THE WORLD OF CHANCE

W. D. HOWELLS

The World Of Chance

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

The World Of Chance, W. D. Howells
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849657567

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

CONTENTS:

I.

From the club where the farewell dinner was given him, Ray went to the depot of the East & West Railroad with a friend of his own age, and they walked up and down the platform talking of their lives and their loves, as young men do, till they both at once found themselves suddenly very drowsy. They each pretended not to be so; his friend made a show of not meaning to leave him till the through express should come along at two o'clock and pick up the sleeping-car waiting for it on the side track; and Ray feigned that he had no desire to turn in, but would much rather keep walking and talking.

They got rid of each other at last, and Ray hurried aboard his sleeper, and plunged into his berth as soon as he could get his coat and boots off. Then he found himself very wakeful. The soporific first effect of the champagne had passed, but it still sent the blood thumping in his neck and pounding in his ears as he lay smiling and thinking of the honor that had been done him, and the affection that had been shown him by his fellow-townsmen. In the reflected light of these the future stretched brightly before him. He scarcely felt it a hardship any more that he should be forced to leave Midland by the business change which had thrown him out of his place on the Midland Echo, and he certainly did not envy the friend who had just parted from him, and who was going to remain with the new owners. His mind kept, in spite of him, a sort of grudge toward the Hanks Brothers who had bought the paper, and who had thought they must reduce the editorial force as a first step towards making the property pay. He could not say that they had treated him unfairly or unkindly; they had been

very frank and very considerate with him; but he could not conceal from himself the probability that if they had really appreciated him they would have seen that it would be a measure of the highest wisdom to keep him. He had given the paper standing and authority in certain matters; he knew that; and he smiled to think of Joe Hanks conducting his department. He hoped the estimation in which the dinner showed that his fellow-citizens held him, had done something to open the eyes of the brothers to the mistake they had made; they were all three at the dinner, and Martin Hanks had made a speech expressive of regard and regret which did not reconcile Ray to them. He now tried to see them as benefactors in disguise, and when he recalled the words of people who said that they always thought he was thrown away on a daily paper, he was willing to acknowledge that the Hankses had probably, at least, not done him an injury. He had often been sensible himself of a sort of incongruity in using up in ephemeral paragraphs, and even leading articles, the mind-stuff of a man who had published poems in the Century Bric-à-brac and Harper's Drawer, and had for several years had a story accepted by the Atlantic, though not yet printed. With the manuscript of the novel which he was carrying to New York, and the four or five hundred dollars he had saved from his salary, he felt that he need not undertake newspaper work at once again. He meant to make a thorough failure of literature first. There would be time enough then to fall back upon journalism, as he could always do.

He counted a good deal upon his novel in certain moods. He knew it had weak points which he was not able to strengthen because he was too ignorant of life, though he hated to own it; but he thought it had some strong ones too; and he believed it would succeed if he could get a publisher for it.

He had read passages of it to his friend, and Sanderson had praised them. Ray knew he had not entered fully into

the spirit of the thing, because he was merely and helplessly a newspaper mind, though since Ray had left the Echo, Sanderson had talked of leaving it too, and going on to devote himself to literature in New York. Ray knew he would fail, but he encouraged him because he was so fond of him; he thought now what a good, faithful fellow Sanderson was. Sanderson not only praised the novel to its author, but he celebrated it to the young ladies. They all knew that Ray had written it, and several of them spoke to him about it; they said they were just dying to see it. One of them had seen it, and when he asked her what she thought of his novel, in the pretense that he did not imagine she had looked at the manuscript, it galled him a little to have her say that it was like Thackeray; he knew he had imitated Thackeray, but he feigned that he did not know; and he hoped no one else would see it. She recognized traits that he had drawn from himself, and he did not like that, either; in the same way that he feigned not to know that he had imitated Thackeray, he feigned not to know that he had drawn his own likeness. But the sum of what she said gave him great faith in himself, and in his novel. He theorized that if its subtleties of thought and its flavors of style pleased a girl like her, and at the same time a fellow like Sanderson was taken with the plot, he had got the two essentials of success in it. He thought how delicately charming that girl was; still he knew that he was not in love with her. He thought how nice girls were, anyway; there were lots of perfectly delightful girls in Midland, and he should probably have fallen in love with some of them if it had not been for that long passion of his early youth, which seemed to have vastated him before he came there. He was rather proud of his vastation, and he found it not only fine, but upon the whole very convenient, to be going away heart-free.

