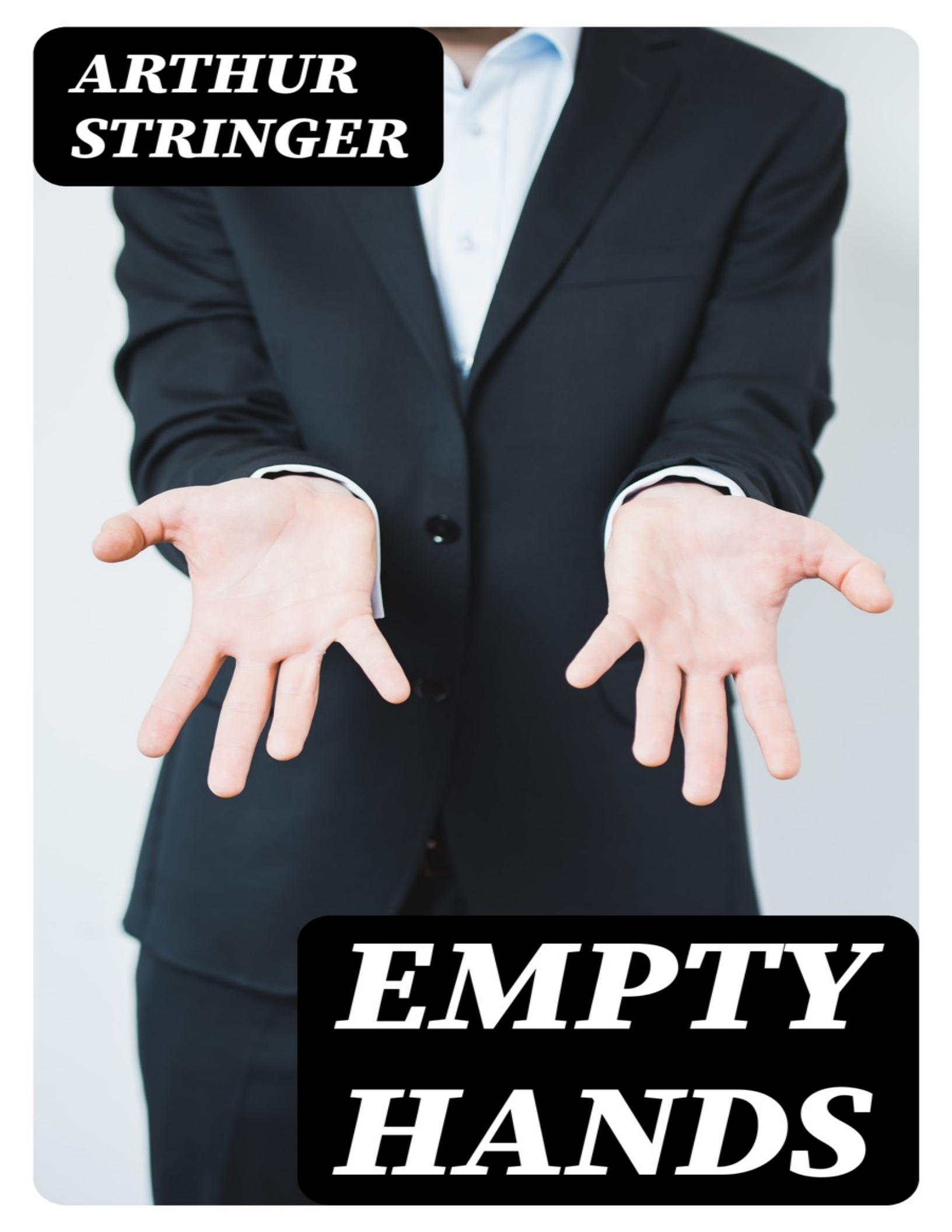


A person wearing a dark suit and a light blue shirt is shown from the chest down to the waist. Their hands are held out flat, palms up, and are empty. The background is a plain, light gray.

