we all put on the best clothes we had to go to the protracted meeting over at Springhill. The sun was shining when we started out – there were seven of us in the wagon – but before we got there it commenced to rain, and we didn't have an umbrella. Papa whipped up as fast he could, but that didn't keep us from getting wet, and my next to youngest sister had on a new dress Mamma had made for her – it was red calico, and it began to run. I reckon it wasn't a fast colour, but it certainly ran fast enough."





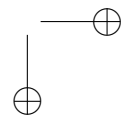
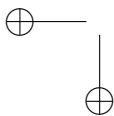
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

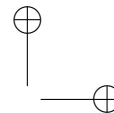
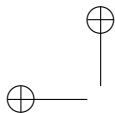
We both laughed at this, and I expressed the hope that the next to youngest, whose name I already knew was Mabel, hadn't minded very much.

"Mabel?" Carrie said. "Why should Mabel mind? It was the rest of us that minded. We scrounged away from her as far as we could, but we were so crowded up and the wagon kept jolting so, and before it quit raining we were every one of us dyed like Easter eggs from Mabel's dress. And then when we got there the sun was out again and the first person we saw, standing there right in front of the church, was Grandpa, and you ought to have seen his face! Grandpa was kind of rough sometimes and didn't care much what he said, and when he came to the side of the wagon and saw us sitting there he said: 'Godamighty, Mildred' (that is Mamma's name), 'what's happened? You all look like a lot of stuck pigs!'

"I was afraid it would worry Mamma," Carrie went on after giving me time out to appreciate Grandpa, "having him swear like that right in front of the church, but she and Papa began to laugh; they just had to. And then of course we children did too. It really was funny any way you looked at it. And do you know that red never did come out. Don't you think it's funny for a colour to just run so far and no farther? – My, but that's pretty!"

I had just lifted my favourite summer hat from its clouds of tissue-paper and was turning it on my hand. It was a Leghorn straw, tilted up on one side and faced with blue forget-me-nots – small velvet ones. I speak





FOR ULISSE

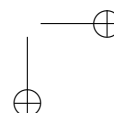
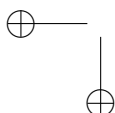
of it lovingly because I loved it. It was not quite new, but it had something better than novelty, even in a hat; it had associations; it had been admired by experts – not in hats, but in admiration. Nobody had ever looked at it, though, as Carrie was looking now. There was something fatal about it. I hadn't the slightest intention of giving it to her, and yet I believe I knew instinctively that she would have to have it. I believe the hat knew; every hair on her head was drawing it like a magnet. I saw her glance over at the mirror.

"Would you like to try it on?" I said weakly. "It ought to be pretty with your hair."

I hardly ever feel called upon to give away the things I want to keep. Giving things to people is such a hit-and-miss sort of business, and if it misses – if they don't like it as well as I did myself – there seems to be a loss about the transaction somehow. But these reflections were quite without weight for some reason as I put the hat on Carrie.

Naturally it didn't go with the dress she had on; naturally too, perhaps, it might not go with any she was ever likely to have on. It didn't, I had to admit, go very well with Carrie, but it went remarkably well with something else. Those flowers matched another blue we have all seen at one time or another – or at least I thought so then. There is one spring. . . I had read that somewhere and those were the days when I believed it.

She wore it to Southport the next Sunday afternoon and it made a tremendous hit, she told me; from which





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

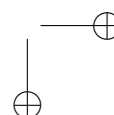
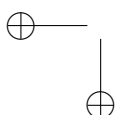
I judged Ulisse liked it. I was glad to think whatever compliments he paid it were sure to have been pretty and poetic. I never saw it again with my bodily eyes, but I have never even in imagination regretted it. Out of all the things we put away that day, it is the only one still safe from moth and rust.

Ulisse had been gone several days before I knew about it.

"I hear your young man is no longer with us," my husband said at lunch, choosing an interval when Carrie was in the kitchen. "Howell just told me he hasn't been seen since Wednesday night."

"Why, where has he gone?" – I asked the usual question, which he was unable to answer, not only because he didn't know, but because just then Carrie came back with something. Ulisse had just not showed up at reveille on Thursday morning, he told me later. Nobody knew anything, but when they found everything he possessed in the way of uniform stowed away in his locker, inference was plain. "Howell didn't know where he got a cits suit to make his getaway in," my husband said. "He didn't have any of his own. He had reported them stolen a while back, and they said over in barracks he never got them again. That's one of the things they will have to ask him."

"Oh, why don't they let him go? Why do they have to try to get him back?" I was by no means speechless, but I really was surprised – about as much so, believe, as I could have been over anything. Suicide





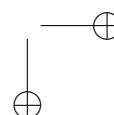
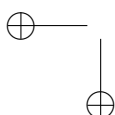
FOR ULISSE

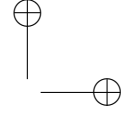
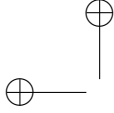
had been mentioned in my hearing more than once, but desertion never. "I know Captain Howell doesn't want him," I went on. "The army is no place for him."

"Steady, now. Take it easy," my husband said. "We can't just wave good-bye to anybody who happens to want to get out of the army. I've heard you say it was no place for you, but you don't think you can quit, do you? Howell thought you might ask Carrie what she knew about his intentions. I don't suppose she would tell."

"Of course she wouldn't tell," I said indignantly. "I wouldn't either. I am not even going to ask her."

I had gone with him into the hall as he was leaving for his office, and at this point he left, amused, I could see, at the subversive state of things. But I was miserable, I didn't know what to do about Carrie. So far was I from asking her what she knew that I hardly dared to look at her for fear she might tell me. I was sure she knew too much. Suppose she knew where Ulisse had gone and wanted to communicate with him in some way; she would have to ask me to help her – that is, supposing also it was far enough for her to have to write. Or suppose it wasn't far enough – if she should be hiding him somewhere – waiting for something. The study really did not present itself to me as a likely place, but I did remember the sandwiches. And I remembered something else – something my husband had just said. I ran upstairs and opened the bottom drawer to the cedar chest. The tweeds were gone.



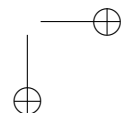
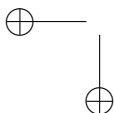


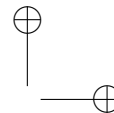
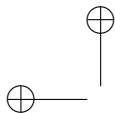
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

I might have said the army was no place for me, but I was not going to make it less so by abetting deserters. It was hard on me and it was hard on Carrie (sisters under the skin), but during the days – only two as I remember – that had still to pass before they caught Ulisse, we stuck to our class.

If I had never gone to the consul's office about him they might never have caught him; but when he began to realize his difficulties he went there too, with the idea of getting a boat to somewhere; and he might as well have taken the one back to Caswell and been done with it. There were all sorts of suspicious things about him – the smell of mothballs at that time of year must have been one of them – and while he did at least give a different name (even an ostrich would surely have done that much), it seems to have been the only thing in the way of concealment that occurred to him. Checking his story with mine was too easy; there was only one conclusion to arrive at, only one course to pursue. A consul's office has regular channels too. Somehow they seemed to be always yawning for Ulisse, who so much preferred to act along original lines.

I am not one of those who think there are "so many things worse than death." When I hear people say that, I should like to ask them – if it didn't sound so unexalted – to name three. I have always been glad Ulisse was not shot at sunrise. I was even glad he did not resist arrest, as Carrie told me he was prepared to do, "to the last drop." That was what she said, and



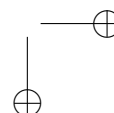
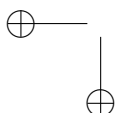


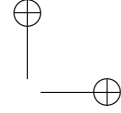
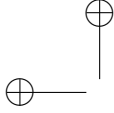
FOR ULISSE

though it sounds like coffee, I knew she meant blood. I was enough like Carrie in those days to understand her very well, and it seems strange to me now, when I have stopped believing so many things, that I can still have faith in some of those I looked at through her eyes. I am convinced that if Ulisse, in the course of his pursuit and capture, had managed to get himself shot, or to shoot – even so much as to wing – one of his pursuers, he would have been, dead or living, the recipient of that tenacious and imaginative thing I think we mean by undying love. It was one case where it might have happened, I feel sure, though here too it didn't. For in some way it had been arranged for Carrie – by her ancestors, I must still suppose, though how far back God knows – that she must love a gentleman, and she was not able to imagine one without courage. They had arranged that too.

I began to think they must also have arranged the definition of a hero, for certainly it did no good to offer her mine. Discretion, for Carrie, was not the better part of valour; it was no part at all. She kept reminding me that Ulisse had a gun. He did; my husband's.

In the matter of the articles she had "borrowed" for Ulisse, she never seemed to think she owed us either explanation or apology. She paid us the compliment of believing we would gauge with accuracy the implications of what she had done, and I believe we did. Equipping Ulisse for flight at any expense to anybody was an entirely intelligible proceeding. What I failed to understand was that she could be so totally unpre-



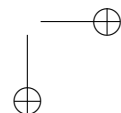
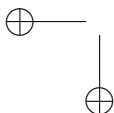


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pared for the possibility of his return. I dare say he had told her a hundred times that he would die rather than let that happen, and some of them she must have believed him; when it did happen, she may have been as much surprised to see him as she would have been to see his ghost. Alas, poor ghost! I was present when the meeting took place, and for a long time afterwards I used to wonder if there wasn't something I could have done to keep it from being so painful to all three of us.

Carrie and I were in the kitchen when we heard the prisoners marching down the back road. They were collecting the ash-cans, and the escort wagon was following slowly along behind them. I sent Carrie out to tell the guard about some crates I wanted moved out of the basement, and as they wheeled and came towards us, we saw Ulisse. This time he was not the guard.

As far as the blue homespun went, it seemed to me rather becoming to him. He never did look like much of a soldier, and not trying to made him look a good deal freer than I had ever seen him. Carrie's feelings about the clothes was one of the things I could not sympathize with entirely, though I suppose if we take them symbolically, it is difficult to over-estimate the influence clothes can have on both our feeling and our behaviour. I think sometimes that if Ulisse had been allowed to keep his uniform, however badly it fitted him, he might have kept Carrie's affection too; or if she had seen him in prison it might have been a help.



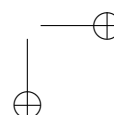
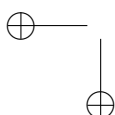


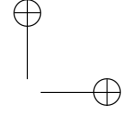
FOR ULISSE

But heaving ash-cans in the sunshine – everything was against him. And for her, not expecting to see him at all, it was a cruel thing to see him as she did.

I was the only one who spoke to him as he went by on his way to the basement steps, and I didn't look at him or at Carrie either – not at their faces. She was not in the kitchen when I went back, but she came in time to take over the lunch as usual, and I looked at her then. She was not pale or flushed or anything special: she had evidently not been crying, and I did not think she had been praying, but something had come to her rescue, something in her blood, I insist it must have been, for brains do not work that quickly, and religion does not work that way. I could see that for her the worst was over, and I suspected what turned out to be true – that everything was over for Ulisse.

