His Family

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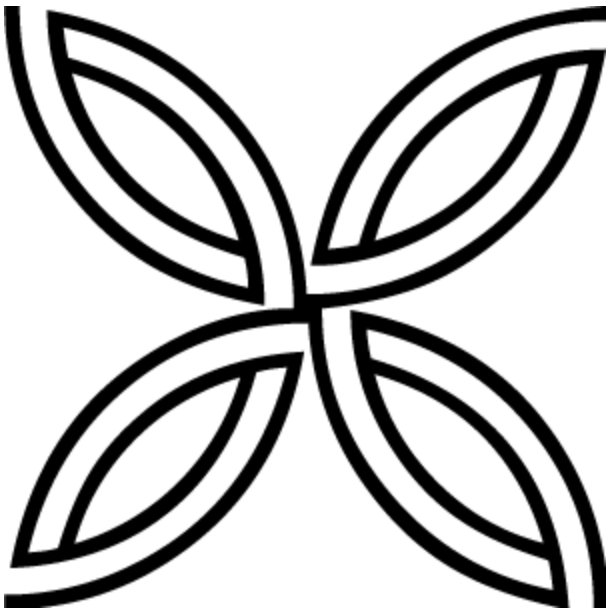

CHAPTER I

He was thinking of the town he had known. Not of *old* New York—he had heard of that from old, old men when he himself had still been young and had smiled at their garrulity. He was thinking of a *young* New York, the mighty throbbing city to which he had come long ago as a lad from the New Hampshire mountains. A place of turbulent thoroughfares, of shouting drivers, hurrying crowds, the crack of whips and the clatter of wheels; an uproarious, thrilling town of enterprise, adventure, youth; a city of pulsing energies, the center of a boundless land; a port of commerce with all the world, of stately ships with snowy sails; a fascinating pleasure town, with throngs of eager travellers hurrying from the ferry boats and rolling off in hansom cabs to the huge hotels on Madison Square. A city where American faces were still to be seen upon all its streets, a cleaner and a kindlier town, with more courtesy in its life, less of the vulgar scramble. A city of houses, separate homes, of quiet streets with rustling trees, with people on the doorsteps upon warm summer evenings and groups of youngsters singing as they came trooping by in the dark. A place of music and romance. At the old opera house downtown, on those dazzling evenings when as a boy he had ushered there for the sake of hearing the music, how the rich joy of being alive, of being young, of being loved, had shone out of women's eyes. Shimmering satins, dainty gloves and little jewelled slippers, shapely arms and shoulders, vivacious movements, nods and smiles, swift glances, ripples, bursts
of laughter, an exciting hum of voices. Then silence, sudden darkness—and music, and the curtain. The great wide curtain slowly rising....
But all that had passed away.

Roger Gale was a rugged heavy man not quite sixty years of age. His broad, massive features were already deeply furrowed, and there were two big flecks of white in his close-curling, grayish hair. He lived in a narrow red brick house down on the lower west side of the town, in a neighborhood swiftly changing. His wife was dead. He had no sons, but three grown daughters, of whom the oldest, Edith, had been married many years. Laura and Deborah lived at home, but they were both out this evening. It was Friday, Edith's evening, and as was her habit she had come from her apartment uptown to dine with her father and play chess. In the living room, a cheerful place, with its lamp light and its shadows, its old-fashioned high-back chairs, its sofa, its book cases, its low marble mantel with the gilt mirror overhead, they sat at a small oval table in front of a quiet fire of coals. And through the smoke of his cigar Roger watched his daughter.

Edith had four children, and was soon to have another. A small demure woman of thirty-five, with light soft hair and clear blue eyes and limbs softly rounded, the contour of her features was full with approaching maternity, but there was a decided firmness in the lines about her little mouth. As he watched her now, her father's eyes, deep set and gray and with signs of long years of suffering in them, displayed a grave whimsical wistfulness. For by the way she was playing the game he saw how old she thought him. Her play was slow and absent-minded, and there came long periods when she did not make a move. Then she would recall herself and look up with a little affectionate smile that showed she looked upon him as too heavy with his age to have noticed her small lapses.

He was grimly amused at her attitude, for he did not feel old at all. With that whimsical hint of a smile which had grown to be a part of him, he tried various moves on the board to see how far he could go without interrupting her reveries. He checkmated her, re-lit his cigar and waited

until she should notice it. And when she did not notice, gravely he moved back his queen and let the game continue. How many hundreds of games, he thought, Edith must have played with him in the long years when his spirit was dead, for her now to take such chances. Nearly every Friday evening for nearly sixteen years.