He had no embarrassing ties, no hindering obligations of any kind. He had no one but himself to look out for in

seeking his fortune. His father, after long years of struggle, was very well placed in the little country town which Ray had come from to Midland; his brothers had struck out for themselves farther west; one of his sisters was going to be married; the other was at school. None of them needed his help," or was in anywise dependent upon him. He realized, in thinking of it all, that he was a very lucky fellow; and he was not afraid, but he should get on if he kept trying, and if he did his best, the chances were that it would be found out. He lay in his berth, with a hopeful and flattered smile on his lips, and listened to the noises of the station: the feet on the platforms; the voices, as from some disembodied life; the clang of engine bells; the jar and clash and rumble of the trains that came and went, with a creaking and squealing of their slowing or starting wheels, while his sleeper was quietly side-tracked, waiting for the express to arrive and pick it up. He felt a sort of slight for the town he was to leave behind; a sort of contemptuous fondness; for though it was not New York, it had used him well; it had appreciated him, and Ray was not ungrateful. Upon the whole, he was glad that he had agreed to write those letters from New York which the Hanks Brothers had finally asked him to do for the Echo. He knew that they had asked him under a pressure of public sentiment, and because they had got it through them at last that other people thought he would be a loss to the paper. He liked well enough the notion of keeping the readers of the Echo in mind of him; if he failed to capture New York, Midland would always be a good point to fall back upon. He expected his novel to succeed, and then he should be independent. But till then, the five dollars a week which the Hanks Brothers proposed to pay him for his letters would be very convenient, though the sum was despicable in itself. Besides, he could give up the letters whenever he liked. He had his dreams of fame and wealth, but he knew very well that they were dreams,

and he was not going to kick over his basket of glass till they had become realities.

A keen ray from one of the electric moons depending from the black roof of the depot suddenly pierced his window at the side of his drawn curtain; and he felt the car jolted backward. He must have been drowsing, for the express had come in unknown to him, and was picking up his sleeper. With a faint thrill of homesickness for the kindly town he was leaving, he felt the train pull forward and so out of its winking lamps into the night. He held his curtain aside to see the last of these lights. Then, with a luxurious sense of helplessness against fate, he let it fall; and Midland slipped back into the irrevocable past.

II.

The next evening, under a rich, mild October sky, the train drew in towards New York over a long stretch of trestlework spanning a New Jersey estuary. Ray had thriftily left bis sleeper at the station where he breakfasted, and saved the expense of it for the day's journey by taking an ordinary car. He could be free with his dollars when he did not suppose he might need them; but he thought he should be a fool to throw one of them away on the mere self-indulgence of a sleeper through to New York, when he had no use for it more than halfway. He experienced the reward of virtue in the satisfaction he felt at having that dollar still in his pocket; and he amused himself very well in making romances about the people who got on and off at different points throughout the day. He read a good deal in a book he had brought with him, and imagined a review of it. He talked with passengers who shared his seat with him, from time to time. He ate ravenously at the station where the train stopped twenty minutes for dinner, and he took little supernumerary naps during the course of the afternoon, and pieced out the broken and abbreviated slumbers of the night From the last of these naps he woke with a sort of formless alarm, which he identified presently as the anxiety he must naturally feel at drawing so near the great, strange city which had his future in keeping. He was not so hopeful as he was when he left Midland; but he knew he had really no more cause now than he had then for being less so.

The train was at a station. Before it started, a brakeman came in and called out in a voice of formal warning: "This

train express to Jersey City. Passengers for way stations change cars. This train does not stop between here and Jersey City."