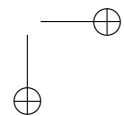
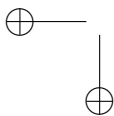
She saw him again, of course; we both saw him, and heard him too, whenever he could work it around that way, and I hated to think of the time he must have spent preparing speeches for these occasions. I used to wonder that Carrie could bear it, and in the end I suppose she couldn't, for before his prison term expired – it must have been one of the longest; it seemed to me he never would get out of the guardhouse – she told me she thought she would like to go home. If I could spare her, she said – which was, we both knew, a manner of speaking only, for I certainly could not; but we both knew also that it was the thing for her to do.

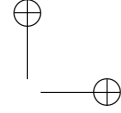
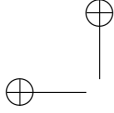




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I used to hear from her sometimes, though it has been a good many years now since I had one of those vicarious epistles which were never so satisfactory as to be greatly missed. Their style was always so deeply tinged by the taste and perhaps the abilities of the various friends who wrote them for her that they seemed to confer on her a chameleon like quality entirely at variance with my recollection. In one respect, however, they were all alike; they never referred in any way to Ulisse, though my own letters continued to do so as long as I continued to hear anything about him. There was not much I could tell her, nor was it very interesting while he remained in the army, and when he finally got out – through regular channels this time – there was nothing, for then I ceased to hear.

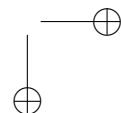
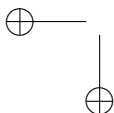




MEMORANDUM

Mademoiselle Helene saw the cloud while it was still no bigger than a man's hand. "That means the end of our peec-neec," she told the children. "We will have to hurry; finish your lemonade and give me the mugs; never mind the ant, Tommy; let him have the cookie."

The little girls were immediately infected with panic. They had been wading and now began getting back into their shoes and stockings. Most of their outdoor occasions ended this way – in flight from barometric premonitions of one kind or another. They had never learned to distinguish between Mademoiselle's terrors, which were real, and their own, which were hypnotically induced. Rain descending in sheets upon their heads would have been delightful to them this hot afternoon; they knew that, all the while they were hurrying to tie their dusty shoe-strings and get ready for the long run to cover, the lunch-basket, perilously packed, clattering between them. Mademoiselle would be dragging Tommy and issuing orders. She was rather fat and must be old by this time, they thought; she had for them the immemorial quality of having always



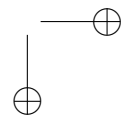
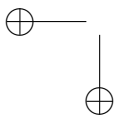


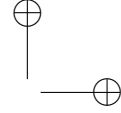
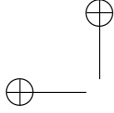
A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

been there. And Tommy was slow; he never got into the spirit of things. This time he had not even gone wading; nothing had to be done to his legs, so he sat with them in front of him on the ground, taking a detached interest in the cookie he had abandoned. The ant, heavily reinforced by now, seemed to be moving it somewhere else – out of the rain, no doubt.

The way home took them out of the wood and across a marshy meadow that changed to water every now and then on either side of the banked-up path. They didn't see the water very much; only the water-hyacinths, pale purple with queer swollen leaves, and an occasional heron standing knee-deep – one knee deep – among them; a certain sign of rain, Mademoiselle told them, though whether she meant being on one leg was the sign or just being a heron. This was the longest part of the trip, this unprotected part. If the rain caught them here – Mademoiselle looked aloft where the cloud had taken on a full-sailed aspect before some wind up there, and then down to earth, where Tommy's feet seemed to be impeding not only her progress but his own.

Under the trees again it was darker, but safer. "Run on ahead and open the gate," she called to the little girls, as if she and Tommy coming on abreast might have been a charging span. But the gate stood already open. There must be company, Mademoiselle thought; or else Mrs. Austen must have driven out, in the phaeton; the carriage was in New Orleans with Mr. Austen. "But where could your mother have gone?"



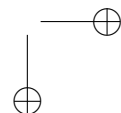
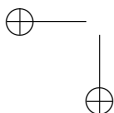


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she said to Tommy, “leaving the gate open behind her this way?”

There were two rows of holly-trees leading to the house, and more of them standing singly on the lawn. Even in this light the ground beneath them kept a strange green light of its own, like something seen in an aquarium – something less than grass but more than moss, that grew there all the time. It was the coolest-*looking* place in southern Mississippi, visitors always said, and had probably been saying for a great many years; it was one of the earliest of the Austens who had bettered the friendly insult by naming the place Yule.

Almost any white house in that emerald setting would have been effective; this one, tending as it did to lacy iron-work rather than to columns, was not imposing, but it was charming. The little girls ran up one side of the double flight of steps on to the wide veranda and sat down, the basket between them, to watch Mademoiselle and Tommy converge more slowly from the other side. It had never occurred to Mademoiselle that she was old, or even that the children could think she was, but she knew she was not slender; and, for that matter, neither was Tommy. They sat down too, on the top step. It was lovely and cool there now; the wind had come down to earth, and if the rain came too – why, let it come. She leaned against the twisted iron leaves and grapes of the white balustrade and closed her eyes – or almost closed them.





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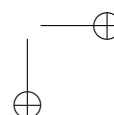
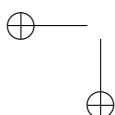
"I felt a drop!" Cathy said. She and Betty scrambled to their feet and took up the basket. "Look, it's going to pour!"

"And Madame your aunt out in the phaeton!" Mademoiselle, likewise on her feet, addressed the little girls in French, but Tommy understood. It was his mother who was out in the phaeton; he was only four and couldn't say things in French, but lots of times he understood them; he understood Mademoiselle when she said things to Cathy and Betty, and to herself too, about his mother. His mother was their aunt, and they didn't live there; they came with Mademoiselle when it was too hot in New Orleans, or when there was yellow fever.

"Aunt Mollie's getting wet!" they now began to chant gaily, dancing towards the open hall door with their basket.

"Hush," Mademoiselle said; "I hear somebody now, out by the carriage-house, talking to a horse."

They all went to the end of the veranda and looked out, but there were trees in the way and it had begun to rain hard. Presently, however, they saw somebody coming through the gate; it was Jobey, from the other plantation. He had been putting up the horse, so the phaeton was there and nobody was getting wet after all, except Jobey, and he didn't seem to mind. The children watched him as he came sauntering along, the drops falling twice as fast from the brim of his frayed straw hat. He had pinned an empty feed-sack round





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his shoulders with a crooked nail, but it didn't seem to be keeping him dry.

"Why don't you wait for the rain to stop, and then go home?" Mademoiselle asked him.

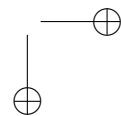
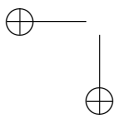
"I'm goin' on down now an' fasten the front gate," Jobey said. "Miss Mollie tole me to be sho' an' not fergit it." He paused and looked up Eg at them through the rain. "She jus' did git thar in time," he added.

"Get where?" Mademoiselle said. "What do you mean, Jobey? Where did your Miss Mollie go?"

"She didn' say whar she wuz goin'," Jobey said. "She jus' tole me to hitch up Nettie right quick an' take her to the train. I ain't been long come back."

The long parlour was covered with cool linen, for summer. The chairs and the sofa looked as if nobody had ever sat on them; the carpet lay under long linen strips from end to end, and a great bag hung from the middle of the ceiling over the crystal chandelier. Nobody lighted it in the summer, for then they were always away. This afternoon was the last day anybody would be there, except the servants, of course, until the autumn. They were going earlier than usual, and farther; all the way to the mountains instead of just to the Gulf.

Mademoiselle, coming through the hall with the children on their way upstairs, gave a start as she passed the parlour door, and let go of Tommy's hand. She had forgotten about the portrait; just for a moment she thought Mrs. Austen was there, standing with her hat on between the two windows. The portrait had



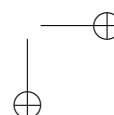
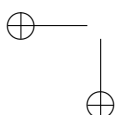


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only been finished the week before and had not been hung yet. It was standing on the easel, just as Mr. Hunt had left it, and there was a linen cloth ready to pull down over it too. Mr. Austen hadn't decided yet just where he wanted it to go. It was his picture; five bales of delta cotton had gone to make it his, Mademoiselle had heard him say.

Upstairs the hall was full of trunks, most of them already packed and strapped, a few still open. They could finish everything, Mrs. Austen had said, after the children got back from their picnic. "We will bathe them and dress them in the clothes they are going to wear on the trip," she said, "so we can pack the others. Tom will be back from New Orleans in time for breakfast, he thinks, and he wants us to be ready to start right after." Mademoiselle remembered the words with a sort of dazed feeling – as if they were not words any longer, now that they had lost their meaning. Take her to the train, Jobey had said. Words too.

"Tommy," she called through the open door into his mother's room. But Tommy was not there. The room was in great disorder, the kind of disorder brought about by a sudden change of plans. Things that had been already packed – Mademoiselle had packed them – had now come out of Mrs. Austen's trunk and were lying on the bed. The bureau drawers stood open and empty, and most of her lighter luggage was nowhere to be seen. "Tommy," she called again, going on to the nursery, where the little girls had taken up with





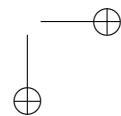
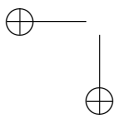
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renewed interest their interrupted packing for their dolls. "Where did he go?" she asked them.

Tommy was in his own room, packing too. "Come, *chéri*," Mademoiselle said; "we can't take your blocks, you know. You must tell your toys to stay here and wait till you come back. Then you will be surprised to see how they have grown. Come now and stay with Cathy and Betty, while I look round a little. Emma will be coming to cook your supper; we must have something nice because we didn't quite finish the peec-neec."

She went downstairs again, and this time the portrait did not startle her. She remembered now that she would never pass the open parlour door without being smiled at by the lady in darkly gleaming silk who stood there pressing to her flounces a darkly gleaming child.

Warren Hunt's portrait of Mrs. Thomas Austen and her son, though less frequently exhibited than others he did about the same time, has always been among the most admired. He had not wanted to paint them together; mother-and-child pictures were not in his line, he told Mr. Austen. He was perfectly willing to paint any or all of those delta nabobs (he did not tell Mr. Austen that), but for God's sake let him take them one at a time. It was beginning to be warm weather anyhow by the time he got round to Mrs. Austen. He had gone to New Orleans in the winter. He didn't like the heat.





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

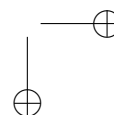
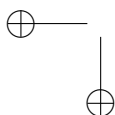
He, too, thought Yule a cool-looking place. He ought to have an ash-blond subject to hang in that pale room, all blues and greys, with that aqueous landscape outside. Mrs. Austen was not ash-blond – nor Tommy. He had decided to do them together after all. “If you will let me do you just that way – just as you are now,” he said suddenly. He had been making sketches, of Tommy especially; and then his mother had taken him off for a drive – to let him forget about it, she explained. They had come back, and Tommy, who had apparently not forgotten about it, had turned a little from the painter and given his mother an appealing look, pressing his small figure in among the ruffles of her prune-coloured polonaise. Those were the days of long tapering basques, too – a whole geography of fashion – and little hats with curling plumes. Hunt saw his picture there before him.