Before that, Judith his wife had been here. It was then that the city had been young, for to Roger it had always seemed as though he were just beginning life. Into its joys and sorrows too he had groped his way as most of us do, and had never penetrated deep. But he had meant to, later on. When in his busy city days distractions had arisen, always he had promised himself that sooner or later he would return to this interest or passion, for the world still lay before him with its enthralling interests, its beauties and its pleasures, its tasks and all its puzzles, intricate and baffling, all some day to be explored.

This deep zest in Roger Gale had been bred in his boyhood on a farm up in the New Hampshire mountains. There his family had lived for many generations. And from the old house, the huge shadowy barn and the crude little sawmill down the road; from animals, grown people and still more from other boys, from the meadows and the mountain above with its cliffs and caves and forests of pine, young Roger had discovered, even in those early years, that life was fresh, abundant, new, with countless glad beginnings. At seventeen he had come to New York. There had followed hard struggles in lean years, but his rugged health had buoyed him up. And there had been genial friendships and dreams and explorations, a search for romance,
the strange glory of love, a few furtive ventures that left him dismayed. But though love had seemed sordid at such times it had brought him crude exultations. And if his existence had grown more obscure, it had been somber only in patches, the main picture dazzling still. And still he had been just making starts.

He had ventured into the business world, clerking now at this, now at that, and always looking about him for some big opportunity. It had come and he had seized it, despite the warnings of his friends. What a wild adventure it had been a bureau of news clippings, a business new and unheard of but he had been sure that here was growth, he had worked at it day and night, and the business widening fast had revealed long ramifications which went winding and stretching away into every phase of American life. And this life was like a forest, boundless and impenetrable, up-springing, intertwining. How much could *he* ever know of it all?

Then had come his marriage. Judith's family had lived long in New York, but some had died and others had scattered until only she was left. This house had been hers, but she had been poor, so she had leased it to some friends. It was through them he had met her here, and within a few weeks he had fallen in love. He had felt profound disgust for the few wild oats he had sown, and in his swift reaction he had overworshipped the girl, her beauty and her purity, until in a delicate way of her own she had hinted that he was going too far, that she, too, was human and a passionate lover of living, in spite of her low quiet voice and her demure and sober eyes.

And what beginnings for Roger now, what a piling up of intimate joys, surprises, shocks of happiness. There had come disappointments, too, sudden severe little checks from his wife which had brought him occasional questionings. This love had not been quite *all* he had dreamed, this woman not so ardent. He had glimpsed couples here and

there that set him to imagining more consuming passions. Here again he had not explored very deep. But he had dismissed regrets like these with only a slight reluctance. For if they had settled down a bit with the coming of their children, their love had grown rich in sympathies and silent

understandings, in humorous enjoyment of their funny little daughters' chattering like magpies in the genial old house. And they had looked happily far ahead. What a woman she had been for plans. It had not been all smooth sailing. There had come reverses in business, and at home one baby, a boy, had died. But on they had gone and the years had swept by until he had reached his forties. Absorbed in his growing business and in his thriving family, it had seemed to Roger still as though he were just starting out. But one day, quite suddenly, the house had become a strange place to him with a strange remote figure in it, his wife. For he had learned that she must die. There had followed terrible weeks. Then Judith had faced their disaster. Little by little she had won back the old intimacy with her husband; and through the slow but inexorable progress of her ailment, again they had come together in long talks and plans for their children. At this same chessboard, in this room, repeatedly she would stop the game and smiling she would look into the future. At one such time she had said to him,

"I wonder if it won't be the same with the children as it has been with us. No matter how long each one of them lives, won't their lives feel to them unfinished like ours, only just beginning? I wonder how far they will go. And then their children will grow up and it will be the same with them. Unfinished lives. Oh, dearie, what children all of us are."

He had put his arm around her then and had held her very tight. And feeling the violent trembling of her husband's fierce revolt, slowly bending back her
head and looking up into his eyes she had continued steadily:

"And when you come after me, my dear, oh, how hungry I shall be for all you will tell me. For you will live on in our children's lives."

And she had asked him to promise her that.

But he had not kept his promise. For after Judith's dying he

had felt himself terribly alone, with eternity around him, his wife slipping far away. And the universe had grown stark and hard, impersonal, relentless, cold. A storm of doubts had attacked his faith. And though he had resisted long, for his faith in God had been rooted deep in the mountains of New England, in the end it had been wrenched away, and with it he had lost all hope that either for Judith or himself was there any existence beyond the grave. So death had come to Roger's soul. He had been deaf and blind to his children. Nights by the thousand spent alone. Like a gray level road in his memory now was the story of his family. When had his spirit begun to awaken? He could not tell, it had been so slow. His second daughter, Deborah, who had stayed at home with her father when Laura had gone away to school, had done little things continually to rouse his interest in life. Edith's winsome babies had attracted him when they came to the house. Laura had returned from school, a joyous creature, tall and slender, with snapping black eyes, and had soon made her presence felt. One day in the early afternoon, as he entered the house there had burst on his ears a perfect gale of laughter; and peering through the portières he had seen the dining-room full of young girls, a crew as wild as Laura herself. Hastily he had retreated upstairs. But he had enjoyed such glimpses. He had liked to see her fresh pretty gowns and to have her come in and kiss him good-night.