He went out and shut the door behind him, and at the same time a young woman with a baby in her arms jumped from her seat and called out, " Oh, dear, what did he say? "

Another young woman, with another baby in her arms, rose and looked round, but she did not say anything. She had the place in front of the first, and their two seats were faced, as if the two young women were travelling together. Ray noted, with the interest that he felt in all young women as the elements both of love and of literature, that they looked a good deal alike, as to complexion and feature. The distraction of the one who rose first seemed to communicate itself to her dull, golden-brown hair, and make a wisp of it come loose from the knot at the back of her head, and stick out at one side. The child in her arms was fretful, and she did not cease to move it to and fro and up and down, even in the panic which brought her to her feet. Her demand was launched at the whole earful of passengers, but one old man answered for all:

" He said, this train doesn't stop till it gets to Jersey City."

The young woman said, " Oh! " and she and the other sat down again, and she stretched across the fretful child which clung to her, and tried to open her window. She could not raise it, and the old man who had answered her question lifted it for her. Then she sank back in her seat, and her sister, if it was her sister, leaned forward, and seemed to whisper to her. She put up her hand and thrust the loosened wisp of her hair back into the knot. To do this she gave the child the pocketbook which she seemed to have been holding, and she did not take it away again. The child stopped fretting, and began to pull at its plaything to get it open; then it made aimless dabs with it at the back of the car seat and at its mother's face. She moved her head patiently from side to side to escape the blows; and the

child entered with more zest into the sport, and began to laugh and strike harder. Suddenly, mid-way of the long trestlework, the child turned towards the window and made a dab at the sail of a passing sloop. The pocketbook flew from its hand, and the mother sprang to her feet again with a wail that filled the car.

" Oh, what shall I do! He's thrown my pocketbook out of the window, and it's got every cent of my money in it. Oh, couldn't they stop the train? "

The child began to cry. The passengers all looked out of the windows on that side of the aisle; and Ray could see the pocketbook drifting by in the water. A brakeman whom the young woman's lamentation had called to the rescue, passed through the car with a face of sarcastic compassion, and spoke to the conductor entering from the other end. The conductor shook his head; the train kept moving slowly on. Of course it was impossible and useless to stop. The young women leaned forward and talked anxiously together, as Ray could see from his distant seat; they gave the conductor their tickets, and explained to him what had happened; he only shook his head again.

When he came to get Ray's ticket, the young fellow tried to find out something about them from him.

" Yes, I guess she told the truth. She had all her money, ten dollars and some change, in that pocketbook, and of course she gave it to her baby to play with right by an open window. Just like a woman! They're just about as Jit as babies to handle money. If they had to earn it, they'd be different. Some poor fellow's week's work was in that pocketbook, like as not. They don't look like the sort that would have a great deal of money to throw out of the window, if they were men."

" Do you know where they're going? " Ray asked. " Are they going on any further? "

" Oh, no. They live in New York. 'Way up on the East Side somewhere."

" But how will they get there with those two babies? They can't walk."

The conductor shrugged. "Guess they'll have to try it."

" Look here! " said Ray. He took a dollar note out of his pocket, and gave it to the conductor. " Find out whether they've got any change, and if they haven't, tell them one of the passengers wanted them to take this for car fares. Don't tell them which one."

" All right," said the conductor.

He passed into the next car. When he came back Ray saw him stop and parley with the young women. He went through the whole train again before he stopped for a final word with Ray, who felt that he had entered into the poetry of his intentions towards the women, and had made these delays and detours of purpose. He bent over Ray with a detached and casual air, and said:

" Every cent they had was in that pocket-book. Only wonder is they hadn't their tickets there, too. They didn't want to take the dollar, but I guess they had to. They live 'way up on Third Avenue about Hundred and First Street; and the one that gave her baby her money to hold looks all played out. They couldn't have walked it. I told 'em the dollar was from a lady passenger. Seemed as if it would make it kind of easier for 'em."

" Yes, that was right," said Ray.

III.

When they stopped in Jersey City, Kay made haste out of the car to see what became of his beneficiaries, and he followed closely after them, and got near them on the ferry-boat They went forward out of the cabin and stood among the people at the bow who were eager to get ashore first They each held her heavy baby, and silently watched the New York shore, and scarcely spoke.