It had taken a long time to do it, however – because of Tommy and of other things. “I would like to rather finish with him now, if you don’t mind,” he said, “instead of bringing the two of you along together.”

“But I like to have him,” Mrs. Austen said. “I pose better.”

“And I paint worse. Besides, you are very indiscreet, you know. Children that age – boys anyway – feel things. I don’t go so far as to say they understand them.”

“And who is being indiscreet at present, if I may ask?” she said, moving a little to smile down at Tommy – to show him a joke was in progress, nothing more.





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Hunt frowned, making a motion with his brush to get her back where he wanted her. "Now let him go," he said after he had painted in silence for a while.

"You may go now, darling," she said, seeing that Tommy was waiting for her to say it. "And besides," she continued after he had gone, "I am only indiscreet, as you call it, because I have to keep reminding you not to be something a great deal worse."

He was still painting. He did not seem to hear.

"And I don't believe a child four years old is ever much interested in grown people's conversation, anyway – as long as they are not quarrelling. Anger frightens them, naturally."

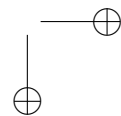
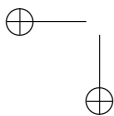
"And love does not? You believe that?" he said. "You'd be surprised. I was just Tommy's age or maybe a little older – I can't remember exactly – but I can remember that I was desperately in love with one of my mother's friends."

Mrs. Austen laughed. "How did you know you were?"

"I didn't. I only knew it afterwards; but she knew it then. I used to turn pale when she kissed me, and that amused her; made her do it oftener."

"Well, you are an artist; you are supposed to turn pale over a lot of things. Tommy isn't like that; he is strictly normal."

"Which means that he is only in love with his mother, I suppose. Everybody understands that and makes allowances for it. Only they don't allow enough for jealousy sometimes."





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

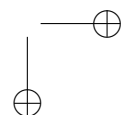
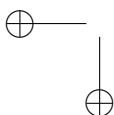
“But why should he be jealous, as long as mother loves back?” she said easily, careful of her pose – “as long as she doesn’t listen to attractive strangers?”

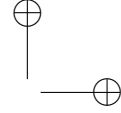
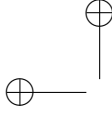
“Nothing to do with it,” he said. “I’m on your dress now; you can let your face go a little – They don’t reason in any such way as that – children, I mean. How could they? It’s the atmosphere that affects them; they feel that there’s a tension – agony, I suppose the Greeks would call it, struggle – call it a quarrel if you want to, opposing forces, opposing wills.”

“My, but you’re intense!” she said. “I believe you are painting my dress red; you keep digging over on that side of your palette. I suppose it always brightens the picture to make love to your model – indirectly, shall we say?”

“No,” he said, “we shall not – nor anything else for the present if you would just as soon. For one thing, you don’t know what you are saying, and for another I’m going to work on your mouth now; that left-hand corner that turns up just a little more than the other; that gives me so much trouble – that makes me suffer so – that I don’t know what I am going to do about; God knows I don’t – I just don’t know.”

Utterly unreasonable, she knew. And even when he talked sensibly it still took time. It was June before the portrait was finished and set up on the easel, still wet in places, between the two long windows in the parlour, where the light would fall on it from both sides.





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"Well, son, what do you think of it?" Hunt asked. Tommy was looking at it; he stood between the artist and his mother, seeing himself as in a glass, but apparently not thinking. "Can I go now – for good?" he asked.

"I'll say you can! And people ask you if it isn't half-price for children!" Hunt went over to the picture and did something to Tommy's hair. "Beautiful boy, though," he said.

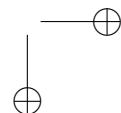
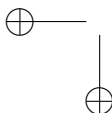
"And to think that there he is, for ever," Mrs. Austen said, "in spite of everything that can happen. I should think it would almost frighten you – to work against the course of nature this way. It seems almost as if you were working against God. God wants Tommy to change, you know."

"Do you believe that?" he said, pushing up another chair and sitting down beside her in front of the picture. "I don't. Not about you, anyway. Tommy can change whenever he feels like it, but if I thought God wanted you to change, I wouldn't go near Him any more – not even as far as the church door. He wouldn't let you change for anything; you'll see."

"Did I tell you what my husband said about it – the picture, I mean?"

"No." He got up and went over to touch the canvas again. "Suppose you don't," he said.

"Very well; but anyhow you ought to know he wants us to give you a party – a real one, with champagne. Maybe you wouldn't like that either. I'm just trying to find out."





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“No,” he said, “not that either – in spite of being obliged, and gratified, and all the rest. It’s too hot, tell him; too much yellow fever around. It is worse than usual, isn’t it? My friends in the East are making the biggest kind of fuss; about to quarantine against me, I believe.”

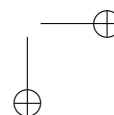
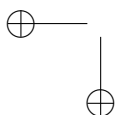
“Much worse,” she said; “much earlier. You really should be going back. Tom thinks we ought to be leaving, ourselves, as soon as he can get away; though they say in the country —”

He was not listening, so she stopped. He was still doing things to the picture. “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” he hummed – “speaking of champagne. Of course you never think, now that it’s finished – the picture – everything – about what I’m going to do. You don’t even ask me where I’m going; you just say ‘back.’ Comprehensive word – ‘back’; takes in all a man’s past, doesn’t it? I wonder what’s in your mind when you talk about my going back. Back to what?”

“Well – to whatever it was, I suppose. You know we haven’t gone into that very much.”

“No,” he said, “we haven’t. Old loves, you think – old names – old faces; let him go back to them. And with which of them, now, do you think my heart can lie down? What have you done to me, Mollie?”

“One thing I have done,” she said, dropping her voice a little, but not changing in the least its light and casual tone, “is to remind you more than once that the person who just went by the window – out there on the porch – understands English perfectly.”





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“So you have,” he said, “and I keep forgetting. French tongue and English ears, I believe. You are taking her with you, I suppose; and the little girls.”

“A lesson in polite interest?” she said, smiling at him. “Yes, we are all getting off next week, if we can.”

Mr. Tom Austen, returning from New Orleans in time for breakfast, met the first indication of strangeness in his household when he met Tommy in the hall. Tommy was plainly not exuberant – over something; over his father’s return, or his own impending departure? Queer in either case. Didn’t Tommy want to go? His father, putting him down after having swung him up, looked at him and then at his clothes. He wasn’t even dressed for going; and the trunks had not been brought down. “Where’s Mother, son?” he said.

Tommy did not answer.

“Is Mother upstairs?” He had thrown his linen duster and his hat on a chair and was starting up the steps when Tommy stopped him.

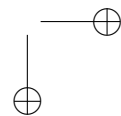
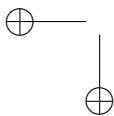
“She isn’t up there,” he said.

“Mollie!” Tom Austen called, on his way to the dining-room.

“Good mo’nin’, Mr. Tom,” Emma said, coming in from the kitchen. “Yo’ breakfus’ is ready whenever you wants it; Madamzelle an’ the chil’en has done had their’n.”

“Where’s Miss Mollie?” he said.

Emma looked embarrassed. “We don’ jus’ egzactly know whar she is.”

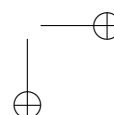
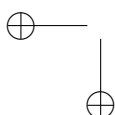




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“Do you mean she’s outdoors somewhere – in the garden? Didn’t she hear me coming? Go find her, some of you,” he said, raising his voice. He would be damned – He was a young man of effective impacts; being damned usually meant getting immediate results. The most immediate one this time was to have Emma disappear and not come back. The housemaid who brought his breakfast couldn’t even tell him where she had gone. “Go get Mademoiselle, then, before you disappear yourself,” he said, sitting down and pouring himself some coffee.

French, long conceded to be the language of lovers, is better than most languages even for people who are not in love if they find themselves for any reason obliged to discuss the subject. Mademoiselle was sorry to be obliged to discuss it with Mr. Austen in English. His language was all right for answering his questions. It was towards the last – after he stopped asking them – that she longed for her own. It would have been so easy then to explain to him, clearly enough and at the same time delicately enough, just what she thought she had reason to think; even, perhaps, some of the things she feared she had reason to fear. Not only had she found his language difficult; he had been difficult himself. “That’s all right,” he kept saying while she was explaining to him how she knew that certain matters were wrong; and then, when he got up to go: “Well, thank you very much, Mademoiselle,” was all he said, “and just look after the children the way you always do, until we hear something. In a





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day or two, I imagine —” It was as if he had not understood her; almost as if he did not believe her.

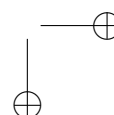
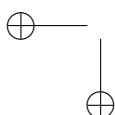
“Why do you not ask Tommy?” she suggested as he was leaving the room. “Tommy was with them more than anyone. He is small, of course, but children see more than we imagine, perhaps.”

“Thank you; that will do,” he said. He went on out in the yard, but not, she thought, to look for Tommy. Mademoiselle did not believe he would mention Mr. Hunt to Tommy at all.

But this, though it might well be true, would not be for the reason she supposed. It would not be because of his intention not to do so, or to do something else instead. She could hardly have figured to herself how small at the moment was his capacity for dealing with anything so stable as a plan.

Mademoiselle had under-estimated her subversive gifts. How could she imagine that, in her imperfect English, she could turn back the order of creation and set somebody’s universe once more in a state of flux? Seeing a young man, good-looking, fortunate, and self-possessed, go out to get on his horse and ride across his own rich fields, she could have no conception of the way those fields would dissolve before him. There was nothing for him anywhere just then that did not slip the moment his mind touched it.

He had never heard anyone speak of a shattering uncertainty. Uncertainty was not the blow; something else was supposed to happen first. But in this case, Tom Austen reflected, nothing had. Nothing had hap-

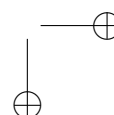
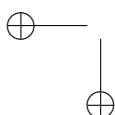




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pened to anybody that a breath of information, a word of better knowledge, could not set right. But what was he to do in the meantime? Where was ignorance such as his to turn? Friends, family – his own – Mollie’s? He knew of no human being to whom he could go, now or ever, and say: “Where is my wife?” He would talk to that boy Jobey – he was on his way there now – but what could Jobey tell him? The station where the train stopped, if anybody wanted it to, was a little shed between the dirt road and the railway track; the train at that hour would be the north-bound train. Mollie’s family lived in Memphis. Would she stop there? He knew she would not. They were the last in whom she would confide – the last but one. Confide what? There it was again – the wavering uncertainty. Anything – a lie even, a written lie left behind her – would be better than that. Or a written truth? – That was the shaken centre of his mind: why had she left no word?

The portrait, strangely enough, as the day wore on, began to seem an anchor in this distressing ebb and flow. Once or twice in the night, even, he left his bed and his tossing thoughts and went down to look at it, pushing a little table up in front of it for the lamp. He had never been an artist in any line, even as a boy. He could hardly draw any better than Tommy could right now, or carry a tune as well. Except as a source of pleasure he had never given a thought to the function of art. As he sat there now in the stillness of his house, facing the picture of his wife and son, he





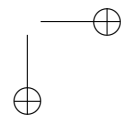
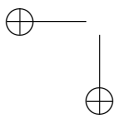
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knew it was not pleasure it gave him; it was something else, a sort of curious reassurance. Not by seeming to bring them nearer; it did not do that either; it took them farther – farther than anything had ever done, except perhaps sometimes when he looked at them in their sleep and wondered where their dreams were taking them. Strange things happened to people: dreams – this. He had never realized before how little these two belonged to him. That was the reassurance, he supposed – like prayer: so little he could do about it; somebody else's job.

