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THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

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THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

BY

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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CHAPTER I: SUPPOSE WE HAVE LUNCH

FLORA SIBLEY stood just outside the bronze doors of the north entrance to the New York Public Library, drawing on her suede gloves. From the top of the marble steps to Forty-second Street she surveyed the passersby without any real apprehension of their existence. She was slightly above the average height, rather slender. She wore, if exactitude be demanded, a navy-blue tricotine and a smart black hat, the latter nicely adjusted upon her dexterously arranged brown hair. She had a straight nose and a pleasing, quizzical mouth. Her eyebrows were pronouncedly curved, giving her an expression of surprise even when she was not particularly surprised. She had dark eyes.

But how many men can describe a woman? I shall dodge hastily behind the useful phrase "unique charm". Flora had it. It was enhanced by an aloof, slightly astringent manner, an innate shyness she had never quite conquered from girlhood.

Flora was a "pop" novelist—but you wouldn't have known it. In conversation you could not have connected her with the lapses into mediocrity and sentimentality so frequent in her books, with the facile literary compromises she had made for so many years. You could only feel, if you happened to know who she was at a dinner or a reception, that such dual personality bordered upon the incredible. In conversation she could be witty, even brilliant. It was her

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quotidian return to the typewriter, upon which she "dashed off" both first drafts and revisions, that exerted the malign influence. Then, from her flying fingers, spattered that treacle of romance without which the mere bread and butter of life is, to most of us, both stale and unprofitable. Most of us were, after all, responsible for Flora.

By the courage and cleverness of her own brain she had forged a weapon of style. After persistent unsuccess she had also forged the tools to blunt and dull it. Finally she had fashioned her literary self not in her own but in the Public's image. Yet nobility persisted in her face, for she was fundamentally a fighter, possessed of a natural spiritual courage against odds. She had merely misapplied it.

Her maternal instinct was strong. She often pitied other people to excruciation, quite sincerely. Her characters became to her as the people she pitied. Then she could refuse them nothing, money, children, countryhouses, candy-box love-affairs, hairbreadth rescues, hummingbirds and roses. It wasn't good for them. And any social criticism implied in the works of this authoress was always smoothed over with a large solution of faith, hope and charity. Some problems necessitated laying it on pretty thick.

Flora was thirty-five. She had begun writing novels ten years ago and had produced just exactly ten. She had made a pot of money. O Flora! But I like Flora very much, in spite of my natural brutality. You couldn't help it.

So she stood, half-smiling at her own thoughts, at the top of marble steps to a tawdry newspaper-blown street. Any man in love with her, as he looked at her, might have felt his pulse accelerate. Her small pugnacious chin was tilted upward.

Wherever she went, would not her thousand photographic likenesses follow her? But that was what gave her the half-smile. She recalled some of them. She took such an abominable picture. She remembered her own particular gallery of them: Orphant Annie, The Pride of the Harem, The Super-Clubwoman, Pride's Purge, Maybelle the Movie

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Star, Old Mother Hubbard, Vampirina. She herself had bestowed the titles. No, they'd never in the world——!

She grasped her small suede handbag with decision. Sunlight and a breeze brought colour to her cheek. Her air was distinguished. She was almost beautiful.

She *was* beautiful to a certain straw-hatted gentleman in heather-mixture cheviot, pausing in his stride along the opposite side of Forty-Second Street. He halted in front of a window displaying a large oil portrait of an atrabilious individual whose painted nose supported a pair of imitation tortoiseshell eyeglasses. The eyeglasses were real. That was what people said when they loitered in front of the window. But Richard Coryat's back was toward it.

He got himself immediately across the street between a Dodge, a cross-town car and a brown and white taxi. He met Flora as she descended to the pavement.

"I called last night, but——"

"O, I'm *so* sorry. A friend of mine was ill and leaving town. (Well, Lucy had certainly been leaving town, in a month, and she *looked* ill!) I should have called you up, or left a message. I forgot. How are you?"

"Splendidly—now," he couldn't help adding. "Which way are you going? Mightn't we——?"

"Well, to tell the truth," Flora smiled, "I'm sure I don't know. I've just been looking up something in there. I——"

"Won't you lunch with me?"

"No—I'm afraid that——yes, suppose we do. Dutch. I'm an independent person, you know, Mr. Coryat."

After all, why not? She had been rather mean to him probably. She could go back to her Gramercy Park apartment or to the National Arts Club. But after all, why not? He looked agreeable. He *was* interesting *if* too persistent. They were at the corner. His fingers barely touched her elbow as they crossed Forty-Second Street. They walked slowly up the Avenue.

"You got my note about 'Golden Windfall'?"

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Her eyes had turned toward him, her head was slightly bent.

"Yes. I'm glad you agree with me. But I knew you'd appreciate it."

"Why?"

"Why, because—oh, I don't know. It's your sort of a book."

"How about my own books?"

"Well, to make a horrible confession, I've been so busy this last month getting settled I haven't had a chance to read them yet. And you see I was away from America for ten years. I'm frightfully ignorant about your work really. But I certainly intend to remedy that."

"Don't!"

"Why not?"

"They're awful!"

"I refuse to believe it!" he laughed.

"They are, they're atrocious. I'm sick of them. It's your fault though."

"How?"

"Terrill's book. Don't you know that you and he are responsible for a positively suicidal mood on the part of this particular lady novelist?"

"Good Lord, what do you mean?"

"Oh, don't be scared," she laughed, and then was grave. "I simply mean I seem to have come to a turning-point. 'Golden Windfall' did it. Of course you couldn't know. And you couldn't know that I opened Terrill's book with a feeling of great superiority and a decided aversion to him. But, it's curious, he has convinced me as no one else has ever been able to convince me of the obligations of a talent. 'The artistic conscience'! (She laughed shortly—rather harshly.) You see I had become pretty case-hardened, I guess. And then, of course, I have made money. And there's so much trifling and idling in the name of Art. So much buncombe. But he got me."

"But I know you're exaggerating——"

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Flora gave him a swift side-glance.

"No," she almost snapped, with an expressionless face. "It's worse than you think."

He changed the topic to suggest a tea-room on West Forty-sixth Street. Seated at a corner table near the window, they confided the appeasement of their hunger to an entirely indifferent waitress. She returned in five minutes having forgotten the order. "What was it you said?" They told her all over again.

Flora opened her handbag and scrutinized its interior intently, moving her face about with great seriousness. Richard Coryat realised, when she raised her eyes, that he had been staring at her. He thought he had rarely seen such a thoroughly honest gaze. Yet it was veiled to him. Her own work must be infinitely better than she thought.

"Do you know," said Flora, and then suddenly curtailed her sentence. What she had been going to ask would never do. She must escape him. Yes, even after his introducing her to Terrill's book. He had become altogether too interested. She wished, in fact, to get rid of all of them, editors, publishers, literary acquaintances. The thing to do was to make a complete break. She would go back——. She as suddenly smiled to herself at this persistent invasion of her creative imagination.

The fish and salad having made its appearance, with rolls and pots of tea, she listened to Coryat as he talked of Paris and the Riviera. His voice was light, high, with a certain harsh, hurt strain in it. He told some interesting stories. He became animated as he talked, his greenish blue eyes sparkled. His lean brown face with its deep but not prominent jaw and somewhat broad and uptilted nose was attractively homely. His light brown hair was thick, difficult to part properly and inclined toward curliness. He had a characteristic habit of tilting his head upward and back with great suddenness. He betrayed nervousness by the restless gestures of his hands. His ears were too large, his mouth was broad and firm, half-hidden beneath a close-cropped

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mustache that had come out sandy. He was not above the average height and, in the street, save for the keenness of his gaze, you might easily have passed him as the average man.

"What do you intend to do now, Mr. Coryat?"

"Not foreign correspondence any more at any rate. I don't really know. I'm tired of journalism. This inheritance I told you about——. Of course I really intend to write, but I don't know exactly what. There's a different feel to things over here, on first reacquaintance at any rate. Seems so much all Business. But then Europe's a ruin. France is about the only real intellectual centre. But the War's spoiled most things. I certainly got fed up on fracas—as well as on discipline—in the Legion. Yet it seems to me I hate worse the stupor I find over here—a stupor as to ideas. Of course that sounds superior. I don't mean it so. As a matter of fact I *am* getting back my old love for New York, love like hatred. It certainly hasn't lost its fascination, though it's changed. But socially and politically and so on, doesn't the country seem dead to you ? Look at this administration."

"Well, I admit we seem to care very little for personality over here. At least now. It *wasn't* so, certainly. But industrialism has us, and moulds. Take our writers. Well," she smiled ruefully, "take me. I'm a grand example of the American idea of success, in literature. You'd better go home and read my books—if you can stand it."

"Oh, come!" he said unbelievingly; "but if standardisation is the cry to-day, as it certainly was in the War, I think just the same that we're bound to swing out of it again. There are a number of signs. Certainly order and system under special privilege and convention are really figments of the imagination—any real order, any real system——"

"You're a Socialist, are you?"