Ray looked at it too, with a sense of the beauty struggling through the grotesqueness of the huge panorama, and evoking itself somehow from the grossest details. The ferry-boats coming and going; the great barges with freight trains in sections on them; the canal-boats in tow of the river steamers; the shabby sloops slouching by with their sails half-filled by the flagging breeze; the ships lying at anchor in the stream, and wooding the shore with their masts, which the coastwise steamboats stared out of like fantastic villas, all window-shutters and wheel-houses; the mean, ugly fronts and roofs of the buildings beyond, and hulking high overhead in the further distance in vast bulks and clumsy towers, the masses of those ten-storied edifices which are the necessity of commerce and the despair of art, all helped to compose the brutal and stupid body of the thing, whose soul was collectively expressed in an incredible picturesqueness. -Ray saw nothing amiss in it. This agglomeration of warring forms, feebly typifying the ugliness of the warring interests within them, did not repulse him. He was not afraid. He took a new grip of the travelling-bag where he had his manuscript, so that he should not be parted from it for a moment till it went into

some publisher's keeping. He would not trust it to the trunk which he had checked at Midland, and which he now recognized among the baggage piled on a truck near him. He fingered the outside of his bag to make sure by feeling its shape that his manuscript was all right within. All the time he was aware of those two young women, each with her baby in her arms, which they amused with various devices, telling them to look at the water, the craft going by, and the horses in the wagon-way of the ferry-boat The children fretted, and pulled the women's hair, and clawed their hats; and the passengers now and then looked censoriously at them. From time to time the young women spoke to each other spiritlessly. The one whose child had thrown her pocketbook away never lost a look of hopeless gloom, as she swayed her body half round and back, to give some diversion to the baby. Both were pretty, but she had the paleness and thinness of young motherhood; the other, though she was thin too, had the fresh color and firm texture of a young girl; she was at once less tragic and more serious than her sister, if it was her sister.

When she found Ray gazing fixedly at her, she turned discreetly away, after a glance that no doubt took in the facts of his neat, slight, rather undersized person; his regular face, with its dark eyes and marked brows; his straight fine nose and pleasant mouth; his sprouting black moustache, and his brown tint, flecked with a few browner freckles.

He was one of those men who have no vanity concerning their persons; he knew he was rather handsome, but he did not care; his mind was on other things. When he found those soft woman-eyes lingering a moment on him he had the wish to please their owner, of course, but he did not think of his looks, or the effect they might have with her. He fancied knowing her well enough to repeat poetry to her, or of reading some favorite author aloud with her, and making her sympathize in his admiration of the book. He

permitted his fancy this liberty because, although he supposed her married, his fancy safely operated their intellectual intimacy in a region as remote from experience as the dreamland of sleep. She and her sister had both a sort of refinement; they were ladies, he felt, although they were poorly dressed, and they somehow did not seem as if they had ever been richly dressed. They had not the New Yorkeress air; they had nothing of the stylishness which Ray saw in the other women about him, shabby or splendid; their hats looked as if they had been trimmed at home, and their simple gowns as if their wearers had invented and made them up themselves, after no decided fashion, but after a taste of their own, which he thought good. He began to make phrases about them to himself, and he said there was something pathetically idyllic about them. The phrase was indefinite, but it was sufficiently clear for his purpose. The baby which had thrown away the pocket-book began to express its final dissatisfaction with the prospect, and its mother turned distractedly about for some new diversion, when there came from the ladies' cabin a soft whistle, like the warbling of a bird, low and rich and full, which possessed itself of the sense to the exclusion of all other sounds. Some of the people pressed into the cabin; others stood smiling in the benediction of the artless strain. Ray followed his idyllic sisters within, and saw an old negro, in the middle of the cabin floor, lounging in an easy pose, with his hat in one hand and the other hand on his hip, while his thick lips poured out those mellow notes, which might have come from the heart of some thrush-haunted wild wood. When the sylvan music ceased, and the old negro, with a roll of his large head, and a twist of his burly shape, began to limp round the circle, everyone put something in his hat. Ray threw in a nickel, and he saw the sisters, who faced him from the other side of the circle, conferring together. The younger had the bill in her hand which Ray had sent them by the conductor to pay their car fares home. She

parleyed a moment with the negro when he reached them, and he took some of the silver from his hat and changed the bill for her. She gave him a quarter back. He ducked his head, and said, " Thank yeh, miss," and passed on.