Then had come a sharp heavy jolt. His business had suffered from long neglect, and suddenly for two anxious weeks he had found himself facing bankruptcy. Edith's husband, a lawyer, had come to his aid and together they had pulled out of the hole. But he had been forced to mortgage the house. And this had brought to a climax all the feelings of guiltiness which had so long been stirring within him over his failure to live up to the promise he had made his wife.

And so Roger had looked at his children.

And at first to his profound surprise he had had it forced upon him that these were three grown women, each equipped with her own peculiar feminine traits and desires, the swift accumulations of lives which had expanded in a city that had reared to the skies in the many years of his long sleep. But very slowly, month by month, he had gained a second impression which seemed to him deeper and more real. To the eye they were grown women all, but inwardly they were children still, each groping for her happiness and each held back as he had been, either by checks within herself or by the gay distractions of the absorbing city. He saw each of his daughters, parts of himself. And he remembered what Judith had said: "You will live on in our children's lives." And he began to get glimmerings of a new immortality, made up of generations, an endless succession of other lives extending into the future.

Some of all this he remembered now, in scattered fragments here and there. Then from somewhere far away a great bell began booming the hour, and it roused him from his revery. He had often heard the bell of late. A calm deep-toned intruder, it had first struck in upon his attention something over two years ago. Vaguely he had wondered about it. Soon he had found it was on the top of a tower a little to the north, one of the highest pinnacles of this tumultuous modern town. But the bell was not tumultuous. And as he listened it seemed to say, "There is still time, but you have not long."

Edith, sitting opposite him, looked up at the sound with a stir of relief. Ten o'clock. It was time to go home.

"I wonder what's keeping Bruce," she said. Bruce was still in his office downtown. As a rule on Friday evenings he came with his wife to supper here, but this week he had some new business on hand. Edith was vague about it. As she tried to explain she knitted her brows and said that Bruce was working too hard. And her father grunted assent.

"Bruce ought to knock off every summer," he said, "for a good solid month, or better two. Can't you bring him up to the mountains this year?" He referred to the old New Hampshire home which he had kept as a summer place. But Edith smiled at the idea.

"Yes, I could bring him," she replied, "and in a week he'd be perfectly crazy to get back to his office again." She compressed her lips. "I know what he needs—and we'll do it some day, in spite of him."

"A suburb, eh," her father said, and his face took on a look of dislike. They had often talked of suburbs.

"Yes," his daughter answered, "I've picked out the very house." He threw at her a glance of impatience. He knew what had started her on this line. Edith's friend, Madge Deering, was living out in Morristown. All very well, he reflected, but her case was not at all the same. He had known Madge pretty well. Although the death of her husband had left her a widow at twenty-nine, with four small daughters to bring up, she had gone on determinedly. Naturally smart and able, Madge was always running to town, keeping up with all her friends and with every new fad and movement there, although she made fun of most of them. Twice she had taken her girls abroad. But Edith was quite different. In a suburb she would draw into her house and never grow another inch. And Bruce, poor devil, would commute and take work home from the office. But Roger couldn't tell her that.

"

I'd be sorry to see you do it," he said. "I'd miss you up in the mountains."

"Oh, we'd come up in the summer," she answered. "I wouldn't miss the mountains for worlds!"

Then they talked of summer plans. And soon again Edith's smooth pretty brows were wrinkling absorbedly. It was hard in her planning not to be sure whether her new baby would come in May or early June. It was only the first of

April now. While she talked her father watched her. He liked her quiet fearlessness in facing the ordeal ahead. Into the bewildering city he felt her searching anxiously to find good things for her small brood, to make every dollar count, to keep their little bodies strong, to guard their hungry little souls from many things she thought were bad. Of all his daughters, he told himself, she was the one most like his wife.

While she was talking Bruce came in. Of medium height and a wiry build, his quick kindly smile of greeting did not conceal the fine tight lines about his mouth and between his eyes. His small trim moustache was black, but his hair already showed streaks of gray although he was not quite thirty-eight, and as he lit a cigarette his right hand twitched perceptibly.