“If you will pardon me for saying so again, Mr. Austen, I think the thing you should do is to talk to Tommy. Tommy knows something – something he does not choose to tell; he is not, as you know, a confiding child.”

“But you think he might confide in me?” Tom Austen said. “How do I go about it? Just what, for instance, do you think he knows that the rest of us don't?”

What they knew was still as little as ever. The day or two he had allowed as a term of waiting had grown to almost a week and the “something” they were to hear was still withheld. Even the servants, though no doubt they had “talked,” had seemingly not been talked to in return. Not even rumour moved on the face of the waters. “And anyhow,” Tommy's father continued, “how do you know he knows it – if he will not do any confiding, as you say?”





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"It is to Cathy and Betty that he talks more." Mademoiselle hesitated; he even thought she flushed. "He has said to them it is because of me that his mother has gone."

"But that is nonsense," Tom Austen said. "Why do you listen to children?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Austen," Mademoiselle said formally, "but it is not nonsense. If I listen to children it is because my experience has taught me that they use nonsense very rarely."

"Well then, suppose you decode it for me," he said. "Explain what you think Tommy meant."

This time the flush was unmistakable, "He knows – perhaps not consciously – that I have been obliged to disapprove of certain things —"

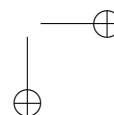
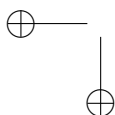
"Yes?" Tom Austen said.

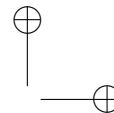
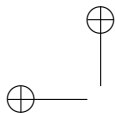
"He thinks perhaps that I would presume to correct madame his mother as I would one of the little girls —"

"Yes?" he said again.

"I find it difficult to talk to you, Mr. Austen." Mademoiselle's dignity became her. "If you were not in great trouble I would not try."

Tom Austen had known ever since his school-days – it was in the curriculum of the period – that the only wife a gentleman could under any circumstances admit he had was Cæsar's; it had never occurred to him to wonder just what Cæsar in certain cases might be called upon to do. In the case of a stout and ageing governess, compromise seemed the only thing possible.





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“I am sorry,” he said. “Things are a little hard for all of us right now. If you will tell me about Tommy —”
This time he listened.

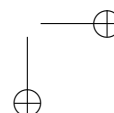
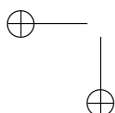
“I’m going to the store, son; want to come along?”
Having been persuaded to undertake a *tête-à-tête* with his son, Tom Austen thought the dog-cart would be as good a place as any. He saw no reason to be hopeful about the interview in any setting, but at least Tommy could not just quit the session in the dog-cart. It was a lovely morning, warm but breezy, and he noticed with satisfaction, as he swung him over the wheel, that Tommy’s mood seemed propitious.

Tommy adored going to the store – even slowly in the phaeton with Mademoiselle and the little girls. He had seen several things there the last time he went that now, with an improved financial backing, presented themselves to him as attractive investments. He presented them attractively to his father as they sped along the dusty road. “It makes a noise just about like thunder,” he was saying.

“Is that so?” his father said absently, and then after a short silence: “Son, how would you like it, now that you have finished having your picture painted, if we got your hair cut and gave your mother the surprise of her life when she sees you?”

“All right,” Tommy said agreeably. “Will she know me?”

“I think so,” his father said. “She ought to be coming back pretty soon now. Tomorrow is my bet – or the day after. What’s yours?”





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"I think Saturday," Tommy said.

"But that's a long way off. I didn't know she meant to stay that long; did you?"

"Yes," Tommy said:

"Did she say so?"

"No."

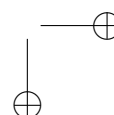
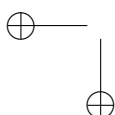
Tom Austen sighed. He knew he wasn't going to get anywhere. "Well, there's one thing we both know," he began again, "and that is we are going to be mighty glad to see her. And she's going to be glad to see us too – every one of us: you and me and Cathy and Betty, and Mademoiselle." He glanced down. Tommy was not looking up at him; he was gazing thoughtfully ahead. "Nice old Mademoiselle" – he pressed it a little.

"Do horseflies feel like bees when they bite you?" Tommy asked.

The following day, however, it rained. It was the first rainy day they had had since the picnic; it was that day all over again, in the afternoon. The parlour was still all covered up, and the trunks were still out in the hall. A lot of the clothes, though, had been put back in the closets.

"Is she coming today?" Tommy asked. He was down on the carpet painting with his water-colours.

His father was reading the paper that had come in the afternoon mail. The yellow fever was spreading, it said. Epidemic proportions, whatever that meant; quarantine, for one thing. He couldn't go on waiting like this; he would have to take them away, and then





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come back – to wait, “I wish I knew, son,” he said. He put the paper down and took up Tommy. “Let’s talk about it. What did you and Mother talk about, that day, before you started on the picnic – remember? Mademoiselle and Cathy and Betty were already out in the yard, weren’t they? And Mother was tying on your hat. What did she say, Tommy? Did she say goodbye, or be a good boy – or anything like that?”

Tommy’s eyes – Mollie’s eyes – were looking back. What did they see? What would a child’s unaccountable memory bring up out of the waters that had closed over them all?

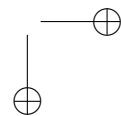
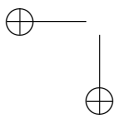
“She told me to stand still and let her tie it, or they would beat me there and eat up all the picnic.”

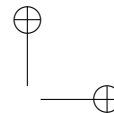
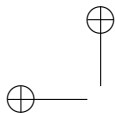
Was life like that? Did things happen like the slides in a magic lantern – light, dark, light, no premonition anywhere, no shadow falling? He put Tommy down and went over to the window. The earth under the holly-trees lay in shallow green pools.

“And when you came back, Tommy —” he sat down on the sill and took Tommy up beside him – “when you saw Jobey out there by the gate – was it raining this way?”

“It was raining on Jobey,” Tommy said. “He was ‘sopping soaking dripping wet,’” he quoted gaily.

“And when you came in and all of you went upstairs, and Mademoiselle saw the trunks, and the clothes all scattered around – what did she say, Tommy?”





A WINTER IN GENEVA AND OTHER STORIES

"She didn't say anything," Tommy said. "She was downstairs. Cathy and Betty were in the nursery and I went in Mother's room."

"To look for her? You knew she wasn't there, though." He waited.

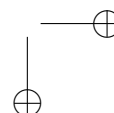
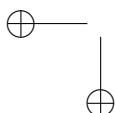
"And what did you do in Mother's room, son – cry?"

"No," Tommy said; "I took her letter off of the pin-cushion and put it away. I didn't want Mademoiselle to read it to me. I didn't want her to say anything. Do you want to read it? I will get it." He slipped down on to the carpet....

"Mail just come. Fever bad in Memphis – Mother and Hugh both sick – Nurses hard to get – Must catch 3.15 train – Enclose memorandum...."

It was addressed to Mademoiselle; she was the one who must act on the carefully worded directions. The thing uppermost in Mollie's mind had been that there must be no delay in their departure; he could read that without reading the list. How had she managed to think of all those things? He was throwing chine into his own bags now. – And of course her letters, since, had been going to the mountains – if they could go. Communications, traffic, dislocated, the paper said. He was too late for the 3.15. The night train from New Orleans, then.

Epidemic proportions. That was the summer of 1878. Memphis, on the afternoon Tom Austen turned his face in that direction, had not yet attained pre-eminence among the South's plague-stricken localities,





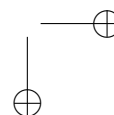
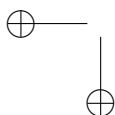
MEMORANDUM

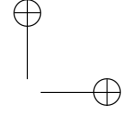
though it was gaining fast. Nobody realized how fast. People still bought tickets to Memphis; even to Memphis and return. It was not yet regarded as a one-way trip.

And he did return. Not so soon as he had expected, but still in time to take Mademoiselle and the children to the mountains – a long and difficult business now, with quarantine entanglements cast suddenly like a net over all the roads and rivers leading anywhere. Mollie's memorandum proved invaluable. There were so many things that would have been forgotten. Nobody would have remembered to tell Emma to put the children's milk in a bucket of ice; or realized, hot as it was, that their coats must not be packed because they would be sure to need them before the trunks could get there.

Mollie was among the unreturning, and now, running down her careful list of all those to-be-remembered things, Tom Austen was caught in the ancient fallacy – the old catch-question that time keeps up its sleeve: If this had not been thus? If the letter had not been lost for all those days? There is never any answer, other than the one already given, but he, no more than others, could resist the torment of stating the problem in ever-differing terms.

Another question – one he did not ask – might have come more within the range of his philosophy. He gave little thought to Tommy's motive in hiding the letter. Children did those things – because they were children, he would have said; because they wanted to, without knowing why they did them. But it might

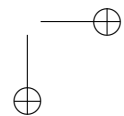
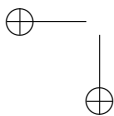


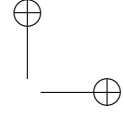


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be Mademoiselle was nearer right in suspecting them of following, as a rule, some line of reasoning; or Mr. Warren Hunt in suggesting, as he had done on several occasions, that they were often influenced beyond their knowledge, and even beyond their will, by tension and conflict in the wills of others.

Such theories are difficult to substantiate; in one statement that he made, however, Mr. Hunt was justified by the event. He can hardly be credited with inspiration in telling Mrs. Austen she was never going to change, yet there was much comment among her friends on how little her brief illness had altered her — up to the end, and beyond.



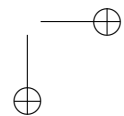
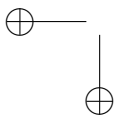


ALLAN PERCY'S SON

I

Mrs. Garrison had never had a child, but when Neville Mason's book arrived by the afternoon post and she sat under the reading-lamp in the parlour holding it in her lap, she felt that she must know something of the same sense of fulfilment. And the long waiting beforehand, the assured expectancy – she had known them too, only in her case it had not been months; it had been years, fourteen of them, since he had promised it first: “Never fear; the record will be kept; not an aspect shall be lost of this new life I owe to you. . . .” And now it lay here on her lap – the new life. She folded her hands over it reverently. “In the beginning was the word,” she said.

It was a thick book. She reached for the scissors lying on the table, to cut the string, smiling at the thought of paper and string in connection with a miracle; knowing how he would smile too. The hand that held the scissors trembled a little, remembering his smile.