"No. Not an anything-ist. Satisfactory social systems are a problem. The point is, under any system, the attitude of the people. I'm certainly *not* for the present amount of

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special privilege. Yet—there's personal liberty too. Maybe the anarchists have, after all, the best doctrine for the individual soul. Only I don't believe it. I believe in some system. Not too much. Socialism might easily become as autocratic as capitalism, in a different way. Here's what I mean. The spirit in this country. I believe you're right about the individual. Who wants another war? I certainly don't. War is a rotten thing. I've seen it and I know. But in a crisis like a great war there comes certainly a new spirit, a solidarity. Something more than mere comfort and ease. An ideal. Something burning. Now that that's left us——"

"Maybe it hasn't!"

"Yes, I think it has. The present lies with the individual. If I'm purged of any jingoism I had, as well as of old-line socialism—for I had both in a sense—I'm also against the moulds of this present phase of industrialism. I'm for the growth of the individual now as the only thing that will resurrect us from the grave we've fallen into with our dead. And I don't mean the old Puritanical idea of character either. I mean the life that makes itself felt by courage and pioneering, by thinking for itself—not by mob formulas."

Like the opinions voiced in most casual conversation, his own tripped and stumbled over each other. You could have annihilated some of his easy summaries. Flora, like most of us, picked out merely the phrases that applied to her own immediate problem. She liked the eagerness in his eyes and a certain suppressed scorn in his voice. Also, he seemed to know the names of things.

"So you're an individualist?"

"H'm," he drew his compressed lips inward. "I don't know. At present we're all slaves to mechanism. Perhaps more so because we're a democracy, we're formularised. The proper expression of personality—the characteristic differences between human beings—well, call it the first person singular, in two senses, is what interests me most. Over here I find types, not people. In Europe, and even—paradoxically—in the war, despite all the regimenting of every-

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thing, and the discipline—I found *people*. It was due, I guess, to the crisis. Men and women revealed themselves. Now, over here at least, they've crept back into convention. There's more real life in Minetta Lane than all upper New York. There's a type of business man, a type of society woman, a type of flapper, yes, and a type of everything else. You say there's a type of American novelist. There's the suburb type and the city type. It may be silly of me—or it may be a snap-judgment—but I want *people*, not types."

"People," murmured Flora Sibley. "Yes. Real people. I want them too."

A silence fell between them as he drew out a silver cigarette case, chose a cigarette, and tapped it upon the table.

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CHAPTER II: RICHARD TERRILL SPEAKING

MR. CORYAT was interesting, yes. But the fact remained that she wanted to escape him, to escape them all. She sat at the window of her sitting-room looking out over green, sunny Gramercy Park. The things she had lived for seemed now particularly worthless. She had fulfilled certain responsibilities, of course, paid certain debts. That much was true, but——.

Why had he happened to lend her that book? She didn't know. But wasn't she glad after all? She knew she was. However, the mental disgust returned. She could see herself as she must have looked at two of that last Sunday morning, when she had finished the last page of "Golden Windfall." She could see herself getting up from the davenport, walking slowly toward the open window, standing staring out upon the mysteriously moonlit park. The mental nausea. Good Heavens! Well, it was true. And it was the test.

She had never heard of the writer before. Richard Terrill. Richard Terrill. What in heaven's name was the matter with American publishers *not* to have heard of him? Well, they would now. That was her first duty, to spread knowledge of his book. He must be an Englishman. It was an English book. How old was he, she wondered. How in heaven's name had he managed to show her her very own problem so keenly yet so kindly?

First emotional impressions did not live. But he had said something living. The truth of it was burned in her heart. Yet, on analysis, it was simple enough and something she had seen all along. However, the words were now a part of her, they had irrevocably changed her.

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The puppet procession began again to pass through the clear light of what he had said. The puppets proceeded out of the shadow, showed in the light for an instant with a startling clarity of detail, sank again into the shadow. She had been so proud of Sallie Pryor—at least leave her Sallie Pryor! Sallie stood in that light with the jerky gestures of a grimacing doll, leered, disappeared grotesquely. The light was utterly pitiless.

Clarriby Null of "The Wiseacres". Clarriby came creeping avoidingly into the light—stood and blinked in it. The light began to blacken his edges. It burst through. It consumed him with little eating flames. He was a slight shower of infinitesimal ashes.

Tortured, lugubrious shapes, pitifully processional. Barker Straik, George Phillips, little laughing Nelly Madox, Jane Orgue, the Cranes, the Busbees—all incredibly galvanized painted pasteboard. Or floating ghosts that faded piecemeal in the light. The words of their wraithlike voices hummed about her. The lives of her puppets swept round her like a sea—voices of age, of childhood, from the froth and ferment of her brain. The skein of all their lives hung on a hook in the blank wall of her mind. She had tugged threads from it, knotted them into patterns, patterns that also passed into that light and were consumed like a spider-web under a burning-glass. It was too awful!

It was desperately unkind not even to leave her Sallie Pryor. An enormous public had liked Sallie. One hundred thousand copies of "The June Bug" had been printed. Sallie had made her fortune. The light was cruel, unkind. The man's book was hideous, untrue. The man was an idiot, or simply an ineffectual angel. What he saw as art was really a supersensitive and impossibly stern avoidance of the compromises necessary in real life. Life was simple. You needed distraction and money. You worked for money. You made the most of your ability. The public would buy certain things. You gave them that. No one who had not come the hard, practical road to financial success could pos-

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sibly know how sweet it was to have fought your way, met your obligations, gained once more ease, leisure, a bright world of royalties, nice clothes, decorous applause. And no one who had not been through——! Her indignant thought paused.

But she *had* made her way, at least. She saw perfectly clearly the road behind her. A girl's idealistic decision and disastrous experiment; the escape; persistent brave effort; the man, the woman who had helped her. The development of a gift at first desperately meagre; the bleak interim; finally—what the world knew as "success". Suddenly, one day, the grasp of the box-of-tricks, the formula. Labouring over the dénouement of her tenth short story, she had seen. She was perfectly conscious at the time,—she must have been; yet, somehow, not at all conscious. She knew that it was not her idea of good writing, of what she could really do. But the desperation of her mind at the time stifled the thought. And the formula had proved correct. Read the reviews!

Then why had this book of Terrill's intruded to shatter the dream? It was surely a beneficent dream enough. A world of bright laughter, sound sermons, happy people, wholesome moods. A beneficent dream that had cheered the lives of thousands! She smiled grimly. That phrase was from the jacket of "Rosemary and Rue". But wasn't it true? It had. Always the happy ending. Always the sweetmeats and bonbons tucked into the lavendered folds of the story. Always the delight in life—or had it been merely in "laying it on thick"? *Had* she grown to believe it was life? She must have. It was accepted as life. It was thoroughly wholesome and uplifting. Good heavens!

That girl had been so excruciatingly unhappy. Wistful, hard-worked, hungry, romantic, sentimental,—then crushed. Then so bravely trying to build up the fairy story that might have come true. She had thought, at least, to make it come true for others. Then how had she lost the substance for the shadow?

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A long accumulation of small scraps of advice and counsel came to her, from many a successful writer, from many a seasoned editor; advice to which she hungrily listened, advice that had finally crystallised itself into The Formula. She remembered now beginnings in so different a vein. Two pages of that third, often-rejected story for instance, "The Barrier". She closed her eyes to see the two figures in those pages pass under that scathing light of Terrill's words. Of all the characters her teeming thought had created those two alone did not move like automata. Their small but distinct voices rang true in her inner ear. She had finally torn that story into strips, and from strips into fine fragments.

That girl; the girl of those days, lean, suffering, puzzled, embittered, in her frayed grey wrapper and tousled hair, scribbling desperately in that back hall room of Mrs. Murtrie's, writing on the varnish-peeled wash hand-stand, the big white crockery basin and pitcher (with their impossible red-lily decoration) standing beside her upon the thread-bare piece of carpet to which she had removed them. Oh (suddenly), to have her back, that thin, passionate, intolerably shy, madly battling girl of ten years ago!

Well, to work! That manuscript in the binder had to be shipped off to Harvey Wick of "The Criterion". She rose from her cretonned chair, unlocked her desk, and spent the next fifteen minutes or so correcting a few sentences. Then she reached for the notebook she had tossed on the table and worked steadily for half an hour "pointing up" the reference to the Boxer outbreak. It was four o'clock when she had finished, and she had invited Mr. Seelye to tea at the National Arts at 4:30. He was connected with the Bozarre Picture Corporation. The moving-picture rights of "Rosemary and Rue" were under consideration. Flora Sibley sighed, closed and locked her big desk, and called softly for Marie.

* * *

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Flora nibbled a butter-thin and listened to Mr. Irwin Seelye. His face distinctly resembled a Regensburg cigar sign. It had creamed lobster and "The Follies of 1920" written large all over it. Mr. Seelye inhaled his tea.