Bruce Cunningham had married just after he left law school. He had worked in a law office which took receiverships by the score, and through managing bankrupt concerns by slow degrees he had made himself a financial surgeon. He had set up an office of his own and was doing splendidly. But he worked under fearful tension. Bruce had to deal with bankrupts who had barely closed their eyes for weeks, men half out of their minds from the strain, the struggle to keep up their heads in those angry waters of finance which Roger vaguely pictured as a giant whirlpool. Though honest enough in his own affairs, Bruce showed a genial relish for all the tricks of the savage world which was as the breath to his nostrils. And at times he appeared so wise and keen he made Roger feel like a child. But again it was Bruce who seemed the child. He seemed to be so naïve at times, and Edith had him so under her thumb. Roger liked to hear Bruce's stories of business, when Edith would let her husband talk. But this she would not often do, for she said Bruce needed rest at night. She reproved him now for staying so late, she wrung from him the fact that he'd had no supper.

"Well, Bruce," she exclaimed impatiently, "now isn't that just like you? You're going straight home—that's where you're going—"
"To be fed up and put to bed," her husband grumbled good-naturedly. And while she made ready to bundle him off he turned to his father-in-law.
"What do you think's my latest?" he asked, and he gave a low chuckle which Roger liked. "Last week I was a brewer, to-day I'm an engineer," he said. "Can you beat it? A building contractor. Me." And as he smoked his cigarette, in laconic phrases he explained how a huge steel construction concern had gone to the wall, through building skyscrapers "on spec" and outstripping even the growth of New York. "They got into court last week," he said, "and the judge handed me the receivership. The judge and I have been chums for years. He has hay fever—so do I."
"Come, Bruce, I'm ready," said his wife.
"I've been in their office all day," he went on. "Their general manager was stark mad. He hadn't been out of the office since last Sunday night, he said. You had to ask him a question and wait—while he looked at you and held onto his chair. He broke down and blubbered—the poor damn fool—he'll be in Matteawan in a week—"
"You'll be there yourself if you don't come home," broke in Edith's voice impatiently.
"And out of that poor devil, and out of the mess his books are in, I've been learning engineering!"
He had followed his wife out on the steps. He turned back with a quick appealing smile:
"Well, good-night—see you soon—"
"Good-night, my boy," said Roger. "Good luck to the engineering."
"Oh, father dear," cried Edith, from the taxi down below. "Remember supper Sunday night—"
"I won't forget," said Roger.

He watched them start off up the street. The night was soft, refreshing, and the place was quiet and personal. The house was one of a dozen others, some of red brick and some of brown stone, that stood in an uneven row on a street but a few rods in length, one side of a little triangular park enclosed by a low iron fence, inside of which were a few gnarled trees and three or four park benches. On one of these benches his eye was caught by the figure of an old woman there, and he stood a moment watching her, some memory stirring in his mind. Occasionally somebody passed. Otherwise it was silent here. But even in the silence could be felt the throes of change; the very atmosphere seemed charged with drastic things impending. Already the opposite house line had been broken near the center by a high apartment building, and another still higher rose like a cliff just back of the house in which Roger lived. Still others, and many factory lofts, reared shadowy bulks on every hand. From the top of one an enormous sign, a corset pictured forth in lights, flashed out at regular intervals; and from farther off, high up in the misty haze of the night, could be seen the gleaming pinnacle where hour by hour that great bell slowly boomed the time away. Yes, here the old was passing. Already the tiny parklet was like the dark bottom of a pit, with the hard sparkling modern town towering on every side, slowly pressing, pressing in and glaring down with yellow eyes. But Roger noticed none of these things. He watched the old woman on the bench and groped for the memory she had stirred. Ah, now at last he had it. An April night long, long ago, when he had sat where she was now, while here in the house his wife's first baby, Edith, had begun her life.... Slowly he turned and went inside.

CHAPTER II

Roger's hearing was extremely acute. Though the room where he was sitting, his study, was at the back of the house, he heard Deborah's key at the street door and he heard the door softly open and close.

"Are you there, dearie?" Her voice from the hallway was low; and his answer, "Yes, child," was in the same tone, as though she were with him in the room. This keen sense of hearing had long been a peculiar bond between them. To her father, Deborah's voice was the most distinctive part of her, for often as he listened the memory came of her voice as a girl, unpleasant, hurried and stammering. But she had overcome all that. "No grown woman," she had declared, when she was eighteen, "has any excuse for a voice like mine." That was eleven years ago; and the voice she had acquired since, with its sweet magnetic quality, its clear and easy articulation, was to him an expression of Deborah's growth. As she took off her coat and hat in the hall she said, in the same low tone as before,

"Edith has been here, I suppose—"

"Yes—"

"I'm so sorry I missed her. I tried to get home early, but it has been a busy night."