The transaction seemed to amuse some of the bystanders, and Ray heard one of them, who stood near him, say: " Well, that's the coolest thing I've seen yet I should have about as soon thought of asking the deacon to change a bill for me when he came round with the plate in church. Well, it takes all kinds to make a world! "

He looked like a country merchant, on a first business visit to the city; his companion, who had an air of smart ease, as of a man who had been there often, said:

" It takes all kinds to make a town like New York. You'll see queerer things than that before you get home. If that old darkey makes much on that transaction, I'm no judge of human nature."

" Pshaw! You don't mean it wasn't a good bill? "

The two men lost themselves in the crowd now pressing out of the cabin door. The boat was pushing into her slip. She bumped from one elastic side to the other, and settled with her nose at the wharf. The snarl of the heavy chains that held her fast was heard; the people poured off and the hollow thunder of the hoofs and wheels of the disembarking teams began. Ray looked about for a last glimpse of the two young women and their babies; but he could not see them.

IV.

Rat carried his bag himself when he left the elevated road, and resisted the offer of the small Italian dodging about his elbow, and proposing to take it, after he had failed to get Ray to let him black his boots. The young man rather prided himself on his thrift in. denying the boy, whose naked foot came half through one of his shoes; he saw his tatters and nakedness with the indifference of inexperience, and with his country breeding he considered his frugality a virtue. His senses were not offended by the foulness of the streets he passed through, or hurt by their sordid uproar; his strong young nerves were equal to all the assaults that the city could make; and his heart was lifted in a dream of hope. He was going to a hotel that Sanderson had told him of, where you could get a room, on the European plan, for seventy-five cents, and then eat wherever you pleased; he had gone to an American hotel when he was in New York before, and he thought he could make a saving by trying Sanderson's. It had a certain gayety of lamps before it, but the splendor diminished within, and Ray's pride was further hurt by the clerk's exacting advance payment for his room from him. The clerk said he could not give him an outside room that night, but he would try to change him in the morning; and Ray had either to take the one assigned him or go somewhere else. But he had ordered his trunk sent to this hotel by the express, and he did not know how he should manage about that if he left; so he stayed, and had himself shown to his room. It seemed to be a large cupboard in the wall of the corridor; but it had a window near the bed, and the usual

equipment of stand and bureau, and Ray did not see why he should not sleep very well there. Still, he was glad that his friends at Midland could none of them see him in that room, and he resolved to leave the hotel as soon as he could the next day. It did not seem the place for a person who had left Midland with the highest social honors that could be paid a young man. He hurried through the hotel office when he came out, so as not to be seen by any other Midlander that might happen to be there, and he went down to the basement, where the clerk said the restaurant was, and got his supper. When he had finished his oyster stew he started towards the street-door, but was overtaken at the threshold by a young man who seemed to have run after him, and who said, " You didn't pay for your supper."

Ray said, " Oh, I forgot it," and he went back to his table and got his check, and paid at the counter, where he tried in vain to impress the man who took his money with a sense of his probity by his profuse apologies. Apparently, they were too used to such tricks at that restaurant. The man said nothing, but he looked as if he did not believe him, and Ray was so abashed that he stole back to his room, and tried to forget what had happened in revising the manuscript of his story. He was always polishing it; he had written it several times over, and at every moment he got the reconstructed sentences in it, and tried to bring the style up to his ideal of style; he wavered a little between the style of Thackeray and the style of Hawthorne, as an ideal. It made him homesick, now, to go over the familiar pages: they put him so strongly in mind of Midland, and the people of the kindly city. The pages smelt a little of Sanderson's cigar smoke; he wished that Sanderson would come to New York; he perceived that they had also a fainter reminiscence of the perfume he associated with that girl who had found him out in his story; and then he thought how he had been in the best society at Midland, and it seemed a great descent from the drawing-rooms where he