"They'll eat it!" pronounced Mr. Seelye. "See if they don't. They'll eat it. Home and mother." He beamed gelatinously at her.

"The only trouble being," said Flora sweetly, "that I've chucked the whole business now, Mr. Seelye."

"You mean the royalties? Well now I'll tell you——"

"No, I mean I'm tired of the whole business. I'm going away."

"Oh! Oh, vacation. Course you're tired. Should think so. 'Mount of work you turn out. But you needn't worry 'bout the picture till you get good and rested. We could go right ahead with it. We'd have to do that anyway."

"You don't understand me. I've just delivered my last novel to Harvey Wick according to contract. I had to. But I'm out of it now. I've decided not to sell any more movie rights."

"Well, what *is* your figure?"

"I must repeat that you misunderstand me, Mr. Seelye. The rights to 'Rosemary and Rue' simply aren't on the market. I should have told you that at once—but you looked tired and I wanted you to have some tea. Pardon me if I haven't broken it especially gently."

"Well, what d'you—why, but—but, Miss Sibley, you really don't mean that?"

"I'm afraid I do. You see I'm just sickened suddenly—of the whole thing."

"But of what?"

"Of writing rot, of purveying rot, of stuffing the public with rot. I'm through."

The belligerent small chin was in evidence. Flora's eyes stared straight ahead of her at nothing in particular.

"Well, now of course, Miss Sibley," the tone was meant to be pacifying. "You know really that there's no reason

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at all for you to talk that way. Not the slightest. Look how your work goes. Look how good it is. Haven't I just been telling you that the public'll eat up 'Rosemary and Rue'?"

"Yes, that's the whole trouble. I believe they would."

"But isn't this reasonable!" Flora suddenly sat up very straight and looked at him with clear wide eyes. "Isn't this reasonable. I have made all the money I want. That, as all of us know is 'the object in view'. Well, I've made enough. But I've just come to see what I've made it by. We needn't go into that. I'm through, that's all."

"Sorry," she said a few moments later, at the door of the National Arts, to this rather dazed myrmidon of the producers. "I see you don't quite understand it. Perhaps I'm wrong. Only I don't think so. Good-bye!"

Mr. Irwin Seelye paused to light a fat cigar as he reached Fourth Avenue. He tilted it toward the not-far-distant Metropolitan Tower and looked vaguely up and down the street.

"Now I wonder," he said to himself, "just what she *is* holding out for! Well,—she's bound to snap out of it."

He began to walk slowly south on Fourth Avenue. He continued to wonder.

Flora, meanwhile, returning to her apartment, called in Marie. It was not on the matter of dinner. Later she held several telephone conversations and made several appointments, one with her friend Phil Bruston of the Park Avenue Bank. Fortunately he was not out of town. She experienced a strange thrill in the thought that she was setting wheels in motion. She knew now that she had finally decided.

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CHAPTER III: THE PERSISTENCE OF JANE

THREE weeks later, in his rooms on the opposite side of Gramercy Park, Richard Coryat was filling a pipe from a large glass humidor on the table in his sitting-room. He had seen Flora several times lately. Now, it seemed, she was gone. Still vivid before the lens of his thought floated a likeness of her face. He liked smart black hats and blue tricotine. He liked peculiarly-arched eyebrows. He liked dark eyes. He liked——. His mouth drew down lugubriously at the corners. He exhaled through his nose sharply and shook his head. He shrugged. He went over and relapsed deeply into the Chesterfield before the empty fireplace. He sat puffing at a pipe he had forgotten to light.

His face sharpened as he sat in thought, his cheeks drew gaunt. His left arm came up on the back of the Chesterfield, and his head leaned upon his left hand. His hand kept smoothing back his hair with a softly grinding motion of the heel of it upon his left temple. His teeth showed as he bit the stem of his pipe again and again.

Flora—and Jane. He wondered what on earth Jane could be doing now. He wondered for the ten thousand two hundred and twenty-fifth time in eighteen years whether he had acted like a cad. He didn't see how he had. But he wondered. That the ache should be so keen—still—at times—what did that imply? Well then, the implication was correct. He still loved her.

But was it that? A man's physical hunger was so treacherous; and he had avoided women. Was it that? Could it be that only? Was it the old possessiveness, that issue on which they had broken? No. That wasn't true. It simply wasn't. He had learned that lesson.

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Had he? And should he want to find her? He certainly wondered what she was doing.

She had dismissed him. He was young—what a kid he was then, what an infant! What a goings-on he had made within himself about his pride! What a horrible thing, and what an incredibly childish thing it had been anyway! How proud they both were! As Lucifer. Lucifer had brought the light. Lucifer matches. His pipe wasn't lit! He felt along the table backing the couch for matches. The tobacco seethed as it caught and he popped his lips with the first exhalations.

Nineteen years ago he had been one of the most promising young newspapermen in New York. A year later, in considerable bitterness of spirit, he had decided to leave the United States altogether. He had.

He had gone first to South America on a fruit company steamer. He had knocked around Rio and then sailed for France. Journalistic facility, an ability to live through discomforts and rough experiences, kept him on his feet. Also, despite his sorrow, he possessed an intense interest in life. He enjoyed new sights and new people. Once in France he had gained a livelihood by writing for the Paris edition of a Chicago paper. He applied himself to a work of fiction and went to England. It found a publisher and actually brought him some royalties. He lived in cheap lodgings and made enough pickings from journalism to support mind and body for several years. This whole period of his life, however, was somewhat depressing to remember. But his fascination with the human comedy had pulled him through. He had made friends and acquaintances. He had returned to France before the War, sporadically affluent, in general impecunious. When the War broke out he had enlisted in the Foreign Legion at the instance and for the companionship of a friend. He had certainly seen action? He had been wounded and had spent several months in a French hospital. After the Armistice he had gone back to journalism. The War had not improved his position. For all the rapid-fire

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work he had turned out in fifteen years no literary reputation was his. His one novel was now completely forgotten. He wondered to-day, rather dismally, how it had ever managed to sell at all.

He had expected things of the War. A gallant end in action. The nearest he got to it was being buried by a shell in an *abri*. After that it seemed to him that anticlimax piled upon anticlimax, until, after he recovered from his wound, he was reduced to the position of a mere military clerk in a Paris office. Once out of uniform he had begun to write again, from his war experience and from various memories of his intermittent wanderings before the war, in Spain, in South America, in Algeria.

One morning he had experienced mental paralysis in the news that his Aunt Clara Bowers of Pittsburgh had chosen to remember him upon her deathbed to this end, that, "I give, devise and bequeath to my nephew, Richard Ripston Coryat, his heirs and assigns forever, one undivided half of the remainder of my estate real and personal." Aunt Clara had died a wealthy old lady. It came to ten thousand a year, that remainder. He had forgotten all about Aunt Clara. Hadn't seen her since he was a freckled boy of ten who used to greatly prize the pumpkin pie she was fond of making. The only reason he could attribute in his own mind for this startling bequest was a remark that floated back through the shimmering mists of time, made by him in a voice breaking,—no, not with emotion,—with the advance of young manhood: "Gee, Aunt Clara, I like your pies!"

It was the truth. And it was all he could remember. Out of the conquered past unravishable financial relief born of an early passion for pie. Superb irony. He hardly remembered even what Aunt Clara had looked like, save that she wore a silk shawl and was rather stout, and that her house on a hill had two cast-iron dogs on the front lawn. Well, God bless her anyway! He pinched himself a number of times. It was, to him, one of the oddest things that could possibly have happened. Which was, after all, a strange

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belief to be cherished by one so familiar with the news of the world in the daily press.

For a while after that it was difficult for him to take himself seriously. He strove hard enough, of course, to remember Aunt Clara and evoke some more fundamental reason than pie for the bequest. He tried to imagine he had always been her favourite nephew—that she had loved little boys—that his father had been her favourite brother. He simply couldn't remember. His mother had still been alive when Aunt Clara was indulging her culinary propensities. His father had followed her to the grave while Richard was a senior in high school. Uncle Jim had taken him to live in Brooklyn. Aunt Clara was never mentioned by Uncle Jim. They were not related and did not like each other. Aunt Clara had completely faded out of all recollection. She had never written, certainly. Yet she had been "of sound and disposing mind, and capable of executing a valid deed". There was no flaw in the disposition of her property. There you were.

It irritated him in a manner he discovered to be petty, that after a tragic love-affair and an ensuing life of rather threadbare grimness, after a war hallucination that broke down in absurd unheroic anticlimax, after days and weeks and months he so well remembered in which he had seemed the sport of destiny, he should suddenly be set upon his feet with genuine opportunity after the manner of a short story in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Had life then any genuine sequence or dignity? But there it was. The grotesque side of life was always poking its waggish face around the corner of his mind whenever he became comfortable in one of his dream selves; those dream selves we all fashion of a high solitary grandeur.