Her voice sounded tired, comfortably so, and she looked that way as she came in. Though only a little taller than Edith, she was of a sturdier build and more decided features. Her mouth was large with a humorous droop and her face rather broad with high cheekbones. As she put her soft black hair up over her high forehead, her father noticed her birthmark, a faint curving line of red
running up from between her eyes. Imperceptible as a rule, it showed when she was tired. In the big school in the tenements where she had taught for many years, she gave

herself hard without stint to her work, but she had such a good time through it all. She had a way, too, he reflected, of always putting things in their place. As now she came in and kissed him and sank back on his leather lounge with a tranquil breath of relief, she seemed to be dropping school out of her life.

Roger picked up his paper and continued his reading. Presently they would have a talk, but first he knew that she wanted to lie quite still for a little while. Vaguely he pictured her work that night, her class-room packed to bursting with small Jews and Italians, and Deborah at the blackboard with a long pointer in her hand. The fact that for the last two years she had been the principal of her school had made little impression upon him.

And meanwhile, as she lay back with eyes closed, her mind still taut from the evening called up no simple class-room but far different places—a mass meeting in Carnegie Hall where she had just been speaking, some schools which she had visited out in Indiana, a block of tenements far downtown and the private office of the mayor. For her school had long curious arms these days.

"Was Bruce here too this evening?" she asked her father presently. Roger finished what he was reading, then looked over to the lounge, which was in a shadowy corner.

"Yes, he came in late." And he went on to tell her of Bruce's "engineering." At once she was interested. Rising on one elbow she questioned him good-humoredly, for Deborah was fond of Bruce.

"Has he bought that automobile he wanted?"

"No," replied her father. "Edith said they couldn't afford it."

"Why not?"

"

This time it's the dentist's bills. Young Betsy's teeth aren't straightened yet—and as soon as she's been beautified they're going to put the clamps on George."

"Poor Georgie," Deborah murmured. At the look of pain and disapproval on her father's heavy face, she smiled quietly to herself. George, who was Edith's oldest and the worry of her days, was Roger's favorite grandson. "Has he been bringing home any more sick dogs?"
"No, this time it was a rat—a white one," Roger answered. A glint of dry relish appeared in his eyes. "George brought it home the other night. He had on a pair of ragged old pants."
"What on earth—"
"He had traded his own breeches for the rat," said Roger placidly.
"No! Oh, father! Really!" And she sank back laughing on the lounge.
"His school report," said Roger, "was quite as bad as ever."
"Of course it was," said Deborah. And she spoke so sharply that her father glanced at her in surprise. She was up again on one elbow, and there was an eager expression on her bright attractive face. "Do you know what we're going to do some day? We're going to put the rat in the school," Deborah said impatiently. "We're going to take a boy like George and study him till we think we know just what interests him most. And if in his case it's animals, we'll have a regular zoo in school. And for other boys we'll have other things they really want to know about. And we'll keep them until five o'clock—when their mothers will have to drag them away." Her father looked bewildered.
"But arithmetic, my dear."
"You'll find they'll have learned their arithmetic without knowing it," Deborah answered.
"Sounds a bit wild," murmured Roger. Again to his
mind came the picture of hordes of little Italians and Jews.
"My dear, if I had your children to teach, I don't think I'd add a zoo," he said. And with a breath of discomfort he turned back to his reading. He knew that he ought to question her, to show an interest in her work. But he had a

deep aversion for those millions of foreign tenement people, always shoving, shoving upward through the filth of their surroundings. They had already spoiled his neighborhood, they had flowed up like an ocean tide. And so he read his paper, frowning guiltily down at the page. He glanced up in a little while and saw Deborah smiling across at him, reading his dislike of such talk. The smile which he sent back at her was half apologetic, half an appeal for mercy. And Deborah seemed to understand. She went into the living room, and there at the piano she was soon playing softly. Listening from his study, again the feeling came to him of her fresh and abundant vitality. He mused a little enviously on how it must feel to be strong like that, never really tired.

And while her father thought in this wise, Deborah at the piano, leaning back with eyes half closed, could feel her tortured nerves relax, could feel her pulse stop throbbing so and the dull aching at her temples little by little pass away. She played like this so many nights. Soon she would be ready for sleep.

After she had gone to bed, Roger rose heavily from his chair. By long habit he went about the house trying the windows and turning out lights. Last he came to the front door. There were double outer doors with a ponderous system of locks and bolts and a heavy chain. Mechanically he fastened them all; and putting out the light in the hall, in the darkness he went up the stairs. He could so easily feel his way. He put his hand lightly, first on the foot of the banister, then on a curve in it halfway up, again on the sharper curve at the top and last on the knob of his bedroom door. And it was as though these guiding objects came out to meet him like old friends.