used to call on all those nice girls to this closet in a fourth-rate New York hotel. His story appeared to share his downfall; he thought it cheap and poor; he did not believe now that he should ever get a publisher for it. He cowered to think how scornfully he had thought the night before of his engagement with the Hanks Brothers to write letters for the Midland Echo; he was very glad he had so good a basis; he wondered how far he could make five dollars a week go toward supporting him in New York; he could not bear to encroach upon his savings, and yet he probably must. In Midland, you could get very good board for five dollars a week.

He determined to begin a letter to the Echo at once; and he went to open the window to give himself some air in the close room; but he found that it would not open. He pulled down the transom over his door to keep from stifling in the heat of his gas-burner, and some voices that had been merely a dull rumbling before now made themselves heard in talk which Ray could not help listening to.

Two men were talking together, one very hopelessly, and the other in a vain attempt to cheer him from time to time. The comforter had a deep base voice, and was often unintelligible; but the disheartened man spoke nervously, in a high key of plangent quality, like that of an unhappy bell.

" No," he said; " I'd better fall, Bill. It's no use trying to keep along. I can get pretty good terms from the folks at home, there; they all know me, and they know I done my best. I can pay about fifty cents on the dollar, I guess, and that's more than most businessmen could, if they stopped; and if I ever get goin' again, I'll pay dollar for dollar; they know that."

The man with the deep voice said something that Ray did not catch. The disheartened man seemed not to have caught it either; he said, " What say? " and , when the other repeated his words, he said: " Oh yes! I know. But I been dancing round in a quart cup all my life there; and now it's

turning into a pint cup, and I guess I better get out The place did grow for a while, and we got all ready to be a city as soon as the railroad come along. But when the road come, it didn't do all we expected of it. We could get out into the world a good deal easier than we could before, and we had all the facilities of transportation that we could ask for. But we could get away so easy that most of our people went to the big towns to do their trading, and the facilities for transportation carried off most of our local industries. The luck was against us. We bet high on what the road would do for us, and we lost. We paid out nearly our last dollar to get the road to come our way, and it came, and killed us. We subscribed to the stock, and we've got it yet; there ain't any fight for it anywhere else; we'd let it go without a fight We tried one while for the car shops, but they located them further up the line, and since that we ha'n't even wiggled. What say? Yes; but, you see, I'm part of the place. I've worked hard all my life, and I've held out a good many times when ruin stared me in the face, but I guess I sha'n't hold out this time. What's the use? Most every businessman I know has failed some time or other; some of 'em three or four times over, and scrambled up and gone on again, and I guess I got to do the same. Had a kind of pride about it, m' wife and me; but I guess we got to come to it. It does seem, sometimes, as if the very mischief was in it. I lost pretty heavy, for a small dealer, on Fashion's Pansy, alone — got left with a big lot of 'em. What say? It was a bustle. Women kept askin' for Fashion's Pansy, till you'd 'a' thought every last one of 'em was going to live and be buried in it. Then all at once none of 'em wanted it — wouldn't touch it. That and butter begun it You know how a country merchant's got to take all the butter the women bring him, and he's got to pay for sweet butter, and sell it for grease half the time. You can tell a woman she'd better keep an eye on her daughter, but if you say she don't make good butter, that's the last of that woman's custom. But

what's finally knocked me out is this drop in bric-à-brac. If it hadn't been for that, I guess I could have pulled through. Then there was such a rush for Japanese goods, and it lasted so long, that I loaded up all I could with 'em last time I was in New York, and now nobody wants 'em; couldn't give 'em away. Well, it's all a game, and you don't know any more how it's comin' out — you can't bet on it with any more certainty — than you can on a trottin' match. My! I wish I was dead."