No. Jane would have made her way. But why hadn't he heard of it? She was going to write books. He knew books. There were no books of hers on the market. But then she had also begun to be interested in social conditions. Perhaps she had "gone in" for that. He had inquired. She

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had left the "Sphere",—oh, it must have been that next year. Nobody knew down there where she was now. New city editors, new managing editors had come and gone. Blakely and Fitch, those two old timers, remembered, remembered her and him. Remembered their engagement. He remembered that one Spring. Benches in Washington Square. Hansoms. Good God, there were hansoms then, not taxis! Eighteen years ago. "The Black Cat". Finzetti's. Well. "The Cat" was still in evidence. Finzetti had gone back to Italy before the War, he heard.

And Lord, how different prices were then, not to mention wages. How could a girl like that live on twelve dollars a week. But she did. And really they both had lived rather royally, in spite of the boarding house. The basement dining-room where that strange Mr. Quigley who worked in a bank had put a bunch of violets at her place the day after they had announced their engagement. The fuss of pleasure old Mrs. Staples had made, the woman who looked exactly like a head of lettuce, with her green flounces. How they had laughed at that! What a string of intimately amused little jokes they had had over the others. That person—what was his name?—that man who had been a policeman. The one they called between themselves The Habitual Henchman. What in the devil *was* his name?

Well, who could possibly have imagined he wouldn't have found anyone else after all, anyone to supplant those memories. In a certain light it was rather ridiculous. But then . . . Miss Sibley now was certainly charming . . . But . . .

Jane often came in and sat on a chair in his living-room. She had done that in Paris and in London too, in Rio and at Cairo. She still had on the brown street dress in which he had last seen her, and the hat so out of fashion nowadays. She tortured a minute cambric handkerchief in small square hands and her eyes were full of tears. She had brown hair and brown eyes, like pools in a forest. He had once told her that. She looked at him under level brows. Her chin trembled but her lower lip was bitten white. She sat and

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looked at him, without anger. Looked through him. He *had* been a cad.

Of course you could always see the door-jamb or the wall-corner, or whatever was hung upon or stood against the wall, through the diaphaneity of Jane. She usually came after midnight. Once she came in the afternoon on a street in Pernambuco. That was a comparatively short time after the break. She looked up at him and took his arm. That was the hardest to bear. Walking in the sunlight, along the white street, with the white houses glaring. With Jane on his arm—a Jane no one else could see. She suddenly left him, crossing a square . . .

No, all this money meant for him must be the opportunity to do some really creative writing, the chance he had coveted through years of time-serving. *Could* he ever do another novel? Should he begin with—what? Some more articles, till he got his hand in?

Another thing that perplexed him was his having gone over to call on Flora Sibley that afternoon and his finding out from the elevator-man at the desk that she had sublet her apartment and vanished. He had talked to the sub-leasers. They did not know her plans or where she had gone. A Mr. Bruston was handling the matter for her. Coryat had not seen her for a week. He had called up three days before and had heard her voice. She had given him no intimation of her intention. Oh, well, after all, why should she? Yet her going seemed to leave a certain vacancy. He must read that book of hers he had bought to-day at Brentano's. Her books *couldn't* be as bad as she had intimated.

He settled himself under the standing lamp in a comfortable corner. He was in his brown dressing-gown. He began to read "Rosemary and Rue". The small cased clock ticked upon the mantle across the room. The light from the lamp lay in a golden pool about him. Outside the nearby window vines dripped and the rain whispered softly.

The expression upon Richard Coryat's face grew more and more pained. Twice he snorted, twice he sniffed, thrice

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he stared up with harassed disbelief in his eyes. Finally the book dropped from his hands. It was too unbelievable!

She couldn't have written it. A woman like that *couldn't*. He closed the book and took it up in its picture jacket. The cover design was that of a stalwart young man in khaki and high-laced boots embracing a frail, blonde young woman clad in some material that looked like window-curtain. The young woman clung to him upon a rocky hilltop. The young man's face was uplifted. The illustrator had evidently intended to endue him with exaltation. He had succeeded in making him look as if he were sniffing a smelter. Something was evidently burning. This impression was increased by a conflagrate sunset behind the two figures.

Unfortunately the contents of the book was of a piece with the cover.

She *couldn't* have written it.

She had. There was her name. Under it, God save the mark, "Thirtieth Thousand".

He opened the book and began to go through it again, hastily, but with a careful scanning of pages. One halted him. He settled himself to read. He read it and the two following. The tension in his face relaxed. Then it came again. He skipped several chapters. Again a page halted him. Again he read.

A half hour passed. At the end of it, Coryat laid the book down again with a sigh. Flashes—decided flashes—amid a welter of absolutely inexcusable sentimentality. She could write like that on the pages whose corners he had dog-eared, and yet, she could write—all the rest!

He stared at nothing, and Jane grew out of the chair opposite. She sat demurely, hands quiet in her lap. They were working at the diminutive handkerchief. Her eyes were on him now. They were full of tears.

"Oh, Jane, Jane, Jane!"

He had not spoken the words, but it was exactly as if he had spoken them. The room was full of words. Full of her own low last word to him. *"Good-bye!"*

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He wondered what she was doing.

She had built a new life by now. She did not need or want him. She had fought through to some new happiness. He was still a selfish fool. An incredibly selfish fool.

He wanted somebody. He was intolerably lonely.

He was a beastly idiot, a perfect infant. Strong, perhaps, when the outlook was absolutely blank. Weak in the hour of opportunity. This money. His writing.

He wanted Jane.

His loneliness illuminated his mind with a dry, harsh light that showed it intolerably empty. Across the cracked and broken tesserae of the floor of a ruined palace sparse thought rustled like dry leaves. He had actually seen such a ruin once. Near Ombos.

He sat up and looked around him. He felt weak in bone and sinew. Outside his window the rain rustled. It had probably suggested the rustling of those leaves.

Jane. Flora. Why had she left without a single word for him? But why should she?

He would sleep like the dead to-night. He hoped he would never wake up. After all, who was dependent upon him?

"Oh, what did I do to you, Jane?"

He was in a nice state of mind indeed He was a preposterous ass. He had better go to bed.

He would start the first of those articles to-morrow. To-morrow he was to lunch with Lin Jessup at the Players. And with an old acquaintance who had arranged the meeting at Coryat's intimation. "The Coming Age", after all, *might* want what he wanted to write . . .

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CHAPTER IV: MR. GARTNER GETS A LETTER

ON a certain afternoon in May, Jake Gartner, postmaster of Tupton, Pennsylvania, came out of the yellow-painted brick building at the corner of Market and Willow Streets and stood looking across at the platform of the Railroad Station, where a seedy individual in a grey sweater occupied himself with a painted tin chocolate and gum machine that stood against the station building. He had removed the front of the machine and was scooping chinking handfuls of change into the pocket of his sweater. He returned the front to its place, locked it with a click and jingle of keys, and picked up the long container he had removed for replenishment. He came across the street toward Mr. Gartner.

"Been a hot day a'ready, ain't it Abe?" The gentleman addressed as Abe jerked his head in reply and spat accurately over his shoulder into the gutter. His agency for the station candy machines gave him, over and above his combination news room and billiard parlor, an importance in his own eyes.

"Yeah. Any nooze?"

"Not much. Jase'll have a chance to get their place rented for the Battells now though."

"Who? Jase Duffit? Why?"

"Letter from a New York lady. Thinks she wants to live here. Askin' about proputty."

"Thasso? That's a queer one. Thinka wantin' here when yeh could live in N'York."

"What I thought. We-el, I guess I'll be gettin' home to supper. Goin' home yerself?"

"Yeah. It's after seven aint it. That six o'clock train

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makes me a busy time 'thout help. S'pose you'll be back here again workin' till all hours."

"Not to-night. Got another touch o' my asthmy. Kilkevin'll do the extra sortin'. We-el, I'll be movin', I guess. S'long Abe."

"S'long Jake. See ye to-morrow."

Mr. Gartner passed rather importantly down Willow Street, looking across at the Livery Stable. He waved with a loose gesture to Jackson Weil who sat just outside the door of the latter smoking a pipe and caressing a black-spotted carriage dog. He turned into Monument and crossed the street toward a decent white house with a small iron-fenced front yard.

Mr. Gartner found supper already upon the table and his wife, coming in from the kitchen, with flushed face and disordered hair, her hands disposing the latter's moist tendrils, sat down to help him to a veal chop and smoking baked beans. She began to discuss the salient features of the day's routine.

"Got a letter I got to take up to Jase Duffit," remarked Mr. Gartner, finally, after rolling his secret for a while luxuriously upon his mental palate. He produced it with that casualness that always lends such flavor to a matter of import.

"What's that?" returned his wife, halting mid-way in mastication. She looked at him with frank suspicion, the way of most indurated wives.

"Lady in New York wants to rent a furnished house here. References look good. Seems sort of high-toned. You know the Battells have been after Jase to rent their place if he could fer summer an' fall."