***ARTHUR
STRINGER***

***EMPTY
HANDS***

Arthur Stringer

Empty Hands

EAN 8596547187196

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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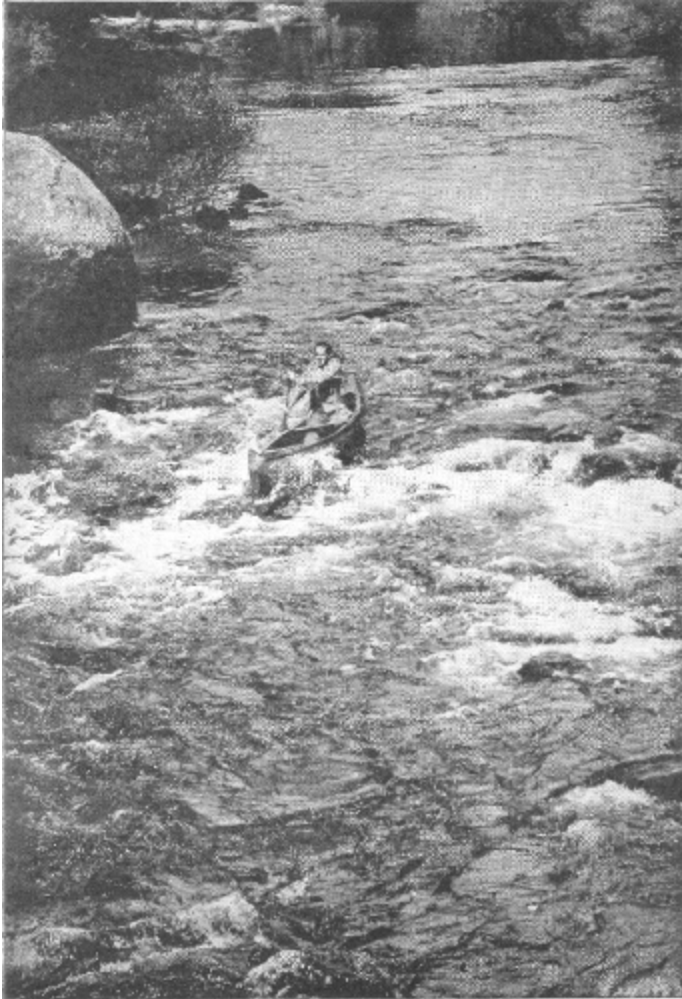
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**He hoped to the last that he might
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EMPTY HANDS

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CHAPTER I

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Endicott, oppressed by the silence of the house, dropped his bags on the Sarouk rug at the foot of the cascading wide stairway and went on to the twilit living-room. Finding that empty, he wandered out to the sun-room, where he hesitated a moment, then stepped through the double screen-doors to the garden terrace. There he turned abruptly south. He followed the leaf-filtered gloom of a pergola until he came to the Etruscan seat that overlooked the swimming-pool. And there he sat down.

It was a hot night. It was more than hot; it was stifling. Not a breath of air stirred the syringa leaves that hung on either side of him. Somewhere back of the faded tamarisks a pair of katydids had already begun their nocturnal antiphony. A cricket shrilled from time to time, in the parched grass-parterres behind the grape-arbors. There was no moon, as yet, and even the stars were shut out by the tepid haze that seemed to blanket a burned-out world. It was so close and sultry that Endicott, as he stared down at the pool, found something consolatory in the mere thought of water.

There was a time when he had been inordinately proud of that pool. He had planned it himself, on the hillside where a spring had bubbled out below the twisted root of an umbrella-elm. He had tamed and harnessed that spring, and had built his basin of cement, eighty feet long and thirty feet wide, lining it with Tennessee marble and fashioning seven marble steps to lead into its shallower end. Along its

full length, on either side, ran a marble colonnade shaded with wistaria, with Tuscan urns at the four corners. At its upper end stood the arched grotto which he had built of field-stone, after landscaping the higher garden-slopes. He had thought of it as an arena of sane and healthful pleasure. But life had taken the savor out of it, as life took the savor out of so many things. For all its trellises and vines and tubbed greenery, for all its double beauty of jade-green water reflecting unwavering flowers and foliage framed in their milky oblong of marble, it was now a pool of bitterness to him.

As he stared down at it, through the lifeless hot darkness, Endicott remembered how Erica, his wife, had once loved it. He could almost picture her sitting on the Roman bench at the far end of the pool. The wistaria vines were thinner, in those days, and the sun would strike slantingly down on her drying hair. It was wonderful hair, like spun gold, and she had an incredible amount of it. She had always claimed that the water from his spring was not like other water, nursing the purely personal belief that it was slightly radiumized, since it had the trick of leaving one's skin so satin-like in its smoothness. But the blight had fallen with the Osborne affair, when Erica and Bertie Osborne had drifted into the habit of swimming alone there, after dark. Endicott had objected to that, had finally taken his stand and forbidden it. When his wife had laughingly defied him, and proclaimed that she and Bertie were going to swim at midnight, he had as grimly proclaimed otherwise. To establish his authority, he returned to the pool and opened the valve that let out the water. Then he went to bed.