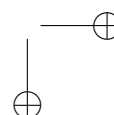
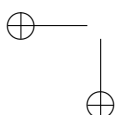


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It was a beautiful book, the binding, the title-page, the portrait – older of course, but so completely the face he would have made for himself in these years: the scholar's face, the scientist's, the soldier's. There were other photographs too: the hospital he had built, the school he had founded, the lines of people coming to be cured, white roads under the palm-trees, definite tropical shadows. That was what the camera could do. Why were they called illustrations, compared to the light his words would bring, the quick images that followed all his thoughts? Should she begin at the beginning or at the end?

She did neither. Fourteen years, it seemed, was not enough. She heard her husband's latchkey in the door, his stick going into the umbrella-stand, his cap going into the coat-closet. "Neville's book is out at last," she said, holding up her face to be kissed, as he came into the room.

Rendezvous with Life. He had chosen that from all the titles she had suggested, just as she knew he would. That was the note she had sounded from the beginning. "It is the meaning behind all the other meanings," she had reminded him, "the reason for everything, even the shape of the instruments, the colours of the bottles even – your rendezvous with life. Do you remember," she asked him, "that beautiful sonnet somebody wrote about Pasteur's tomb? They didn't want it to look like a tomb – imagine it, in France! – or to have any suggestion of death.



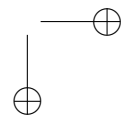
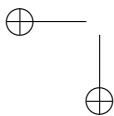


ALLAN PERCY'S SON

*Defender of the living, he shall keep
His slumber in the arsenal of life. . . ."*

She had not forgotten any of the things she had told him, and now, reading the record he had kept, her own rendezvous with the past was so insistent that she sometimes found it difficult to follow on into the distance he had travelled since. The long roads under the palm-trees, leading farther and farther from the time she had known him, were often so thick with memories that she ceased to read. The things they had said, when they could still say things to each other, the ones they had written since, kept intruding on the printed pages. How many letters they must have written, though meaning all the time to write so few! She was almost sorry she remembered them so well, even down to the first one – that little note she had scribbled in such a hurry and sent to him by the orderly, asking him to come some time during the morning and see her on a matter of importance. Not illness, she had added; for that would naturally have been the only thing he would have thought of, being the medical officer on the post.

Their island post – their post in paradise. She never had to close her eyes, even, to see it all again. Could it be possible for the retina of the eye to receive one impression so intense that all the succeeding panorama of life and change could never quite supplant it? She had seen so much that was beautiful; why did that land and, above all, that water come back in such a



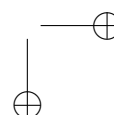
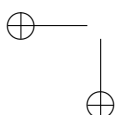


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special way – as if they were already there, a part of vision itself? “When I had the Pacific Ocean in my front yard,” she loved to say; it had really seemed as intimate as that. For all its vastness it had held; or held it now, the prismatic concentration one catches in some small iridescent reflection – the lens of a camera, or mirrored – could it be for ever? – in somebody’s eyes. Well, anyhow, she had known what it was worth, while she still had it, and in spite of all the poets can say about the vanished scene, there is such a thing as appreciating things before they vanish.

The blue Pacific in the front yard, and in the back one, where she didn’t have to see it very much, the deepening shadow of the gun batteries her husband had been sent out there to build – and, building, kept so happy. His rendezvous was, of course, with war, only the dear man did not know it; he thought it was with blueprints and pile-drivers and cement. And they were formidable enough, God knows. Walking with him round the top of his impenetrable walls, she never ceased to marvel that a mind like Jimmy’s – so direct, so uncomplicated – could ever have thought up anything so intricate and mysterious. And what sunsets they used to watch from there – far out over the water, where the west was almost east! So wide a life! Were they never indoors at all?

Remembering that morning when Captain Mason had come in answer to her note, and she had taken him inside where they could talk quietly, without the sound of lapping water that accompanied all their days,





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she was quite sure she had never seen him in a room before. It made him look taller, somehow, and rather formal, standing there in his white uniform even after she had taken a chair, near another one, by the open window. "Do sit down," she said. "It was about the little boy, little Lowrie, I wanted to talk to you. Have you seen him – just now, I mean – since you got my note?"

"Seen him?" he said. "He was with his nurse on the beach as I came along. Why?"

"She didn't tell you – the nurse – that he had been hurt?"

He shook his head. "Surely not much," he said; "did he fall out of the hammock or something? You should not be worried, having him parked on you this way. Had Phyllis gone to town?"

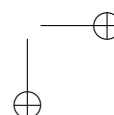
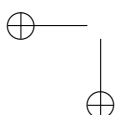
"She went afterwards. Please sit down," she said. "That is why I have to talk to you; because it was his mother who did it – who struck him, I mean."

He took the chair beside her, without speaking, so she hurried on.

"I felt that somebody had to tell you – that perhaps you didn't know. It seems to me dangerous for her to be with him, when she is angry like that."

"Where did she hit him – what with?"

"Oh, it was on his little head – right on his forehead – with the handle of her umbrella." She hadn't meant to shudder that way. "It was really a cut; it bled quite badly. We bandaged it up – his mother and I – and then I made her leave him and go on to town, so I





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could get him quiet. You see, he wanted to go with her, and that made her angry —” She left off suddenly.

“I see,” he said.

She waited, but he did not go on; he was looking past her, out of the window, shaded by its green blind. She had often noticed how blond he was, and how being so tanned made him look somehow blonder. His hair was like a little boy’s. But not his eyes; she wondered for a moment if she had made him angry — if she could perhaps have told him in a better way. “I knew somebody ought to tell you —” she said it again in the same way. “I knew you would have to do something.”

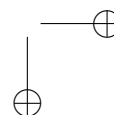
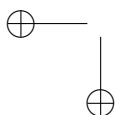
He stopped looking out of the window and looked at her. “What do you want me to do?” he asked her.

“Of all the questions!” she had said later on at luncheon, describing the interview to her husband.

“Well, what did you want him to do?” Colonel Garrison inquired. “What do you want any man to do, after he has married a wildcat, except to take the consequences?”

“But not for his child!” she protested, “not such consequences as that! Hitting that poor little scrawny thing over the head with a club! That’s what it amounted to. She could have killed him with that umbrella.”

“It has been done,” Colonel Garrison agreed. “But tell me what you told him to do. Hit her over the head with his umbrella?”



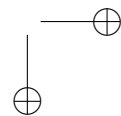
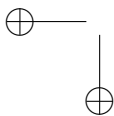


ALLAN PERCY'S SON

"Don't, Jimmy," she said. "You simply can't make it seem funny to me. I actually cried tears over that baby – after I finally got rid of her. I didn't feel like crying as long as she was there. But she was sorry; I'll have to say that for her. And scared; I know she was; she looked pretty white there for a while."

"Well, that must mean something," Colonel Garrison said. "Looking white is one thing Mrs. Mason isn't given to doing."

He thought she was pretty, though. Jimmy had to admit she was pretty; and she was really only half Hawaiian; nor quite half; her grandmother had been Portuguese – on her mother's side, of course. On her father's side there wasn't any mixture. Lieutenant Angus Lowrie, R.N. – straight Scotch, not even soda, Jimmy said. He had maybe thought he could make things better by naming her Phyllis and calling her Bairnie. That, when you looked at her, really did seem something of a joke, even without Jimmy; and sometimes she made it funnier by speaking with a real Gaelic burr. Her father had never lost it, everybody said, even after living in the Islands nearly twenty years. He may have clung to it all the more. But nobody thought it was funny when she would take her little ukelele and sing the ballads he had taught her; incongruous as it was, it was too utterly sweet. And speaking of incongruous things – that she could have a voice like velvet, and that temper!





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“Neville told me you might never want me to come to your house again, after what I did this morning.” Mrs. Garrison would never forget what a picture of contrition she made, lying there on the sand at her feet in her wet bathing-suit. “I hate myself for what I did,” she added, since there was a silence. “I ask you to forgive me.”

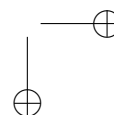
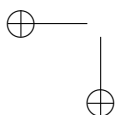
Nothing had happened to make the morning’s episode seem less intolerable. Nothing Captain Mason had said – he had just about said nothing – or Jimmy either, had made her think it possible to let this kind of barbarity go on right under her eyes and not do something about it. They had both of them practically left it up to her; now she would see what reasoning could do with the extraordinary version of motherhood there before her. “Why should I forgive you?” she asked. “You didn’t strike me with your umbrella.”

“And Poor little Lowrie,” the version said in her velvet voice, “he has of course forgiven me long ago.”

This called for a bit of thinking. “Has the cut on his little head forgiven you?” (she would try that). “It is your baby’s body that God expects you to look out for – that He has...”

“Oh, but Neville has fixed it beautifully,” motherhood interrupted; “it doesn’t seem to hurt him any more at all.” After that they watched the waves in silence for a while.

“But do you know,” the figure on the sand resumed meditatively, “I am always so unfortunate – about my dreadful temper, I mean. That baby is the thing I love





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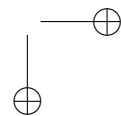
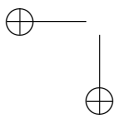
the best in all the world, and I ask myself why, when I get mad the way I was this morning, he always has to be the one to get right in my way and get hurt? It is like fate."

Phyllis had few reservations. Friendship for her meant frankness. Listening to the flow of confidences – conversation to her meant confidences – one came to realize the curious fact that unless people know each other rather well to start out with, the sum of their mutual knowledge is never greatly increased by words. So little is added by telling things; so little revealed by revelations that show first of all no common ground to stand on; no bridge, even, across the abyss that separates one mind from another. It was not the thing that Phyllis told her, but the ones Neville did not tell, that had demanded her sympathy, her help.

It was his reticence more than anything at first, because she saw that it would make it difficult to help him – so difficult that almost anyone might hesitate to try. It would be easier for her because his wife was fond of her.

"Neville says I come here too much," Phyllis told her, "but all the same he is glad I do. He thinks you are an angel, do you know? He hopes that maybe you can teach me to be one too."

"That is one thing I shall not attempt," she said; "but I should like to teach you how to put those little trousers together right. Poor little Lowrie will never





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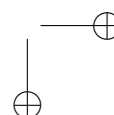
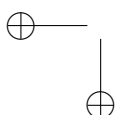
know whether he is coming or going if you sew him up like that.”

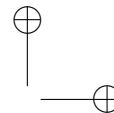
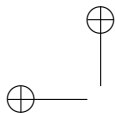
Lessons in dressmaking; hints for housekeeping; surely, even in paradise there ought to be something besides swimming and singing, or going to town and coming home with all sorts of ridiculous things. But in the end it seemed there wasn't. Mrs. Mason's housekeeping, Jimmy said, was enough to make your hair curl. “What must his life have been like in Washington, with a wife like that? No wonder he asked to be sent back here *tout de suite*. And I suppose he will just stay here from now on – or get out of the army maybe. A man certainly ruins his career when he makes a fool marriage like that one.”

All the men said that. And the women – Mrs. Garrison tried a little at first to do something about the women, but it was no use.

And yet, about this time it began to look as if a man's career might be after all a thing so real to him and so important to others that not even such a formidable obstacle as a fool marriage could sidetrack it permanently. Captain Mason's laboratory, which was not under the same roof with his wife's housekeeping, did not make your hair curl; it made the people who were interested in the history of certain tropical diseases open their eyes.