"Huh. My land, what's she want t' come here fer? How many of her is there?"

To this odd mathematical question Mr. Gartner returned simply:

"Self and maid."

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"Maid," sniffed Mrs. Gartner. "Maid, indeed." Which latter ejaculation seemed strikingly inferential.

"Well," she added, rising to clear away the plates and bring back saucers for the apple-sauce, "Some has them, I s'pose. New York must be a queer place. So full o' these transients. But what's my lady think she's goin' to do in Tupton, I wonder?"

"Do?" Mr. Gartner's tone expressed a mild surprise. "Do? Nothing. Why should she? Live here."

Mrs. Gartner vouchsafed a somewhat acrid smile in the general direction of the knitted dining-room motto.

"She'll find it dead. Dead enough." She said between mouthfuls of apple-sauce. "Guess she thinks she's comin' here fer peace and quiet. Plenty o' that. An' niggers. Let's see the letter," she added suddenly, a new acquisitive note in her voice.

Her husband drew an envelope from his inner breast pocket. "Careful of it," he warned. "Gotta show it to Jase."

Mrs. Gartner's only reply to this was a rather embittered stare which she meant to make dignified. She held the blue notepaper somewhat away from her and read it with her head turned slightly sideways and tilted. Her lips were primly drawn together.

"I don't know as we want her in Tupton," she remarked as she finished deciphering. "It smells," she added, sniffing. "Vi'lets."

"Well, what if it does? Jase wants to rent that house, don't he? And you can see by the way she writes she's a lady. (Mrs. Gartner interrupted at this point with another sardonic sniff.) See what she says about a quiet spot——"

"Why don't she go to the mountains? Don't she know it's hot as the hinges down here along in July?"

"Guess she don't. But what have you got against her, Ag? You don't even know her. Here, gimme that letter back!"

Mrs. Gartner returned it with a somewhat contemptuous

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flirt. "Adela Ventress," was all she would add, "Ain't it a name!" Mr. Gartner ignored this cryptic addition.

"Guess I'll go over to Jase's right now," he said, a trifle importantly, after a second or two. His wife made no reply but rose to clear away the dishes.

When Mr. Gartner returned an hour later he heard the creak of his wife's rocking on the porch as he stooped to unlatch the gate. A midge-infested arc-lamp on Willow near the Livery Stable threw jigging shadows from the young leafage of the trees. The lisp of his step as he came up the walk stopped the rocking. His shoes thumped on the steps. The other rocker, the one with the leather seat, complained of his weight. A slow creaking, now duo-toned began again.

"Jase say?" questioned Mrs. Gartner after a while in a a low voice.

"Thinks the Battell place might suit her. He'll write her to-morra."

"Warm, aint it?" His wife's voice was almost wistful. His own rocking stopped. Then, "Yeah," he said. "It's a warm evening." He began rocking again.

The minute, melodic sawing sound of an insect in the grass proceeded intermittently. Down Monument Street the Courthouse clock struck its faint half-hour chime. Voices came indistinguishably from Elm Street.

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CHAPTER V: TUPTON AND THE TEN

ONCE round the curve behind Meldon Ridge, with the Knob lifting into prominence above low rolling hills on your right, before the iron forefoot of the swaying train the land dipped into sunlight from the shadows between high slopes. At the risk of a weeping eye, if you craned from a clicked-up window on the right side of the train, the silver cincture of the Passamint River glittered full into view, and beyond it the red and white toy-box town set in its nest of green.

But the first you really saw of Tupton was the Jail. The further shore of the Passamint lifted an abrupt embankment crowned by old Court Street, and on the other side of old Court Street rose that high, brown, barred bastille. Churlishly it faced inward toward the town, its back to the river.

Nearer, as the train rumbled on the high trestled bridge, the eye overlooked Courthouse Square down Monument Street. Then, with a steady clanging from the engine's bell, the train slowed past Wilder's farm and the Poplar Street crossing, brazenly tolling its way through the heart of Tupton and past a solid block of old-fashioned red brick residences, upright as prim old ladies in lace and mitts, the cushioned stone stoops below their Corinthian-pilastered doorways set back from a clean and wide brick walk.

But if you watched Tupton approach from a window on the left-hand side of the train, no such portent as the Jail suddenly stabbed you in the eye. Beyond the silver eddies of the Passamint, there bending south and running west, slept the green pastures and the red and cream buildings of The Three Farms—Cripps', beyond the weeping wil-

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lows on the river-bank, Sayres', with the flashing weather-cock of a running horse, Wilder's furthest off; beyond them all the dim roofs of residences on Popular and Sycamore.

Northwest also rose the Hill, the yellow roof of the Institute gleaming over the trees behind the Axter Road; east of it the Hyde place with its strange Gothic tower, between them Judge Lindon's old mansion, white and sprawled. And for backdrop of the scene the pale spires of smoke from The Works still further north seemed phantom fingers weaving a perspicuous curtain of faint lemon and violet, that floated and veiled the further valley.

Thus the first two views of Tupton. The tracks of the Meldon Valley Railroad cleft the town in two like a sword.

The first settlers of that part of Pennsylvania were Scotch-Irish and German. The Scotch-Irish were bitterish Presbyterians. Isaiah Scott, Prothonotary of Meldon County, had entertained greasy Tuscarora and Shawnee sachems at dinner in the courthouse in Tupton's early years, dispensing cider and wine. Wolves from the lower slopes of the Blue Ridge had howled around the frontier town. As far back as 1760 a worthy settler named Ephraiam Axter had received by patent some three hundred acres that became known as Quarry Hill. That part of the country was found to be fairly rich in areas of iron ores and limestone. This Axter had later purchased three ore banks in North Mountain. He then took out a patent for some sixteen hundred acres including the land between the ore banks. Such was the rise of the present Meldon Iron Works that constituted the largest industry near Tupton. Far back a certain shrewd Adolphus Hyde had become sole owner.

Yet in spite of its iron works, Tupton had remained fairly obscure, while the town of Barrack Falls further north and the real shipping point for Hyde's manufactured iron had grown into a cheap, blatant, noisy young metropolis. Meanwhile the descendants of the original Scotch-Irish and German families of Tupton, with a strong infusion of Eng-

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lish stock, had replenished the earth in conservatism and strong provincial pride.

The town was small, the principal families traced back to the Revolution. Southeast of the town was a negro settlement in the region locally known as the Bottom. The principal residence section was now on the Northwest side of Market Street, along which ran the somewhat antiquated rolling-stock of the Meldon Railroad. Here Poplar, Sycamore and Ivy ran northwest from Market in parallel maple and chestnut-shaded lines. Market was some ninety feet wide, Poplar, Sycamore and Ivy at least sixty. Northeast of The Old Residence Block on the opposite side of Market was the Railroad Station. On this side of town Laurel Street ran straight north from the stone-parapeted vehicle bridge over the Passamint, to turn northeast across Oak, Elm, and Willow at the intersection of Oak and Monument. The large and ancient Presbyterian Church occupied a tree-shaded green at this point. The lane to the Bottom meandered off downhill from a point southeast of the church. On both sides, between the old residence block and the station, Market Street was lined with quite modern stores. There were other stores along Monument and Laurel. There was also a Memorial Library, and there was the historic Tupton Institute, which had never had more than one hundred pupils. The latter was a semi-colonial structure, with a yellow roof and a monstrosity of a cupola. It looked down upon the chief residence district of Tupton from the lower slope of The Hill.

Within the last twenty-five years a change had gradually come upon the town. Certain newer tradespeople had prospered. The descendants of more ancient tradespeople looked upon their inevitable advance in social standing with perplexity and suspicion. Manners had changed also, strange opinions were often heard in certain quarters. Deference to family and professional standing was felt to be going by the board.

That, at least, was the undercurrent of much of the con-

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versation in the Old Residence Block. The families of the Old Residence Block were intimate with each other since childhood. They comprised, on Market Street, the Brattles, the Corneliuses, the Jeremiah Mixters, the Uttersons, the Adolphus Frazees. In their high-stooped brick residences they formed the thin red line of Tupton's defence, the front line. Separated from them only by adjoining rear lawns, trim garden paths, berry bushes and, in several instances, a tall shady chestnut encircled near its base by a green wooden seat, the six corresponding residences on Monument Street might have been called the second line. Flanking these were the three houses facing Oak and the three facing Larch, namely the Burleys, the Syles, the Reynolds; the MacConliss's, the Vrooms, the Webbers. Against the invasion of questionable taste, odd manners, unconventionality, any new ideas, the old Residence Block presented a compactness of resistance comparable, in a military sense, only to that of the old-time British Square.