At midnight his wife and Osborne slipped down to the pool, without switching on the lights. Osborne dived, laughing and light-hearted, from the carpet-covered spring-board. It was one of his swan-dives, of which he was so proud. His skull crushed in, like an egg-shell, against the floor of the empty cement basin.

Endicott, as he sat there, fancied he could still hear Erica's scream through the midnight quietness of their garden. He even fancied that he could see her, sitting crouched on the Roman bench at the pool-end, staring down into the depths of the jade-green water. Yet she had been dead for five long years. And that second tragedy had always seemed to Endicott as gratuitous and as ironic as the first. For as they were motoring through northern Georgia she had drunk from an abandoned farm well, after he had warned her not to. Three weeks later she had died of typhoid. She had been a beautiful woman. But some women, he told himself, were not to be controlled. They remained untamed and intractable, always seeming one page late in reading the lesson of life. And they not only suffered themselves, but they brought suffering to those about them. He had built up his fortune, as he had built his pool, for her good. And the one now stood as futile as the other. He wondered, as he stared down at the vaguely opalescent oblong of water, if she ever came back there, in the stillness of the night, and brooded over that one place that had once seemed alluring and beautiful to her.

Endicott, the next moment, caught his breath sharply. For as he stared down through the gloom he saw by the sudden flare of a match that a woman was sitting alone and silent

on the Roman bench, on the bench where Erica used to sit and dry her hair. He started up from his seat. Then he sat down again, being able to breathe once more. For he saw that it was merely his daughter Claire, striking a match and lighting a cigarette; Claire in a bathing suit, obviously trying to keep cool.

He could see the slender oval of her thin face, the heavily-lashed eyes under the thoughtful brow touched with petulance, the dusky tone of the sun-tanned skin as the momentary light-flare played on her bare shoulders, forward-thrust and boy-like in their slenderness. He could make out the mass of her bobbed hair, framing the intent, narrow face, darker and more girlish-looking than her mother's. He could see the curved and short-lipped mouth holding the cigarette as she drew the flame in against its end. Then the light went out, with an impatient shake of her hand, and the glowing match-end circled through the darkness and fell into the pool at her feet. All that remained was the tiny glow of the cigarette, growing intermittently brighter as the air was sucked in through its shredded leaf corseted in rice-paper.

What impressed Endicott was the passiveness, the isolation, of the figure on the Roman bench. It amazed him to think how little he understood the girl, if she could still be called a girl, for he remembered that she must be well past nineteen. Perhaps she was more; there was a great deal he could not remember about his Clannie. But he wondered if she too sat oppressed by the loneliness of life, if she too found Hillcrest, this huge house on the hillside, an empty place. She had been left a great deal to herself this last year

or two, he recalled, for a man can't run copper-mines next door to Alaska and northern Quebec and at the same time hug his own fireside. Then he wondered why his heart could remain so unmoved at the thought of her. She was his only child; she was all he had. Yet they lived in worlds of their own, with interstellar æons of space between them, with so few discernible ways of signaling across that gulf.

He was startled, the next moment, by her clear soprano voice calling through the darkness.

"You'd better switch on the lights, Baker."

Endicott could see that she was speaking to one of the servants who carried a flash-light as he wheeled a loaded tea-wagon to the arched outer end of the grotto. He could hear the servant's respectful reply and could see the pencil of light waver about the stone wall in search of the switch. A moment later a sudden garden of color flowered out of the gloom. The dusky oblong of water flashed into incandescence as the current ran through the strings of bulbs enclosed in their huge globes of many-colored Japanese lanterns, globes of beryl and orange and rose and yellow. They fused and merged in a misty crown of light above the mirroring pool where the water, now green and lustrous as malachite, reflected the motionless globes, line for line and color for color, making the tubbed arbor-vitæ and the cerise phlox in the long flower-boxes as fantastically unreal as the paper foliage of a stage-setting.

And at the edge of the pool, with her bare feet trailing in the limpid water, sat the motionless girl in her attenuating dark bathing-suit, alone in her little world of light and silence. She seemed to be waiting for something.