“You should be terribly proud of him,” she said to Phyllis; “having the Surgeon-General, all the way from Washington, write these things to him.”





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"Yes, of course I am proud of him. I do not need that old General to make me proud," Phyllis said. "I knew him when we were there. He is fat, and when he dances, his head shines. I did not want to dance with him, but Neville made me." She laughed softly at some recollection of the occasion. "I went home after that, all by myself," she said, "and Neville had everybody looking for me – even the policemen at the door. He didn't believe I would do such a thing; it scared him dreadfully. And then when he came home, there I was in bed sound asleep!"

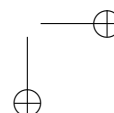
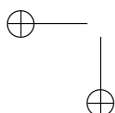
Life in Washington with a wife like that!

It was about midway of their tour in the islands – a year and a half out of the three had almost gone – when he came one day and asked her if she was too busy to talk to him a while. This time too they went into the parlour and sat down by the window, in the same chairs, but this time she waited for him to speak.

"First of all," he said, "I want you to tell me I have been good. You have been here almost eighteen months – seventeen months, one week, and two days – and I have never told you any of the things I have wanted to tell you all that time,"

"Why haven't you?" she said. "Maybe I don't call that being good." She smiled, but she was really very much surprised; it was so different from anything he had ever said before – from anything she had thought.

"Because, for one thing, there were too many of them," he said, "and for another, it seemed to me





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that Phyllis and the boy were giving you about all you ought to have of us and our troubles. I didn't want your beautiful hair to turn grey out here, even with vicarious cares. It's supposed to be a carefree land, you know, and certainly you didn't bring it any troubles of your own." He looked at her thoughtfully, holding his white cap lightly on one knee with the hands that looked so nervous and were always so still. "You have almost made me believe there can be such a thing as eternal peace," he said.

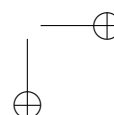
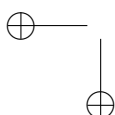
"Perhaps there shouldn't be," she said a little hurriedly, his eyes showing no intention of leaving her face. "We might not prize it so much if it were not so precarious. I believe we are really partial to delicate adjustments. How long would a doctor – you, for instance – be interested in perfect health, do you suppose?"

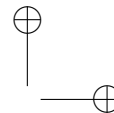
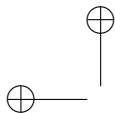
He did not smile. "Tell me the things," she said. "There may not be so many as you think. I may have guessed some of them already."

"I am sure you have. I imagine there is not much left to tell you about my marriage, nor about the boy – as he is at present; his future must be another story. Perhaps the thing I really feel obliged to talk to you about is just – myself."

"And about that I know nothing?"

"I am sure you do; a great deal; but I should like to have you know everything," he said.



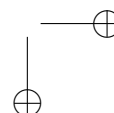
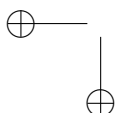


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Everything. One of the great finalities; and yet infinity itself could hardly be further from having an end than expression that was so identical with creation. "Why did I never think of that before?" he would say, surprised himself at something he had just said. "Where has my mind been all this time? Where have I been?"

He had studied so much, talked so little; he seemed to be suddenly in love with words, not only for the power they gave him over his own thoughts, but for the almost forgotten magic he began to find again in books. "May I take this?" he would say. "I had forgotten there was such a thing as 'letters.' Religion may shake hands with science one of these days, but I have my doubts about literature."

The reticence that had so appealed to her disappeared with a naturalness that was more appealing still. She had never thought before how much more we mean than we think we do when we talk about freedom of speech. The breaking down of old constraints that comes with the mere act of speaking; the liberation from embarrassment we seem to effect by putting them into words – the freedom we win from ourselves is surely worth more than just somebody else's permission to speak. It was evident that neither the nonconformities of his wife nor the fantastic conditions prevailing in his home afflicted him as they used to do when he had regarded them in stricken silence. As soon as he began to comment on them he was obliged to see how funny some of them were. Any man





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would laugh at being told the paper he was looking for might be in the basket with the “eggs and shoes.” He gave a delightful rendition, one day, of an argument between Phyllis and the cook – Scotch and Hawaiian on her side, pidgin and Chinese on his. “They have too many languages out here to be able to stage even one good row,” he said. “Maybe the peacemongers might do something with that idea; instead of the better understanding, they might try none.”

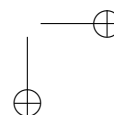
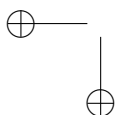
”Esperanto in reverse,” Jimmy said. “Department of Utter Confusion.”

“Exactly. You might set up a Tower of Babel on your gun emplacements, Colonel.”

Jimmy was the first to suggest that he ought to keep notes of his experiences with the different kinds of “natives” he was always being called on to treat. “You are going to forget them if you don’t,” Jimmy told him; “that fish story, for instance.”

“Phyllis won’t; not that one; will you, Bairnie? It was her cousin and he nearly died.”

“From too much fish,” Jimmy suggested as an epitaph for the cousin, who had been eating them as his fathers did before him, right out of the sea, merely biting off their heads as a preliminary, and had narrowly missed being choked to death by the one that leapt down his throat – “accidentally,” he explained when Neville had successfully unscrambled the fins from the tonsils. “Got the whale out of Jonah,” Jimmy said. Such foolishness! And how they laughed!





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Those were the happiest months they had in the Islands. There must have been five or six of them; and then one day, with no warning at all, he came and asked her if she would help him get a divorce. She was standing under one of the coco-palms at the edge of the beach, and there wasn't a chair anywhere near, so she sat down quickly on the grass. "Is it as bad as that?" she said.

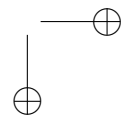
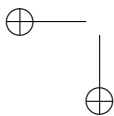
"I am afraid so."

"But I thought things were better – that she was trying."

He shook his head. "But it really is my work – not just Phyllis," he said. "It is because I can see no way to keep them both together – or to keep them apart. Things are always coming up. I have a letter here" – he reached inside the pocket of his blouse – "advising me to come to Washington. No, not orders; it is opportunity really – and you know I cannot do that again, with her. With her I will be chained to these Islands all my life."

"But won't you let me talk to her?" she said. "Let me explain it to her. She doesn't realize that your life is changing; that all these new responsibilities, new advantages —"

"Of course you may talk to her," he said. "God knows how much you will have to talk to her before we are through. But it will do no good; she will never let me go."





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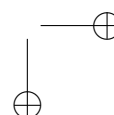
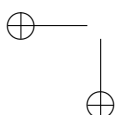
She asked him just what it was he wanted her to do – to help him, as he had said. And standing there by the column of the palm-tree, he explained.

There was no one else who knew the facts that would have to be proved – who understood how impossible it was for him to go on with his life under these conditions. “Not that there has been any privacy about my private life,” he said, smiling sadly; “there is nobody here, or anywhere that we have ever been together, who couldn’t come forward with some contribution; but you are the one who knows.” He put his cap back on and pulled the visor down to shade his eyes, looking out to sea. “You know too that it is hard,” he said.

She would have known it then at any rate. “And Lowrie?” she asked him.

“I will have to see. Maybe they will let me keep him. I think it is there that you can help me most.”

What ought she to have done? What would another woman in her place have thought or said? Over and over she had asked herself that foolish question, and something had always asked back: Well, how many other women are there? They would probably have thought or said that many different things. What she said – and she did it without thinking – was that she could not help him. She would break down, she told him; she would fail him utterly. “And it isn’t because I do not understand,” she pleaded. “I do. I understand everything; even the things you haven’t told me – that you must never tell me. But, you see, she trusts me;





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she depends on me terribly. You see, she loves me too."

He stood looking down into her tearful face. "I see," he said.

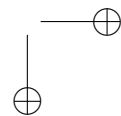
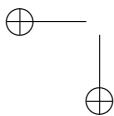
But there had been another year, the turning-point. She was still there to see him set his feet in the road he was to follow; to see the doomed look change into the one he was to wear – that he wore now in the picture. She was there to keep reminding him that there could be no such thing as a "small theatre" for work like his – that it would never be "far" from anywhere. Knowledge behaved the way light did, she told him; it wouldn't stay far: it travelled. Look at what had happened already – the letters, that article in *Time*.

Maybe it had to be like that, she said; maybe for some mysterious reason the element of sacrifice must always enter into every real achievement; not as discipline, but as a means; giving up something for something better, as in the greatest sacrifice of all: *And I, if I be lifted up...*

One day he repeated his remark about being chained to those Islands.

"Prometheus?" she said. "Get the book there, and let's read some of it, then. No, not Mrs. Browning; Shelley – the *Unbound* one – second shelf.

*The wise want love, and those who
love want wisdom;
The good want power...*





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"But not for long; not you," she said. "It will come. And listen, here at the end:

*... and hope, till hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates."*

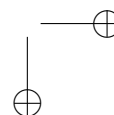
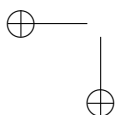
And all this time Phyllis, unbound, continued to swim and sing, to cuff and caress her offspring, and to deviate as little as possible from what nature had intended; which was, one had to admit, something very endearing at times.

"Do you know," she said, coming one day attended by both little Lowrie and the ukulele, "I have just found out he can sing. I believe he is going to have a voice exactly like my father. He already knows the tune to your favourite song, and I am teaching him the words. Come, Lowrie, let us sing 'Allan Percy' for Mrs. Garrison."

That was the ballad that had come nearest to making her weep, when the velvet voice had been accompanied only by the ukulele and the lapping waves. Now, with the addition of Lowrie's infantile treble, she found herself fumbling up her sleeve in earnest for the handkerchief that so seldom seemed to be there:

*Slumber thou still, my babe, my precious one,
Upon my breast to quiet its despair,
And I will dream thee Allan Percy's son...*

She couldn't find her handkerchief, and so she couldn't weep, but oh, oh, whose son ought he to have



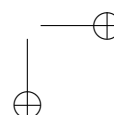
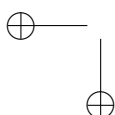


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been – this exotic little waif? His mother of course would never ask herself that question. But Neville? For some mysterious reason did it always have to be like this too? Was nature so interested in some vast design of equilibrium that she didn't care at all for any individual fulfilment? Never, never would she let things be as they were intended – by whom? Well, as they should have been intended. Nature abhors a vacuum – what a joke! How account, then, for all the aching voids, the everlasting emptiness? And even when they did get filled, it was with the wrong thing.

The thirteen years that had passed since she and Jimmy left the Islands had been the busiest ones of both their lives. Reaping, not merely sowing, the benefits of his profession had taken them to some of the world's pleasantest places. They had been stationed in Europe more than once, and had missed in this way more than one of Neville's flying trips to Washington or New York. In one way or another they had missed them all. She had not seen him since the day he came down with all their other friends to hang long garlands round their necks and watch their transport sail. They were like death to her, those flowers. She took them off when the ship began to move, and flung them into the widening gulf that had not been crossed again. Not by reaching hands or straining eyes; only by what had been given wings.

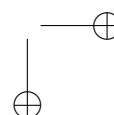
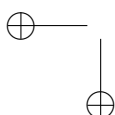
And now the book had come.