In the Old Residence Block life was primarily a matter of ritual. It still proceeded with a leisurely decorum. It acknowledged without unseemly question the pre-eminence of its fathers' gods. Whether this was manifested in the perpetual asseveration of Mr. Utterson, the retired lawyer, that "You will never change human nature, sir!" or in the exasperation of Jeremiah Mixter with the successes of woman suffrage; with Adolphus Frazee, the Railroad Official's staunch Republicanism and implacable hatred of Woodrow Wilson, with old General Brattle's passionate militarism or Dr. John Cornelius's impending apoplexy at any mention of a world-state, the governing principles remained the same.

True, the Monument Street phalanx was perhaps weakened by the presence of the young Harry Persons and the temperamental Rebecca Stone, but, after all, these younger folk were saplings of the same soil, seeded from equally venerable family trees. And they were insulated respectively, to mix a metaphor, by the Miss Babbitts and the Cravens, by Alexander Pennyfeather and Miss Sophia

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Crome. Besides, Harry Persons was a trusted protégé of Cephas Hyde, present lord of the Hill; the temperamental Rebecca Stone's great-grandfather had raised the Meldon Fencibles and his Revolutionary sword still hung in the hall. "These young people under our wing," as old General Brattle had been heard to refer to them with leonine rumbling, "are, after all,—ahem!—sound to the core." They were therefore generously permitted a somewhat lighter attitude toward life, they were indulged in a few harmless heresies.

It did not even matter that Rebecca Stone was known to peruse both Schopenhauer and Nietzche, and sometimes quoted openly and without shame from Bernard Shaw. True, at the very beginning of the war she had announced herself a pacifist, thereby giving General Brattle one of the shocks of his life, but she had shown her mettle eventually, having probably made more Red Cross bandages than any other woman in Tupton. True it irritated Adolphus Frazee that she seemed, in spite of everything, still to admire Wilson; it rubbed Dr. John Cornelius decidedly the wrong way that she would not admit the League of Nations to be the abhorrent sham he considered it. Nevertheless, she remained a Stone.

So the Ten of Tupton, despite immaterial inner differences, stood foursquare to every changing wind of doctrine. Within their portièred drawing-rooms and behind their bowed green and white wooden shutters they conserved the aristocratic social principle. By their edict alone all real amenities in intercourse with the other less fortunate inhabitants of the town were fostered and perpetuated. The smoke of their chimneys spiring bluely upward through the hushed evening must have been a delicious incense in the nostrils of the Most High.

They bowed the knee in two temples only, both gleaming sepulchrally white from the triangular Green faced by the houses on Monument Street. There the First Presbyterian and the Protestant Episcopal churches stood side by side. Between these two denominations there had existed feuds

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of old. To-day, however, in face of the invasion of "these tradespeople", all differences had been buried. The old residents were the principal pew-holders in both edifices, the largest donators in both to the salary of minister and rector and to the weekly collections, the staunch backbone of customary observance. Hardly one Sunday of the year saw any one of them missing from their ancient seats. To the devout in Tupton, and there were many, this was a continual source of edification and self-congratulation. With such a solid phalanx of respectability their rooted centre, they need certainly never fear for the moral tone of their town.

But there were also, alas, the outliers. Take Arthur Pollock, for instance. While he held, unquestionably, the regard of the first families and also came of old stock, he resided on Sycamore Street. His Emporium was certainly nothing against him. His fathers had founded it. As a general store it was rooted in the memory of all the old inhabitants. Pollock was also a Republican in sympathy, though not what could ever satisfy the high principles of Adolphus Frazee as a wholly loyal party man. He was too subject to eccentric outbursts of irascibility against what he denounced as "peculation" and "outrageous imbecility in office". This was applied principally, it must be admitted, to officials in the State capitol.

But then Pollock was a thorn in the flesh of those who sought to conserve that high tradition of manners dating from the period of the Civil War. Pollock was sometimes too outspoken, too brusque, too careless of the conventions. Certain of his stories in mixed gatherings had been thought in questionable taste. He lacked respect for a number of criteria of conduct essentially sacred to the Ten. He had upon occasion proved too rude and boisterous. This at least was the opinion of the women who upheld the social standards of the inner citadel, and their men, with a secret somewhat lugubrious regard for Pollock, outwardly at least concurred. At stag gatherings they greeted him more

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genially, but theirs after all was not the ball and sceptre of social office.

And if Arthur Pollock was an outlier, how much more so his brother-in-law, Dr. Charles Gedney. He was the recluse of the town. He had married one of the Cripps girls, as Martha, his late wife, was still referred to by some, an odd, saturnine woman who had experienced, it seemed, more than her share of family tragedy. She had not sought to mingle with the elect of the town, and, to tell the truth, after a few vague first advances, had not been sought after. Before the death of Arthur Pollock's wife these two families had kept a good deal to themselves. Twenty years ago the Gedney's eldest daughter, Gertrude, had disappeared from home and had never been heard from since. It had been the nine-days' wonder of the time.

To-day the relicts of both the House of Pollock and the House of Gedney were still asked to the various Tupton entertainments. They were not unkindly discussed by the arbiters of taste. The men were greeted by their first names by the men of the Ten. Dr. Gedney had, after all, been for many years one of the bulwarks of the Institute whither the few scions of the Ten had repaired for their earlier education before departing for boarding-school or college. But he and his wife had seemed to hide themselves away. After his daughter's disappearance and his wife's later death his younger growing adopted daughter came only gradually within cognizance of the first families.

Then Bessie Cripps Gedney, orphaned child of Martha's brother, had formed school friendships with young Betty Cornelius and young Laura Brattle. Mrs. Brattle and Mrs. Cornelius found her a well-behaved young person. They politely permitted the friendship. It remained in both cases, however, tinged with formality.

Aside from the outliers—and others who should be mentioned were the James Battells (whose home a Mrs. Ventress from New York had just rented for the summer), not to say Mrs. Ralph Harris the stoic of Sycamore Street, now

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last remaining evidence of her scattered family, her boys being prominent elsewhere in politics and industry—most of the underlings and tradespeople lived on the wrong side of town (in the Ten's opinion, at least,) infesting Ivy, Sycamore, and Poplar Streets, where both Arthur Pollock and Doctor Gedney happened to be so unfortunately situated. Moreover, the new mercantile class whose invasion the Old Residence Block so patricianly resisted, had, in many instances, blossomed forth with pleasant brand-new houses set in their own comfortable gardens. They had brought the raucous Victrola and the ubiquitous Ford to Tupton. Their young people formed their own chattering society. Some of them chewed gum, most of them indulged in slang, many of them forced their way into the hallowed Institute to receive their education.

They permeated the town like a not yet virulent pestilence. They quickened its life with the cheap and noisy. Their fathers made money and instituted new places of amusement, like turning the old Fair Grounds into a Midway Park, like starting the Star Theatre, a moving-picture "palace" on Willow Street, like proclaiming a new young people's tennis club beyond Ivy Street. Was not the dignified if dilapidated tan-bark court under the weeping willow trees in a corner of the Institute Grounds enough in all conscience? These young people in the summer buzzed about Tupton in white flannel trousers, and striped sport skirts, in sport shirts, sneakers, and georgette blouses, to the scandalisation by fits of giggles and gawkish horseplay of the sedate older residents. They went often on unchaperoned picnics into the country, and they danced eternally on their porches to the most rackety music. They destroyed the evening hush of the streets and their observance of the Sabbath was a disgrace—or rather, their lack of observance. So much, then, for the patricians and the *hoi polloi*.

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CHAPTER VI: UNCLE ARTHUR THINKS NOTHING OF IT

"I THINK *nothing* of it!" said Uncle Arthur Pollock stoutly, rising slightly on his toes as he stood braced before the empty fireplace. He thrust out his lower lip in a way that made his chin recede. His sack suit (in much need of pressing) was dark blue with the faintest thread of red in it. It had been made to order. Uncle Arthur's clothes *had* to be made to order. Across one of the gray corduroy waistcoats he affected ran a heavy red-gold watch-chain.

He was huge. He had a scar that ran across his left cheek from under the eye over to opposite the lobe of the ear. He had large stick-out oyster-shaped ears that were always fiery-red and gave an aggressive, attentive aspect to his face. He had a wide mouth drooping at the corners. His countenance was ruddy and round. His sandy hair was thinned and fragile, yet stood up with remarkable wiriness across the arc of his pate, from ear to ear. His mustache was sandy, brief and irregular as if bitten. One eyebrow was perpetually higher than the other and the eye under it slightly bloodshot and strained. For Uncle Arthur was astigmatic and would not admit it. He also would not wear glasses. He thought *nothing* of them. That was his favourite expression.