Endicott realized what this was when he looked up and saw the wide-wheeling twin-ray of motor head-lights as a car circled into the lower drive. Down the valley-side opposing him he could see a second pair of head-lights groping their way. A horn sounded, abrupt and insolent and sonorous, as the first car drew up below the pool, bathed for a moment in the clear light of the car that followed it. To Endicott, in that momentary illumination, it seemed like a car full of white legs. It was filled to overflowing with men and girls in bathing-suits, and from it rose a careless babel of voices, singing voices, shot through with laughter and the sustained chant of a musical-comedy song from the motor behind them.

"Hello, Clannie!" cried a bare-armed youth almost as dark as a Nubian. He leaped the flower-boxes to the pool-edge as he spoke.

"Oh, boy, to get cool!" cried a pale girl in black satin with angel-fish painted on her skirt.

"And Blinkie's bringing some bubble-water," announced a large girl with butternut-brown shoulders and arms.

They crowded and clamored along the pergola until they surrounded the impassive Claire. A girl's voice cried: "Here goes—a jack-knife, everybody!" And that challenge was followed by the repeated splash-splash of straightening bodies striking the dark water, the shouts and gasps of swimmers, the careless screams and laughter of contending couples.

Endicott could see them, when they emerged, sitting side by side along the marble lip of the pool, flesh against flesh, brown against white, while they smoked and chatted and a

fat youth, prematurely bald, passed among them with glasses and a glistening cocktail-shaker. Endicott noticed that Claire drained her glass, drained it silently and impersonally, and still without speaking held it out to be refilled. She tossed away a half-smoked cigarette and stood poised, for a moment of abstraction, as a chorus of laughter followed the sound of a sudden splash. The fat youth with the shaker had slipped and fallen into the pool.

"Go after him, Jappie, and save the hooch!" cried a round-armed girl in a one-piece suit.

"What's the use, Nicky, when we all know fat must float," was Jappie's indifferent retort as chocolates from a brocaded carton that passed from wet hand to wet hand were thrown at the youth swimming with one hand and clutching the shaker with the other. There was a second chorus of laughter as some one tossed him a wine-glass, which, after turning on his back, he poised on his protuberant stomach and solemnly filled from his shaker. Then a car honked from the outer darkness and somebody called: "Here's Blinky with the champagne!"

But Claire, Endicott noticed, was not thinking of Blinky. She moved moodily on to the diving-board, where she stood for a moment, to speak to a youth whom she addressed as "Milt." Then she turned and faced the pool. She balanced, for a moment, on the end of the spring-board, with her bare heels together and her hands above her head, as brown and slender as a dryad, assured, indifferent, insolently impersonal. Then she rose in the air, incredibly, with her knees drawn up against her body, straightening miraculously at the precise moment of her descent, so that

she struck the water taut as an arrow, and disappeared below its surface with scarcely a sound. She stayed under for what seemed an alarming length of time to the watching man. He was on his feet, in fact, before her head slowly emerged within a foot of the marble steps, where she shook her bobbed hair with a casual dog-like movement and swam lazily back to the deeper end of the pool. She seemed as much at home in the water as a young seal might have been. She reminded Endicott of a seal, in fact, as she lowered her head and doubled her thin body and disappeared below the surface again. She came up and went down again, giving the watcher an impression of wallowing, making him think of a porpoise at play. He could see where her lazy movements broke the water's surface into eddies, many-colored under the magnifying light, indescribably lovely in their transmuting tones that merged off into opal and amethyst and broke away again into beryl and still again brightened under one of the swinging globes into orange. Lovely, too, seemed the languid figure floating on that tissue of intermingling colors, so competent and close-muscled, so slender and assured, so passive and yet so poignantly alone in the midst of its noisier companions.

"Can't she," gasped Endicott, "O God, can't she be saved from all this?"

For he could see that glasses were being once more passed from hand to hand. He could see the cool and deliberate stare of men, neither young nor old, scanning the half-clad bodies of women. He could see a brown arm about a stooping white shoulder and above that shoulder the laughing face, reckless with alcohol, that stared into the

solemnly hungry face beside it. And it came home to Endicott, as he gazed down at them, how they were so pallidly and yet so persistently steeping themselves in sensation. That, as he saw it, seemed the one end of this younger generation. All their lives, apparently, were a quest for sensation. They were being catered to, as they idled there in the enervating sultriness, by an appeal to every sense, to taste and touch, to smell and sight. Color was about them and the soft flow of water from the bronze dolphin's mouth was beside them and the body-cooling depths of the pool was below them. They had the scent of flowers floating above the heavier scent of their own perfumed cigarettes. They had sweets for their caprices of appetite, waiting food for their hunger, fantastically flavored drinks for their thirst, and for those darker wants of the spirit the casual contact of velvet skin with velvet skin.