The deep-voiced man murmured something again, and the high-voiced man again retorted:

"What say? Oh, it's all well enough to preach; and I've heard about the law of demand and supply before. There's about as much of a law to it as there is to three-card monte. If it wasn't for my poor wife, I'd let 'em take me back on ice. I would that."

The deep-voiced man now seemed to have risen; there was a shuffling of feet, and presently a parley at the open door about commonplace matters; and then the two men exchanged adieux, and the door shut again, and all was silent in the room opposite Ray's.

He felt sorry for the unhappy man shut in there; but he perceived no special significance in what he had overheard. He had no great curiosity about the matter; it was one of those things that happened every day, and for tragedy was in no wise comparable to a disappointment in first love, such as he had carefully studied for his novel from his own dark experience. Still it did suggest something to Ray; it suggested a picturesque opening for his first New York letter for the Midland Echo, and he used it in illustration of the immensity of New York, and the strange associations and juxtapositions of life there. He treated the impending failure of the country storekeeper from an overstock of Japanese goods rather humorously: it was not like a real trouble, a trouble of the heart; and the cause seemed to him rather grotesquely disproportionate to the effect. In

describing the incident as something he had overheard in a hotel, he threw in some touches that were intended to give the notion of a greater splendor than belonged to the place.

He made a very good start on his letter, and when he went to bed the broken hairs that pierced his sheet from the thin mattress did not keep him from falling asleep, and they did prove that it was a horse-hair mattress.

V.

In the morning, Ray determined that he would not breakfast at the restaurant under the hotel, partly because he was ashamed to meet the people who, he knew, suspected him of trying to beat them out of the price of his supper, and partly because he had decided that it was patronized chiefly by the country merchants who frequented the hotel, and he wanted something that was more like New York. He had heard of those foreign eating-houses where you got a meal served in courses at a fixed price, and he wandered about looking for one. He meant to venture into the first he found, and on a side street he came on a hotel with a French name, and over the door in an arch of gilt letters the inscription. Restaurant Français. There was a large tub on each side of the door, with a small evergreen tree in it; some strings or wires ran from these tubs to the door-posts and sustained a trailing vine that formed a little bower on either hand; a Maltese cat in the attitude of a sphinx dozed in the thicket of foliage, and Ray's heart glowed with a sense of the foreignness of the whole effect. He had never been abroad, but he had read of such things, and he found himself at home in an environment long familiar to his fancy.

The difference of things was the source of his romance, as it is with all of us, and he looked in at the window of this French restaurant with the feelings he would have had in the presence of such a restaurant in Paris, and he began to imagine gay, light-minded pictures about it At the same time, while he was figuring inside at one of the small tables, vis-à-vis with a pretty actress whom he invented for

the purpose, he was halting on the sidewalk outside, wondering whether he could get breakfast there so early as eight o'clock, and doubtful whether he should not betray his strangeness to New York hours if he tried. When he went in there was nobody there but one white-aproned waiter, who was taking down some chairs from the middle table where they had been stacked with their legs in the air while he was sweeping. But he did not disdain to come directly to Ray, where he had sat down, with a plate and napkin and knife and fork, and exchange a good morning with him in arranging them before him. Then he brought half a yard of French bread and a tenuous, translucent pat of American butter; and asked Ray whether he would have chops or beefsteak with his coffee. The steak came with a sprig of water-cress on it, and the coffee in a pot; and the waiter, who had one eye that looked at Ray, and another of uncertain focus, poured out the coffee for him, and stood near, with a friendly countenance, and a cordial interest in the young fellow's appetite. By this time a neat dame de comptoir, whom Ray knew for a dame de comptoir at once, though he had never seen one before, took her place behind a little desk on the comer, and the day had begun for the Restaurant Français.