You may be surprised and a bit perturbed by Uncle Arthur. All I can say is that he did really have that effect upon people. He wore his clothes baggilly, yet they were never old clothes. He had partially retired from business, but still kept a watchful eye on his famous store, a drygoods store, the oldest and largest in Tupton. He had not got his scar shooting wildebeeste or struggling with catamounts

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on the brinks of terrific precipices. He had got it by falling downstairs at the age of thirty-seven and hitting his face on a brass stair-tread. It had cut his face open and he had been in bed for two months. Partly shock and partly because Uncle Arthur was a person who liked to be petted while he damned it. Nowadays he spent most of his time thinking *nothing* of it and watching the hennery life of some gamecocks he kept in a wired enclosure in his back-yard on Poplar Street, though he paid a visit to the store every day also. His house on Poplar Street was an enormous affair, the oldest house in Tupton. It was full of glass cases of stuffed things, birds, small animals, even reptiles—stuffed. Cases of butterflies. That is, those were in the library and drawing-room on the lower floor.

Dr. Gedney, who sat regarding his brother-in-law, was a man of about fifty-five, Uncle Arthur's age. He was as neat as wax. Black clothes, a black bow tie, very white linen, a prominent nose long and earnest, and small, black eyes that bored like gimlets. Pronounced chin and a high white forehead. Black hair—a black mustache.

There was a pervasive eccentricity about Uncle Arthur and a sort of sunset glow. His spasmodic irascibilty and overwhelming scorn of most ideas hardly mitigated this effect. They only made th sunset somewhat stormy. But the black and white of Dr ıey—for his countenance was of a fine clear pallor acc ted by jetty mustache and hair—conferred mo rue . ulness, if more astringency. Where Uncle Arthur presence was pervasive but ambiguous, Dr. Gedney's had the compactness and accentuation of an exclamation point and the frosty stillness of a winter's night. His lips were thinly chiselled—his teeth white and regular—where Uncle Arthur's were extraordinarily crooked and coloured like old ivory. Till he spoke you would have taken Dr. Gedney for a man of infinite determination. When he did speak, however, his voice had the still-born quality of the utterance of a very shy man who talks little and only to his intimates. It rustled dry and un-

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certainly. His eyes changed when he spoke. They dimmed. They dreamed. When roused, however, he became astonishingly staccato.

"Now, Arthur," said Dr. Gedney. "Don't adopt that insufferable attitude. There isn't the slightest reason to suppose——."

Uncle Arthur unexpectedly flirted a large blue and white handkerchief from some bulge of his person and snorted into it. His slightly bulbous nose became even redder.

"—— *nothing* of it!" said Uncle Arthur from behind his handkerchief. "Positively nothing!"

Bessie had been watching all this from the ottoman in front of a book-case on the opposite side of the room, the book-case that had the big luggable books in it. She was also looking at the illustrations of Le Sage's "Gil Blas". She would look and then watch. She wondered what Uncle Arthur was "nothing"ing about this time. Her mind was not on her elders.. A thin sunbrowned child of sixteen, black hair still tied behind with a dark blue ribbon. A cross-barred blue gingham dress. Black stockings and sandals. Large dark eyes with long lashes, elfishly bright. A slightly uptilted nose, a short upper lip and a mouth the colour and texture of a roseleaf. Very much the amusing child still, in many ways, but with a mind of her own.

All that there were of the [illegible]eys now—the Doctor and Bessie—and Bessie was re[illegible] Cripps. Then there was Annie, in the kitchen, cook, [illegible]usemaid and nurse of old.

"There isn't the slightest reason to suppose," went on Dr. Gedney, in his rustly voice, "that this Mrs. Ventress could possibly be a bad influence upon anybody. The drawings Bessie has shown me are excellent, I think, and she is most interested. I think my plan an admirable one."

Bessie was not listening.

"At your age!" puffed Uncle Arthur, for answer. "Don't fool yourself, Charley!"

"Arthur," said the Doctor in an even fainter voice than

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before, "I had thought better of your intelligence. Well, we'll talk about something else."

In the pause that followed, Bessie heard the hall clock ticking. She realised that this murmuring on the part of her adopted father and explosiveness on the part of her uncle must have been just another of the only semi-intelligible wrangles between older people. It touched her consciousness only as blurry noise that distracted her a little from contemplation of the pictures. Her father and her uncle were always arguing something—usually something that seemed to her incredibly uninteresting. Meanwhile Dr. Gedney, rising to get his briar pipe from the table, discovered her presence.

"Doing, Bessie?" he asked.

"A—ah," Bessie exhaled in a soft sigh.

"Reading," with a comfortable unction.

" 'Gil Blas", said the Doctor, looking. "Too old for you." To him she remained about eight years old.

"Fun," returned Bessie succinctly.

"Damn—excuse me," said the Doctor stumbling on the rug. "Where's my pipe?"

"On the Bible," said Bessie without looking up. She turned a page.

The Doctor refilled his pipe at the green bowl on the table and made some pother about getting it to draw. Bessie, regarding him from behind his back, thought him a straight and nice-looking father. She felt sorry for him, in the way all women do.

Uncle Arthur was running his large hands through his hair. He felt somewhat put upon by the discovery of Bessie. Nevertheless——.

"Phryne has four chicks, Bess!" he boomed.

"Oh, *no!*" said Bessie, raising a flushed beaming countenance from the estimation of a wood-cut. "Oh, I *must* see them!"

Outside the house the late spring afternoon was still bright. The low-ceilinged long brown room, with its two

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book-cluttered tables and its walls of glass-doored book-cases, was mellowed with late light. Uncle Arthur, before the empty fireplace, seemed a romantic, somewhat Falstaffian figure.

"To-morrow," he announced, "come round in the morning. They're in the brood coop. I must go. Charley, *do not be a fool.* I've told you my reasons."

He glared, yet with a certain benignancy, upon Dr. Gedney.

"Oh, it's settled," said the Doctor's wispy voice that so belied his authoritative face. "But you'll see."

"Well—great hippopotami!" ejaculated Uncle Arthur despairingly, and departed with rolling gait from the room. In the hall and before the hall-door slammed, Bessie heard him conclude with superb abnegation,

"As for me—I utterly refuse to be a party to it. I repeat that I think absolutely *nothing* of it—nothing whatever!"

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CHAPTER VII: BESSIE, SOLUS

THE design, topped by two reclining cupids who supported a medallion with plump shoulders and faced outwards to confront two balancing butterflies, enclosed what looked like a black slate. On it, in white lettering, stood the words:

HERE
IS INTERRED
THE SOUL
OF THE LICENTIATE
PETER GARCIAS

This volume of the picaresque adventures of the Sage of Santillane was Smollett's translation illustrated by Jean Gigoux. The book was backed with tooled almost olive green leather. It had leather corners. Its boards were covered inside and out with that streaked paper used for legal volumes, looking as if bands of color had run on a stained glass pane and congealed in irregular layers of drops. Blue, yellow and green, on an ox-blood foundation.

Aqui est a encerranda et alma del Pedro Garcias! Bessie pondered the finding of the hundred ducats in the leathern purse under the tombstone. One hundred ducats—the soul of the Licentiate! Yet the adventures were said to contain "moral instructions." The idea that Alain René Le Sage had also made a paraphrastic translation of the Letters of Aristenetus delighted her. She had such a wholly dim and glamorous idea of what it might all be about. "The Devil on Two Sticks." That was another name that intrigued her. Le Sage's character was said to have been "truly amiable". This pleased her especially. She smiled to herself.

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At the top of Book IV an engraving of Gil Blas reclining on a couch and reading in a long-paged narrow book was, to her mind, extremely well drawn. His face, with its sparse square beard and aristocratic mustache, his romantic cambric shirt with open collar and deep rolled-back cuffs, became, as she gazed, the very face and habiliments of her Ideal. The hands were well-treated, the left especially, in a position that showed the draughtsman's knowledge of anatomy. On the other hand, how monstrously insipid was the picture of the jade Laura on the page preceding! What an idiot mouth. If *that* were a coquette! She was so much more convincing in the thumbnail panel, the various faces of her "crowd of relations" so amusing. But living with the seven deadly sins must, somehow, have been quite too treacly. Gil Blas had surely exhibited his good sense by revolting from it.

The pages of the book were rough and yellowed, and the queer pictures seemed rooted in the text. In modern books they were so detached, so unlike the people one imagined. These seemed to fit better, even at their worst. How many initial letters, tailpieces, thumbnail decorations and vignettes there were! That seemed the only way a book *should* be illustrated—in some such apparently impromptu fashion. The "go-to," formal sort of pictures, were the worst; posy, attitudinizing, simpering, losing all grace and motion of line, hard and wooden. That sketch of the horrible face of the crone Leonarda on page fifty-eight, just a bare outline, but worth a hundred Spencerian-haired Lauras. That was it, such drawing was like those flourishy eagles with sheaves of arrows in their claws that went with advertisements of courses in "expert penmanship." Ugh! How she hated Spencerian handwriting!

Bessie suddenly raised her eyes from the page and wondered what Uncle Arthur's "reasons" had been. They must have been divulged before her wraithlike entry into the living room. She came even farther awake from the book upon her knee and her fascination with its illustrations.