In his bedroom, while he slowly undressed, his glance was caught by the picture upon the wall opposite his bed, a

little landscape poster done in restful tones of blue, of two herdsmen and their cattle far up on a mountainside in the hour just before the dawn, tiny clear-cut silhouettes against the awakening eastern sky. So immense and still, this birth of the day—the picture always gave him the feeling of life everlasting. Judith his wife had placed it there.

From his bed through the window close beside him he looked up at the cliff-like wall of the new apartment building, with tier upon tier of windows from which murmurous voices dropped out of the dark: now soft, now suddenly angry, loud; now droning, sullen, bitter, hard; now gay with little screams of mirth; now low and amorous, drowsy sounds. Tier upon tier of modern homes, all overhanging Roger's house as though presently to crush it down.

But Roger was not thinking of that. He was thinking of his children—of Edith's approaching confinement and all her anxious hunting about to find what was best for her family, of Bruce and the way he was driving himself in the unnatural world downtown where men were at each other's throats, of Deborah and that school of hers in the heart of a vast foul region of tenement buildings swarming with strange, dirty little urchins. And last he thought of Laura, his youngest daughter, wild as a hawk, gadding about the Lord knew where. She even danced in restaurants! Through his children he felt flowing into his house the seething life of this new town. And drowsily he told himself he must make a real effort, and make it soon, to know his family better. For in spite of the storm of long ago which had swept away his faith in God, the feeling had come to him of late that somewhere, in some manner, he was to meet his wife again. He rarely tried to think

this out, for as soon as he did it became a mere wish, a hungry longing, nothing more. So he had learned to let it lie, deep down inside of him. Sometimes he vividly saw her face. After all, who could tell? And she would want to hear

of her children. Yes, he must know them better. Some day soon he must begin.

Suddenly he remembered that Laura had not yet come home. With a sigh of discomfort he got out of bed and went downstairs, re-lit the gas in the hallway, unfastened the locks and the chain at the door. He came back and was soon asleep. He must have dozed for an hour or two. He was roused by hearing the front door close and a big motor thundering. And then like a flash of light in the dark came Laura's rippling laughter.

CHAPTER III

On the next evening, Saturday, while Roger ate his dinner, Laura came to sit with him. She herself was dining out. That she should have dressed so early in order to keep him company had caused her father some surprise, and a faint suspicion entered his mind that she had overdrawn at the bank, as she had the last time she sat with him like this. Her manner certainly was a bit strange.

But Roger put the thought aside. Whatever she wanted, Laura was worth it. In a tingling fashion he felt what a glorious time she was having, what a gorgeous town she knew. It was difficult to realize she was his own daughter, this dashing stranger sitting here, playing idly with a knife and caressing him with her voice and her eyes. The blue evening gown she was wearing to-night (doubtless not yet paid for) made her figure even more supple and lithe, set off her splendid bosom, her slender neck, her creamy skin. Her hair, worn low over her temples, was brown with just a tinge of red. Her eyes were black, with gleaming lights; her lips were warm and rich, alive. He did not approve of her lips. Once when she had kissed him Roger had started slightly back. For his daughter's lips were rouged, and they had reminded him of his youth. He had asked her sister to speak to her. But Deborah had told him she did not care to speak to people in that way—"especially women—especially sisters," she had said, with a quiet smile. All very well, he reflected, but somebody ought to take Laura in hand.

She had been his favorite as a child, his pet, his tiny daughter. He remembered her on his lap like a kitten. How she had liked to cuddle there. And she had liked to
bite his hand, a curious habit in a child. "I hurt daddy!" He could still recollect the gay little laugh with which she said that, looking up brightly into his face.

And here she was already grown, and like a light in the sober old house, fascinating while she disturbed him. He liked to hear her high pitched voice, gossiping in Deborah's room or in her own dainty chamber chatting with the adoring maid who was dressing her to go out. He loved her joyous thrilling laugh. And he would have missed her from the house as he would have missed Fifth Avenue if it had been dropped from the city. For the picture Roger had formed of this daughter was more of a symbol than of a girl, a symbol of the ardent town, spending, wasting, dancing mad. It was Laura who had kept him living right up to his income.

"Where are you dining to-night?" he asked.

"With the Raymonds." He wondered who they were. "Oh, Sarah," she added to the maid. "Call up Mrs. Raymond's apartment and ask what time is dinner to-night."

"Are you going to dance later on?" he inquired.

"Oh, I guess so," she replied. "On the Astor Roof, I think they said—"

Her father went on with his dinner. These hotel dances, he had heard, ran well into Sunday morning. How Judith would have disapproved. He hesitated uneasily.