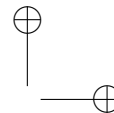
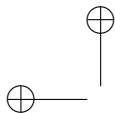




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It was a brilliant book. All the reviews began at once to call it that, and to say how great its value would prove, not only from the standpoint of the medical profession, but from that of those numerous, and no doubt various, individuals always herded together into the singular number as “the layman.” Mrs. Garrison, conscious of being already in the singular number, with a standpoint that was bound to be unique, felt that she must proceed with caution in appraising a work that might easily have lost too much for others by being too much for her. Not through personal references or acknowledgments of any description; of those there could have been no question. No one knew as he did how little they could ever have been for her; their meeting-ground was never there. It was another kind of disappointment against which she knew instinctively she must be on her guard, even before she could recognize it or give it a name. Certainly it was not the plane, the level of the book that fell below her expectations; certainly not the style. The “vigour, sympathy, and humour” the critics discovered in his writing, she had discovered long ago. By their familiar magic (she was discovering now) she could keep even the deep waters of science from closing over her head. What did they say of Bergson? – “*Il séduit avant de convaincre. . .*” And yet, finding all these things, she was conscious still of something she did not find. It was as if a whole dimension were somehow missing; as if, instead of a sphere, she had been given a circle. She turned the pages in a sort of bewilderment, trying





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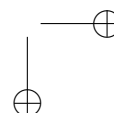
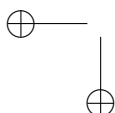
to feel under, to see behind. The thing she had been waiting for, the thing she meant – that she had been promised – was not there.

What was it? The cloudy answer was long in taking shape, enough even to be denied. Was it possible that what she had expected to find was just herself? Was she so vain, so jealous, that she must see her own reflection in all he thought and said? Had she, then, from the beginning, hoped to be as consciously a part of this record he had kept as if it actually were some miraculous creation springing from the impulse she gave him? Then what sort of dim reasoning had she let herself fall into? Old tricks, old traps – immaculate futilities that somebody was always ready to try again.

It was so fatally easy to see the water and the palm-trees; she saw them now, with Phyllis and little Lowrie singing on the sand. How much time in this world, first and last, she wondered, was spent in dreaming of Allan Percy's son?

There had been nothing in the book to make her think he was ill. Even the fact that he had not answered her letter had not alarmed her, knowing as she did the burden of correspondence that must have fallen upon him, and how apt he was, when anything important happened, to write to her last of all. After the recession, he said; she could remember it – “The choir-boys glimmering back into the dusk like moths, the organ still, and now – hark, hark my soul. . . .”

Nothing had prepared her in the least to hear that he was dead. Maybe nothing could. Why would she





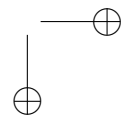
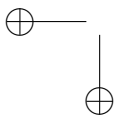
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have believed it then any more than she did now? Losing people who are far away is a very complicated experience, involving so much intelligence; it has to be worked over like a problem; and the mind seems to take a long time to give up and go away and let one be alone. And let one say at last: *I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul...*

II

The young man who was spending the winter with Colonel and Mrs. Garrison in Boston was an object of more than ordinary interest to their friends because of the fact that he had lived all his life in the Islands, though from his appearance, they said, one would never guess he had Hawaiian blood; he must look like his father.

Mrs. Garrison said no, not really like either of his parents. He was supposed to resemble his grandfather, his mother's father, for whom he had been named. . . . No – Scotch. Navy. . . . Yes, both dead. He had lost his mother only last summer, less than two years after his father's death. . . . Yes, terribly lonely for him. . . . Oh, no indeed. He intended to go on living out there. He would finish at Harvard this winter and was planning to go to Europe in the summer and then go back. . . . Yes, wasn't he? She and Jimmy were fairly revelling in such a burst of youth; she was afraid they were getting fatally addicted to it.

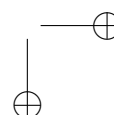
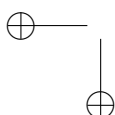




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Addicted already to an event so unattached, so unattended, that she had not been able to fit it into any sequence she knew of. Even the letter Lowrie had written to her, proposing to come, had seemed to her so completely a missive out of her imagination – so certainly the composition of a dream – that she had actually wondered if it would be possible to answer it, except perhaps in some interval of sleep. She realized how little she must have thought about him in all these years, since they had apparently done nothing to change him from the little object she remembered into anything that would have been likely to write to her. Of course she knew he had grown up – and done it rather well, she gathered, in spite of the poor start – but what does knowing a thing amount to when you never stop and draw a picture of it or give it a name or throw it a glance? She knew that he had gone to school and done the other things the boys out there were supposed to do – when they were not in the water. There had even been, in Lowrie's case, some arid terms at a California university subtracted from his amphibious existence; but none of this led up to the letter in any way or made it possible for her to believe it – any more, she thought, than if one of the small sea creatures stranded on the beach had written to her, that being evidently where she had kept him all this time, transfixed by memory, unremoved.

It was a boy's letter, but written with a certain taste, a certain style. "My father talked to me about you very often," he said. "I hope you will not mind me





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knowing you so well. I believe out here I was his best friend." He told her of his mother's death a few months before, and apparently thought he did not have to tell her anything of his own feelings in the face of these great changes. "I would like to come to Boston," he said in closing, "or wherever you are now."

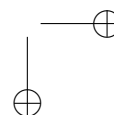
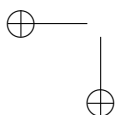
His coming had been for her the strangest experience of her life. She could feel – she could actually see herself sitting there by the fire, the past in heaps around her, submerged in memory, like the Sphinx; barely able to keep her head up out of those excessive sands; while she talked, and laughed even, with the young man on the other side of the hearth who had for her no past whatever. Did the Sphinx feel like that, confronted with the young Alexander, who was a tall boy too no doubt, and self-reliant, and maybe at the time light-hearted with his journey?

It had been fine all the way, Lowrie told her. Of course the boat part always was, but he had not expected to enjoy crossing the continent so much. "And what an interesting town! I am glad you happened to be living in it, just now when I wanted to look you up." This, and down as well, he was now doing with great frankness. "You haven't changed much, have you?" he said.

"From what?" she asked, smiling at him.

"From anything you used to be. I think I remember you a little, but not enough to count."

"And I do not remember you at all," she said.





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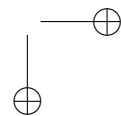
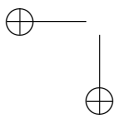
But even so, even without anything to start with, getting acquainted was a singularly uncomplicated business – or would have been had she not wandered from the track so often, looking for traces of one or the other of his parents, whom he seemed to resemble no more in other ways than he did in appearance. It was a mistake to get off the track for anything, since it led so directly to Lowrie himself. She found it as sure and simple as that; and once there, nothing could be more simple or more sure. It was almost the first time in her life, Mrs. Garrison thought, that she had ever been sought out – or “looked up” – by anybody to whom she could give nothing, because he needed nothing. It was to be companionship on equal terms, and she felt strangely flattered.

He listened with great attention nevertheless to any suggestion either she or Jimmy made to him. A year at Harvard would come in perfectly, he agreed. His father had always meant him to finish off with an Eastern college. He had spoken of Princeton, but now, with them right here – “You knew, didn’t you,” he said, “that we gave up the idea of medicine rather early in the game?”

“What is it to be, then?” she inquired.

“Chemistry; rather as a means, though; agriculture is really the end. I am going in with a boy – one of my friends; his family has a big plantation out there; sugar and pineapples.”

She remembered being taken on a drive through a writhing wilderness of purple canes; and pineapples





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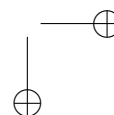
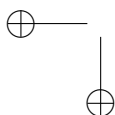
too, which she preferred, set out on wide tablelands with the precision of Italian gardens; miles and miles of them, as if the gardeners had gone mad and couldn't leave off their green geometry, with no walls – only the skyline to stop them. She found she liked the idea of Lowrie helping to produce all this richness. It was pleasant to think of him riding up and down on horseback in the midst of the bursting juices he had conjured out of his retorts and tubes. She applauded the idea and brought the subject up again at dinner, so Jimmy could applaud too.

How quiet dinner must have been before he came – with only her and Jimmy and the maid, who was trained to be quiet whether she was anything else or not! The tall candles, whose austerity she had approved, reflected on white linen and pale silver, seemed no longer part of a ritual, now that they shone on so much animation, lighting Jimmy's dear familiar wit and the cool young eyes of the stranger at their board between them; this messenger from the land where she had left her soul, who had no message to deliver, whom it would be useless to interrogate. "Nice boy," had been Jimmy's verdict.

"But of course if money were the thing I was after," he was saying, "I would go in for explosives. That's where chemistry has its chance of really cashing in."

"Merchant of death, I take it," Jimmy said. "More steak?"

"Please." Lowrie extended his plate. "Did you ever think," he said, "that the people who write those





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things ought to be a little more explicit about where the immoral element gets into the formula? It's bound to be somewhere between the chemistry course and the explosion, but where?"

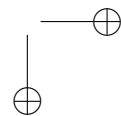
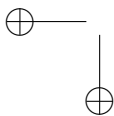
"Doesn't that depend on whether you happen to be making, selling, using, or just being blown up by the bomb?" Jimmy inquired.

"All of them have to be done by somebody, though," Lowrie said. "Even if they signed us up to ride in on horseback with a lance, somebody would have to manufacture the lance."

"And what about the champions who are supposed to wield the moral weapons," Mrs. Garrison said, "the White Cavalry? Can we still do something about their equipment without taking too much from the heavy artillery?"

"And without taking the heavy artillery too much to the rear, I would like to suggest," Jimmy said.

"I believe I'll write something one of these days," Lowrie observed presently, "to show that the moral weapons, as you call them, would never have been used even as much as they have if they hadn't been already in the hands of the strong. The weak can't afford to take chances. I think it's likely the first man who ever tried to see if truth would prevail was one in a position to say: Believe it or else. And anyhow," he went on, aware of Mrs. Garrison's attention, "it seems to me moral questions get too much notice taken of them as it is. There's so much of your life that they have nothing at all to do with – if you don't live in Boston,"





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he added, smiling at her. "I suppose this always has been the favourite stamping-ground of those white knights of yours, hasn't it?"

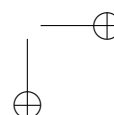
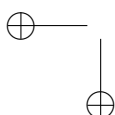
"Cavalry," she said. "It's a poem – by a young man who died." But the young man before her, who had never read it, nor *Alice in Wonderland* either, it seemed, had now embarked on the salad, so unsuspecting of having missed anything that she began to wonder if he had.

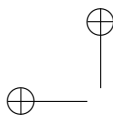
"My, but you look nice in that!" he said, coming in one snowy afternoon when she had been having guests for tea and was still sitting in her long dress by the fire. "There are a lot of people in the Islands who remember you," he went on, taking the big chair opposite to her; "they wanted me to be sure to tell you."

She murmured her appreciation, but Lowrie didn't seem to hear; he was looking thoughtfully into the fire, the way he often did when the conversation turned to things at home. "This is your letter," he said presently, taking it from his breast pocket, "the one that came just after Father died. You see it has been opened. I shouldn't have read it, I suppose, but I felt then that he would want me to. It was sort of like – like forwarding it."