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What was her father's plan? Was he going to do what she asked? She shoved the big leather-backed book into its opening in the shelf and remained on her knees for a moment, thinking. Then she dusted her hands, scrambled up, and went slimly into the hall, arms at sides, thin hands pointing slightly behind her. She tilted on her toes and peered. There was no one in the rather dim hall. Her father had gone into his study (which should have been the parlor) on the other side of the newel-posted stair-foot. There he would be refilling his pipe from the hammered brass bowl at the large table. He would be doing it by the open window that looked out on the side yard where the leaves of the apple-tree glittered in the six o'clock sunlight.

The hall was dim and somewhat dingy. Bessie climbed the stairs. Oh, that was it—of course! Uncle Arthur didn't want Mrs. Ventress to teach her drawing. She wondered again as to his "reasons".

Bessie's room had a marble mantlepiece over a now empty coal grate. The China Animals were its chief feature. These were mainly an array of those fascinating families one could procure some twenty years ago in small brown pasteboard boxes stuffed with cotton. They had been bequeathed her by her cousin, Slade Breckinridge, an editor on the *Colosseum Magazine* in New York. Slade's typhoid at the age of six, when he had lost his curls and the gnome-like voice of his emaciated convalescence had croaked at his mother, "Pack boxes!"—was the primary association these tiny purplish spaniels, bears and deer evoked. Bessie had been told it many times by Aunt Sally. Then there was the "gentle face" dog (first *g* hard, as in gutter). He had abided with sundry chippings and regluings from the same precarious past. There were the See, Hear and Speak-No-Evil Monkeys, in their bright jackets, given her by Slade on his return from that trip to San Francisco. There was Eunice, the china cow, forever at grazing gaze with a slight cast in her eye and one foreleg gone at the knee. Eunice had an incision in her back. She was a bank. The Chinaness of the

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Animals gleamed across Bessie's bedroom. Dimity curtains fluttered at her window. The woolly brown hearthrug under the black tin shield of the grate was often a seat more favoured than either the cretonned wicker basket-chair or the gray corduroy cushioned window-seat. She dove now for the hearthrug and sat quiet upon it, in the dusk, under the China Animals, nursing her knees.

She breathed a name all to herself, after a moment. Her thoughts were in another house entirely. Her expression was dreamy and benign. *"Adela!"* said Bessie. *"Adela!"* And then, with enormous satisfaction, "I simply didn't know there *were* such people!" There was a pleasant sympathetic silence. Bessie cupped her chin in both palms. "She gives you the impression," pronounced the young pythoness solemnly and finally, "of—of a great unhappy grandeur!"

But even by this last remark the China Animals seemed to remain quite unimpressed.

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CHAPTER VIII: "THE GIRL WHO WAS BURNED UP"

DR. GEDNEY did not practice medicine. He had been an instructor at the Tupton Institute. Now he had relapsed into doing nothing much, so far as Tupton could discover. He had written several school-books. He was now engaged, it was rumoured, upon a history of Meldon County. His father had been old Judge Gedney of the Circuit Court. Dr. Gedney himself had a Litt.D. from a small New England college.

His wife's death had driven a naturally recluse temperament even more in upon itself, that and the loss of his daughter. Yet there were those who let it be understood that they considered him better off since his wife had died. "She was certainly very peculiar," Mrs. Harris, the stoic of Sycamore Street, would often allow, folding stout, work-creased hands in her ample lap. Mrs. Harris spoke little and was rarely moved toward censure. She knew what she knew about life, but she kept it mostly to herself. She irradiated benignancy. Hers was a strong character that had endured much without embitterment. But when she said that about Mrs. Gedney, now fifteen years deceased. her eyes narrowed a little and her mouth was firm.

Miss Sophia Crome, whose house was the last in the Old Residence Block at the corner of Monument and Oak, was of the opposite opinion. But then Miss Crome would doubtless have found the personality of John Calvin wholly charming. She was a relic—was Miss Crome. At least, that was what Uncle Arthur called her: "That relic!" He never got any farther in his description. It was Miss Crome's opinion that Mrs. Gedney had been "a most upright

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woman". She said that with an unctuous pursing of dry lips. Her steel spectacles glimmered like the eyes of a cat as she said it.

As for Dr. Gedney, he rarely saw any neighbours. He read, wrote, or pottered about his yard during the day. He read with or without Bessie at home in the evenings. He and Bessie usually had dinner at the Pollocks' once a week. Several times a week he and Uncle Arthur would play checkers together, visiting each other's homes. But most of his life was submerged in that other life afforded by books. He read chiefly philosophy and history (pastimes unbewildering, even fascinating, to his retentive memory and analytical mind). Contemporary affairs, the affairs of the town of Tupton, made little impression upon him. He poked his pipe full of rather rank tobacco, with one long, lean forefinger, and went on reading.

Bessie went in and out of his house as she listed. He usually knew why she was out—at school, at the gymnasium, at the library, at the Brattles, at the Corneliuses. It was one of those places. She was a dear child, dark and quiet and quite fond of reading. With a head in the air of her own. No need to worry about her. Arthur worried entirely too much. Arthur was so fussy. Fussiness ran in that family. Dr. Gedney smiled a sad, haunted smile. Ineffably silly of Arthur, this last business. . . .

Bessie's father was sitting in a large leather chair by the window. The seams of the back of it had burst and the black horsehair stuffing was apparent. He arose now, in his absent-minded way, and went over to his desk by the south wall. After some fumbling he produced from a side-drawer an oblong box of unpainted tin. There was more fumbling with his key-ring, which he wore at the end of his watch-chain instead of a watch. His watch he always carried without fob or other attachment in his upper vest-pocket on the right-hand side. That was typical. Yet he had not broken the crystal once in ten years. That also was typical. He was an unhandy man though. The key stuck in the lock

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of the box and he made some pother getting it open. He kept saying something softly under his breath. As a matter of record the words were, "Oh, dear, oh, dear. . . ." They were his habitual method of expression of his sense of minor annoyances.

In the box, with some other papers, was a small packet secured by a rubber band. Beside this band were traces of another, dark vestiges of rubber. The packet had at one time been put away for a long period. The paper in the packet proved somewhat discoloured and faded as Dr. Gedney unfolded it. He removed the outer sheet and spread it out upon his knee. It was the first picture she had ever drawn.

Three remarkable individuals could be distinguished in the foreground. The hat of one floated in a detached manner half an inch above its head. The arms and legs were excessively spidery. The hands were equipped with at least ten skeleton fingers arranged like rays. The faces of the figures were noseless and their eyes and mouths were large wobbly circles. This gave them an aspect of breathless surprise. Their hair was a voluminous huddle of scratchy lines. To their left a house half their height and even narrower than any one bulging body blazed merrily with carmine water-color flames. In the midst of it stood "The Girl Who Was Burned Up". She was twice as tall as the house and bore a certain weird facial resemblance to a cat. Her writhing mien expressed considerable discomfort. This effort at art was entitled "The Flight of the Family". The printing necessary to display the slogan properly wandered all over the bottom half of the large sheet of ruled tablet paper. The printed letters were enormous and askew.

Dr Gedney had seated himself with the tin box in his lap. He studied the picture without smiling. His eyes wandered from it and came to rest on a large framed photograph in the shadow of the southeast corner of the room. It had been done by that man in Barrack Falls.

Gertrude had looked nothing like her. It was astonishing

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that any mother and daughter could have so little resembled each other. Martha had always taken a good photograph. The querulous lines about the mouth had been retouched away in the photograph. The hard glint in the eyes was not apparent. The bearing of the sitter possessed dignity. The thin aquiline nose alone gave indication in its curve of nostril of that remorseless, accipitrine will. Yet the mouth was smiling a little. The pose was placid. Martha's figure had always been rather graceful. Her head, with its now absurdly out-of-date bonnet, was held high. Her burnt-umber hair had its decided fluffiness. Her large hands clutched each other in her lap. It was an example of photography before the days of softening artistic shadows and blurred outlines and backgrounds. Simply a likeness. A very good likeness—in everything but the essentials of character. A proud and resolute woman, you would have said, but possessed also of wisdom and kindliness. That was how most of them had seen her, he supposed. Yes, he supposed so.

It was strange about Martha. Martha had always acted from the first as if, if he had not actually ever been unfaithful to her, he were, nevertheless, always upon the verge of being so. This attitude was implicit. It had been conveyed for many years by an accumulation of eyebrow-raisings, acrid half-sentences, slight shrugs, impatient sighs, hours of taciturn surveillance. It had been emphasized by furious unexplained tearfulness that ceased as swiftly as it came, typhoons of unreasonableness that whirled and passed. Completely erased, so far as Martha was concerned, but not from his own consciousness. Phenomena of woman nature. These exhibitions did not occur, either, at those times when all women are overwrought and strange to themselves. They were not the result of illness or poor health. They were simply habitual. In self-defense, Dr. Gedney had come to disregard them entirely. He could never hope to unravel the devious tangle of reasoning—or was it merely perverted instinct—which precipitated them upon him. He had tried

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