"I don't especially care for this dancing into Sunday," he said. For a moment he did not look up from his plate. When he did he saw Laura regarding him.

"Oh, do you mind? I'm sorry. I won't, after this," she answered. And Roger colored angrily, for the glint of amusement in Laura's mischievous black eyes revealed quite unmistakably that she regarded both her father and his feeling for the Sabbath as very dear and quaint and old. Old? Of course he seemed old to her , Roger thought indignantly. For what was Laura but a child? Did she ever think of anything except having a good time? Had

she ever stopped to think out her own morals, let alone anyone else's? Was she any judge of what was old—or of who was old? And he determined then and there to show

her he was in his prime. Impatiently he strove to remember the names of her friends and ask her about them, to show a keen lively interest in this giddy gaddy life she led. And when that was rather a failure he tried his daughter next on books, books of the most modern kind. Stoutly he lied and said he was reading a certain Russian novel of which he had heard Deborah speak. But this valiant falsehood made no impression whatever, for Laura had never heard of the book.

"I get so little time for reading," she murmured. And meanwhile she was thinking, "As soon as he finishes talking, poor dear, I'll break the news."

Then Roger had an audacious thought. He would take her to a play, by George! Mustering his courage he led up to it by speaking of a play Deborah had seen, a full-fledged modern drama all centered upon the right of a woman "to lead her own life." And as he outlined the story, he saw he had caught his daughter's attention. With her pretty chin resting on one hand, watching him and listening, she appeared much older, and she seemed suddenly close to him.

"How would you like to go with me and see it some evening?" he inquired.

"See what, my love?" she asked him, her thoughts plainly far away; and he looked at her in astonishment:

"That play I've just been speaking of!"

"Why, daddy, I'd love to!" she exclaimed.

"When?" he asked. And he fixed a night. He was proud of himself. Eagerly he began to talk of opening nights at Wallack's. Roger and Judith, when they were young, had been great first nighters there. And now it was Laura who drew him out, and as he talked on she

seemed to him to be smilingly trying to picture it all....

"Now I'd better tell him," she thought.

"Do you remember Harold Sloane?" she asked a little strangely.

"No," replied her father, a bit annoyed at the interruption.
"Why—you've met him two or three times—"
"Have I?" The queer note in her voice made him look up. Laura had risen from her chair.
"I want you to know him—very soon." There was a moment's silence. "I'm going to marry him, dad," she said. And Roger looked at her blankly. He felt his limbs beginning to tremble. "I've been waiting to tell you when we were alone," she added in an awkward tone. And still staring up at her he felt a rush of tenderness and a pang of deep remorse. Laura in love and settled for life! And what did he know of the affair? What had he ever done for her? Too late! He had begun too late! And this rush of emotion was so overpowering that while he still looked at her blindly she was the first to recover her poise. She came around the table and kissed him softly on the cheek. And now more than ever Roger felt how old his daughter thought him.
"Who is he?" he asked hoarsely. And she answered smiling,
"A perfectly nice young man named Sloane."
"Don't, Laura—tell me! What does he do?"
"He's in a broker's office—junior member of the firm, Oh, you needn't worry, dear, he can even afford to marry me ."
They heard a ring at the front door.
"There he is now, I think," she said. "Will you see him? Would you mind?"
"See him? No!" her father cried.
"But just to shake hands," she insisted. "You needn't talk or say a word. We've only a moment, anyway." And she went swiftly out of the room.
Roger rose in a panic and strode up and down. Before he could recover himself she was back with her man, or rather her boy—for the fellow, to her father's eyes, looked ridiculously young. Straight as an arrow, slender, his dress suit irreproachable, the chap nevertheless was more than a dandy. He looked hard, as though he trained, and his

smooth and ruddy face had a look of shrewd self-reliance. So much of him Roger fathomed in the indignant cornered glance with which he welcomed him into the room.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Gale—glad to see you again, sir!" Young Sloane nervously held out his hand. Roger took it and muttered something. For several moments, his mind in a whirl, he heard their talk and laughter and his own voice joining in. Laura seemed enjoying herself, her eyes brimming with amusement over both her victims. But at last she had compassion, kissed her father gaily and took her suitor out of the room.

Soon Roger heard them leave the house. He went into his study, savagely bit off a cigar and gripped his evening paper as though he meant to choke it. The maid came in with coffee. "Coffee? No!" he snapped at her. A few moments later he came to his senses and found himself smoking fast and hard. He heartily damned this fellow Sloane for breaking into the family and asking poor Laura to risk her whole life—just for his own selfish pleasure, his whim! Yes, "whim" was the very word for it! Laura's attitude, too! Did she look at it seriously? Not at all! Quite plainly she saw her career as one long Highland fling and dance, with this Harry boy as her partner! Who had he danced with in his past? The fellow's past must be gone into, and at once, without delay!