She took it, the strange, familiar thing; forwarded, unclaimed, returned.

"You remember, it was about this book," Lowrie said; "but there was something at the end I couldn't understand. I wonder if you would read it over – that





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part – and then explain it to me? It sounded as if you thought his life ought to have been different in some way; and yet you had just been reading about how successful it was. You had been so glad.”

She didn’t have to look at it again; she held it unopened in her hand. “Did your father ever tell you,” she said after a while, “how he happened to stay out there, in the Islands, instead of coming back – instead of doing the things that would have been possible for him if he had come?”

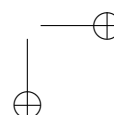
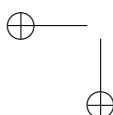
“Not very much,” he said; “a little. I knew of course it was my mother; that he would have had to leave her there.”

“Yes, and it was I who made him not do that – when he was sure it was what he ought to do; when he had made up his mind that his work must come first, that he must sacrifice everything for it. It was I who made him stay.”

He looked puzzled. “But weren’t you glad you did?” he asked her.

“I tried to keep on being glad,” she said, “but after I came away myself – after I travelled more and learned more about important places and people – I began to realize that I had been too young, maybe – certainly too inexperienced – to have interfered that way in another’s destiny. A scientist like your father in Paris – in Vienna —”

The puzzled expression deepened in his eyes. “Did he want to go there?” he said.





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She looked at him in silence, as if making up her mind about something she wanted to say. "I thought," she began, "that perhaps you could tell me about the things he would have liked to do, instead of the one he did. You see, he never talked about it, after he made his decision. You know how strong he was; I believe he thought of that as part of the sacrifice."

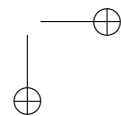
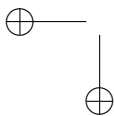
"But I didn't know about it – the sacrifice," Lowrie said. "It always seemed to me he had everything he wanted – almost. Or do you mean the way things were at home?"

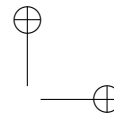
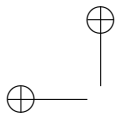
"He never talked about that either," she said. "I hoped it might have got better."

He shook his head. "Of course I don't remember how it was when you were there," he said; "I don't believe it was any better, though. But all the same, I thought he was happy. My mother —" He got up. "I wonder if it's still snowing," he said, wandering over to the window. He stood there between the parted curtains, looking down into the street, but she knew it was not Commonwealth Avenue and its troubled traffic that he saw.

"Did Father ever tell you," he said, coming back to the fire and giving it a cheerful poke, "about the fun we used to have up on *Topgallant* – our ship, you know?"

"Your ship?" she said, and so he told her. It was a brig that had gone on the reef, and he and some of his young friends had salvaged it; enough of it at least to build another boat. They had carried the timbers



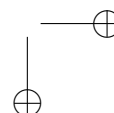
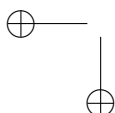


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up and built it on top of a mountain. "You remember Manoa Valley," he said; "it is on one of those peaks up there. We had to load everything on mules for the last lap, and that made it terribly slow. It was months before we could even start putting her together again. We had to have a carpenter for that, of course; he was not a regular shipbuilder, but it was nautical all right. We even have the brig's lanterns, and her clock. We go on ship's time altogether up there. I'd love to show it to you."

She thought he did, a little, as he went on describing it. She remembered the valley, with the sharp green edges of the mountains dipping into it like wings – like fans – like the unfolding of a screen. She had only to follow one of them on up to see the strange sky-going craft poised on its top – the ark on Ararat – to feel the winds, to count the waterfalls. Six of them from the window in the fo'cas'le, he told her. It gave her a new sort of happiness to imagine the hours, measured by the ship's clock, that Neville had spent up there – whenever he had time, Lowrie said – and his account of a storm that struck them once and almost sent them "to the bottom" sounded so much like an adventure of the deep, with all the marine vocabulary he expended on it, that she felt a little seasick. "But, of course, even if we had capsized, we would still have been a good way from Davy Jones," he said, and added: "Father wrote a lot of his book up there."

Far from being dismayed by the Northern winter, Lowrie welcomed all its possibilities with delight. The

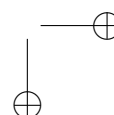
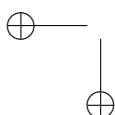




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sports that coincided with the holidays enchanted him. He was, Mrs. Garrison thought, like a lover surrendering to the snow all his passion for the sea. The element didn't matter, she supposed, so long as one could get lost in it. Waves, ice, music – the joy lay always in the giving up, in not being (and certainly not seeing) oneself any longer. Motion could do that for one better than anything else. Maybe life, which was said to be motion, should be given more of the same sort of freedom, instead of the entangling garments thoughtful people imposed upon it, and being halted for inspection so often. This would no doubt be Lowrie's view. His idea of a satisfactory existence, she had discovered, was one involving as little reflection as possible. For him, "keeping his mind off" of a thing was practically synonymous with making it agreeable. But Lowrie's views, aside from the fact that he hardly ever mentioned them, could hardly have led her to make the alterations she now seemed to be making in the ones she had always held herself. It was no doubt some other things, which he mentioned oftener, all of them having to do with his life "out there": and now as the spring came on and the tingling ardours of the New England winter were squelched in the New England thaw, he mentioned them more and more.

He talked continually of his father. It was strange how without recalling to her anything she had forgotten – she had forgotten nothing – or informing her of very much she did not already know, he had yet somehow changed the proportion and the perspective of almost



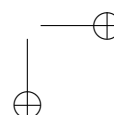
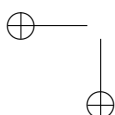


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everything; done it by filling in the incisive outlines of her memory, her knowledge, with shapes and colours of which she had had no vision whatever. How much of Neville's life, after all, had never been for her! Only the best, always; and the best of anything is by its nature limited. Like music, it requires its moods, its moments; one has to get the violins and tune the strings. It is – it must be – worth all else, but it is never all.

She began to wonder, as she listened, if Lowrie might not have brought a message after all. Not the one she would have asked for; nothing that had to do with sacrifice and overcoming, with renunciation or its high rewards; but one to which she felt disposed to listen none the less, because it promised something new. It occurred to her that nature – Wordsworth's "homely nurse" and certainly Lowrie's – being no lover of sacrifice, classing it very likely among the least reasonable of human diversions, might be taking the trouble to show her that this one had been cancelled. Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own. Wordsworth said that too.

Then wasn't she glad? She must be glad, for Neville; but where was she in all of this? It was the question she had asked herself about this book – and how absurd it still was! She remembered something he had said to her: that she was not the inconstant but the constant moon that governed all his tides. Surely that was enough. There was no excuse for feeling forsaken if the little waves escaped from this deep underlying rhythm and ran on alone.





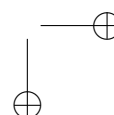
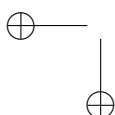
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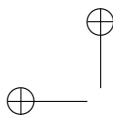
Or not alone. "I wish," Lowrie said to her one afternoon, looking up from his book as if it had reminded him of something, "that you would stop thinking the way you said you did sometimes – that you had anything to regret, I mean. Father always felt he owed you so much. And even the things neither one of you could change – the ones at home – or mother —" He stopped as he usually did at this point. "Of course," he began again, "it wasn't the kind of life a man would think about having, but lots of times people sort of quit thinking about their life – especially in a place like that – like it is out there. I believe I understood better how he felt after they – afterwards. I found so many things – like post-cards and letters. Father used to be away a good deal in the other Islands. She had them in all sorts of places; I have even run across some of them since I came here; in my books, and in the pocket of one of my suitcases. I will show them to you. Some of them will make you smile, I expect, but you can see he was sort of used to things." Leaving his book face downwards on the arm of his chair, he got up and went out. She heard him going upstairs.

There was nothing, not a ribbon or a rubber band, to hold them together; not an envelope among them. Some of them were far from clean, and one or two were torn. They looked so helpless.

"But you will read them, won't you?" Lowrie said, as she laid them on the table beside her. "You know they wouldn't mind. They always told you things."

"Later, maybe," she said.





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"If you should happen to see your son anywhere around, tell him I say better keep out of the water with that foot. I left the bottle on the table in his room. God knows where it is now..."

"I don't know when I will be home I tell you. Go with somebody else. Some fool that wants to dance his legs off..."

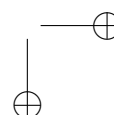
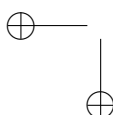
"Don't forget the laundry. I will not have a clean uniform for my dinner at the Governor's..."

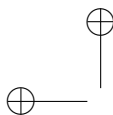
"... to the hospital when you can and look in on poor old Palemanu. He will not be there much longer. Don't let those damned missionaries take his nose-flute away from him. Tell them if I hear anything more about lascivious music (if you want to know what that means don't ask a gentleman) I am going to get a nose-flute – if I can find one – for every patient in the hospital..."

"Doctor Karpenski is coming with me. He is very important, so wear your shoes. Look beautiful. White dress. White flower..."

"It is wonderful here. No reef. Terrible surf. Terrible moon. Sing to me. Can you feel me kiss your throat? ..."

All these years she had followed him, not asking once to stray from any region he inhabited, and yet,





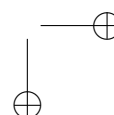
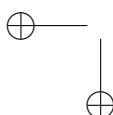
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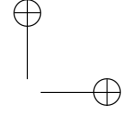
stumbling on these footprints, she did not know what to make of them. She had kept her eyes on the level of his thoughts, his visions; the footprints said: I was here. What else can a footprint say?

She folded the scraps of paper back in their old creases. There was nothing she would have to read again; nothing in these straightforward utterances to ponder over. They left her mind quite free, free to fly back to its habitual refuge, the strong tower of those so different words – that “other language” she and Neville had employed to forge the bond between them. Whose language had it been they made it theirs? That was a question she had never asked before; she had never seen before how they had stolen it, going deep into their memory and their books, prising loose some word or image they could use again – but not again for the first time, not just to tell somebody that the moon was full, or to put a ginger blossom in her hair.

She remembered Rilke’s line about the cup where everybody’s lips had been, and it seemed to her their other language was just that – and even that she had to say in Rilke’s words, not hers. Her mind must be terribly cluttered up with other people’s thoughts and feelings. She was a good deal like the tide-gauge that used to be drawn on the beach, registering where the waves had come once, for somebody – not her waves.

It was hard for a woman, a vain one like herself, to learn suddenly – or was it so sudden? – that she had nothing really her own; that she could have nothing, because she had created nothing – which was supposed





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to be her job. She had always been afraid of life, afraid of happiness; and even the unhappiness she had experimented with, under the name of sacrifice – “that good might come” – had somehow failed because life got in behind her and changed it – not caring for syntheses and sublimations and things like that, only or making something new. Life at least was not afraid of the job. Even when the elements were unkindly mixed (Shakespeare this time?), it went right ahead. And just look – she looked; Lowrie’s book was still lying on the chair where he had left it – just look, she thought, at what can happen. Life being what it is when let alone.