Ray felt that it was life, and he prolonged his meal to the last drop of the second cup of coffee that his pot held, and he wished that he could have Sanderson with him to show him what life really was in New York. Sanderson had taken all his meals in the basement of that seventy-five cent hotel, which Ray meant to leave at once. Where he was he would not have been ashamed to have any of the men who had given him that farewell dinner see him. He was properly placed, as a young New York literary man; he was already a citizen of that great Bohemia which he had heard and read so much of. He was sure that artists must come there, and actors, but of course much later in the day. His only misgiving was lest the taxes of Bohemia might be heavier

than he could pay, and he asked the waiter for his account somewhat anxiously. It was forty cents, and his ambition leaped at the possibility of taking all his meals at that place. He made the occasion of telling the cross-eyed waiter to keep the change out of the half-dollar he gave him, serve for asking whether one could take board there by the week, and the waiter said one could for six dollars: a luncheon like the breakfast, but with soup and wine, and a dinner of fish, two meats, salad, sweets, and coffee. " On Sundays," said the waiter, " the dinner is something splendid. And there are rooms; oh, yes, it is a hotel."

"Yes, I knew it was a hotel," said Ray.

The six dollars did not seem to him too much; but he had decided that he must live on ten dollars a week in order to make his money last for a full experiment of New York, or till he had placed himself in some permanent position of profit The two strains of prudence and of poetry were strongly blended in him; he could not bear to think of wasting money, even upon himself, whom he liked so well, and whom he wished so much to have a good time. He meant to make his savings go far; with those five hundred dollars he could live a year in New York if he helped himself out on dress and incidental expenses with the pay for his Midland Echo letters. He would have asked to see some of the rooms in the hotel, but he was afraid it was too early, and he decided to come to dinner and ask about them. On his way back to the place where he had lodged he rapidly counted the cost, and he decided, at any rate, to try it for a while; and he shut himself into his cupboard at the hotel, and began to go over some pages of his manuscript for the last time, with a lightness of heart which decision, even a wrong decision, often brings.

It was still too soon to go with the story to a publisher; he could not hope to find any one in before ten o'clock, and he had a whole hour yet to work on it He was always putting the last touches on it; but he almost wished he had not

looked at it, now, when the touches must really be the last It seemed to suffer a sort of disintegration in his mind. It fell into witless and repellent fragments; it lost all beauty and coherence, so that he felt ashamed and frightened with it, and he could not think what the meaning of it had once so clearly been. He knew that no publisher would touch it in the way of business, and he doubted if any would really have it read or looked at. It seemed to him quite insane to offer it, and he had to summon an impudently cynical courage in nerving himself to the point. The best way, of course, would have been to get the story published first as a serial, in one of the magazines that had shown favor to his minor attempts; and Ray had tried this pretty fully. The manuscript had gone the rounds of a good many offices; and returned, after a longer or shorter sojourn, bearing on some marginal corner the hieroglyphic or numerical evidence that it had passed through the reader's hand in each. Ray innocently fancied that he suppressed the fact by clipping this mark away with the scissors; but probably no one was deceived. In looking at it now he was not even deceived himself; the thing had a desperately worn and battered air; it was actually dog's-eared; but he had still clung to the hope of getting it taken somewhere, because in all the refusals there was proof that the magazine reader had really read it through; and Ray argued that if this were so, there must be some interest or property in it that would attract the general reader if it could ever be got to his eye in print.

He was not wrong; for the story was fresh and new, in spite of its simple-hearted, unconscious imitations of the style and plot of other stories, because it was the soul if not the body of his first love. He thought that he had wrapped this fact impenetrably up in so many travesties and disguises that the girl herself would not have known it if she had read it; but very probably she would have known it Any one who could read between the lines could penetrate

through the innocent psychical posing and literary affectation to the truth of conditions strictly and peculiarly American, and it was this which Ray had tried to conceal with all sorts of alien splendors of make and manner. It seemed to him now, at the last moment, that if he could only uproot what was native and indigenous in it, he should make it a strong and perfect thing. He thought of writing it over again, and recoloring the heroine's hair and the hero's character, and putting the scene in a new place; but he had already rewritten it so many times that he was sick of it; and with all his changing he had not been able to change it much, lie decided to write a New York novel, and derive the hero from Midland, as soon as he could collect the material; the notion for it had already occurred to him; the hero should come on with a play; but first of all it would be necessary for Ray to get this old novel behind him, and the only way to do that was to get it before the public,