Here indeed was a jolt for Roger Gale, a pretty shabby trick of fate. This was not what he had planned, this was a little way life had of jabbing a man with surprises. For months he had been slowly and comfortably feeling

his way into the lives of his children, patiently, conscientiously. But now without a word of warning in popped this young whipper-snapper, turning the whole house upside down! Another young person to be known, another life to be dug into, and with pick and shovel too! The job was far from pleasant. Would Deborah help him? Not at all. She believed in letting people alone—a devilish

easy philosophy! Still, he wanted to tell her at once, if only to stir her up a bit. He did not propose to bear this alone! But Deborah was out to-night. Why must she always be out, he asked, in that infernal zoo school? But no, it was not school to-night. She was dining out in some café with a tall lank doctor friend of hers. Probably she was to marry him!

"I'll have that news for breakfast!" Roger smote his paper savagely. Why couldn't Laura have waited a little? Restlessly he walked the room. Then he went into the hall, took his hat and a heavy stick which he used for his night rambles, and walked off through the neighborhood. It was the first Saturday evening of Spring, and on those quiet downtown streets he met couples strolling by. A tall thin lad and a buxom girl went into a cheap apartment building laughing gaily to themselves, and Roger thought of Laura. A group of young Italians passed, humming "Trovatore," and it put him in mind of the time when he had ushered at the opera. Would Laura's young man be willing to usher? More like him to tango down the aisle!

He reached Washington Square feeling tired but even more restless than before. He climbed to the top of a motor 'bus, and on the lurching ride uptown he darkly reflected that times had changed. He thought of the Avenue he had known, with its long lines of hansom cabs, its dashing broughams and coupés with jingling harness, livened footmen, everything sprucely up-to-date. How the horses had added to the town. But they were gone,

and in their place were these great cats, these purring motors, sliding softly by the 'bus. Roger had swift glimpses down into lighted limousines. In one a big rich looking chap with a beard had a dressy young woman in his arms. Lord, how he was hugging her! Laura would have a motor like that, kisses like that, a life like that! She was the kind to go it hard! Ahead as far as he could see was a dark rolling torrent of cars, lights gleaming by the thousand. A hubbub of gay voices, cries and little shrieks of laughter mingled

with the blare of horns. He looked at huge shop windows softly lighted with displays of bedrooms richly furnished, of gorgeous women's apparel, silks and lacy filmy stuffs. And to Roger, in his mood of anxious premonition, these bedroom scenes said plainly,

"O come, all ye faithful wives! Come let us adore him, and deck ourselves to please his eye, to catch his eye, to hold his eye! For marriage is a game these days!"

Yes, Laura would be a spender, a spender and a speeder too! How much money had he, that chap? And damn him, what had he in his past? How Roger hated the very thought of poking into another man's life! Poking where nobody wanted him! He felt desperately alone. To-night they were dancing, he recalled, not at a party in somebody's home, but in some flashy public place where girls of her kind and fancy women gaily mixed together! How mixed the whole city was getting, he thought, how mad and strange, gone out of its mind, this city of his children's lives crowding in upon him!

CHAPTER IV

He breakfasted with Deborah late on Sunday morning. He had come down at the usual hour despite his long tramp of the previous night, for he wanted to tell her the news and talk it all out before Laura came down—because Deborah, he hadn't a doubt, with her woman's curiosity had probed deep into Laura's affairs in the many long talks they had had in her room. He had often heard them there. And so, as he waited and waited and still his daughter did not come, Roger grew distinctly annoyed; and when at last she did appear, his greeting was perfunctory:

"What kept you out so late last night?"

"Oh, I was having a very good time," said Deborah contentedly. She poured herself some coffee. "I've always wanted," she went on, "to see Laura really puzzled—downright flabbergasted. And I saw her just like that last night."

Roger looked up with a jerk of his head:

"You and Laura—together last night?"

"Exactly—on the Astor Roof." At her father's glare of astonishment a look of quiet relish came over her mobile features. Her wide lips twitched a little. "Well, why not?" she asked him. "I'm quite a dancer down at school. And last night with Allan Baird—we were dining together, you know—he proposed we go somewhere and dance. He's a perfectly awful dancer, and so I held out as long as I could. But he insisted and I gave in, though I much prefer the theater."

"Well!" breathed Roger softly. "So you hoof it with the rest!" His expression was startled and intent. Would
he ever get to know these girls? "Well," he added with a sigh, "I suppose you know what you're about."