It sickened Endicott, at the same moment that it confronted him with a sense of his own helplessness. It filled him with a passion to snatch the blood of his blood from their midst, to stride down amongst them, scattering them from side to side, and carry his child out of their reach. But where, he asked himself, could he carry her? Where could he take her beyond their influence? She announced herself as one of them by having them about her. And even in carrying her to the end of the world he could not carry her away from herself.

He groaned, without quite knowing it, as his unhappy eyes once more sought out his daughter. She was floating at the far end of the pool now, idly watching the man called Milt as he dove with a lighted cigarette between his lips.

This cigarette he adroitly kept alight by reversing it between his teeth and holding it there until he was above water again. Thereupon he floated triumphantly about on his back, side by side with Claire Endicott, puffing smoke up toward the many-colored globes. The father, watching from his seat above them, moved restlessly when a careless wet hand passed the cigarette over to his daughter, who inhaled a lungful or two of the smoke, luxuriously, and lay floating on the pool-surface, as motionless as a drifting cadaver facing the sky.

There even the man named Milt deserted her, when he found the pool abandoned for Blinkie and his bubble-water. The ensuing laughter grew louder, in the remoter shadows, and the voices dreamier. Back in the grotto a music-box was started up and the wet-clad figures fell to dancing, two by two, about the splashed marble floor.

"Say, Clannie, when do we eat?" an impatiently casual voice called out. And Endicott, a minute or two later, could see the impassive Baker behind the laden tea-wagon. Then couples emerged from the shadows, fantastically like wolves from a forest, and the noise became general again. They shouted and laughed as they ate. And when the music-box was once more started up thin-clad couples with capon-wings in their hands started to dance again.

"These crumpets are cold, Baker—get hot ones," the daughter of the house commanded in her clear and reedy voice. "And some fresh coffee."

Then the scene was blotted out, at a breath, for some one had switched off the lights. A soft pedal fell on the noise about the pool.

Endicott, starting up from his seat, heard a stifled scream that ended in a bubble of laughter. As he stood there, breathing hard, he could see the significant twin-glow of cigarettes from smokers side by side in the darkness. A girlish voice called out in mock terror. "Make this cave-man stop biting me!" From the pergola-end came a deeper male voice, careless and mocking: "No necking, you two!" Then some one dove into the pool and an indifferent-voiced girl called out: "There goes poor Baker!" Then Claire's voice again, reedy and quiet but strangely penetrating: "Milt, I want the lights on!" Scattered groans of protest arose at this command. But the girl disregarded them. "I said I wanted the lights on."

"Why so solemn, Clannie?" demanded a drawling contralto voice.

There was an echo of the drawl in the girl's voice as she retorted: "King Langford says my dad got home to-night!"

CHAPTER II

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Endicott waited until the last voices had died away and the last noisy car had circled insolently about the lower drive. He waited, watching the crawling twin-lights as this car mounted the opposing valley-slope, oppressed by the silence hanging over the home that seemed no longer home to him. He stared down at the pool where the mocking globes of radiance still swung, pondering the dark problem as to why man's happiness is so often destroyed by the very things with which he seeks to perpetuate it. He had fashioned this pool for innocent pleasure, yet he found himself, for the second time, nursing nothing but hate for it. He would be glad, he told himself as he stood waiting for his daughter, when she and he had seen the last of it. It would be better for them both.

Endicott's daughter, however, showed no signs of returning to the house. So he pocketed his repugnance and made his way down into that region of revelry left doubly obnoxious by the mockery of its over-colored lanterns and the memory of its over-hectic hours. He moved slowly, mysteriously touched with age, down through the darkness toward the gaily-lighted oblong of refracted colors framed in drooping shrubbery, feeling utterly and incommunicably alone in a world which had in some way outlived him.

He realized the gulf of time between them as he caught sight of his daughter in her wet bathing-suit, on one end of the Roman bench, staring down into the water. She sat quite motionless. She seemed as remote from him, staring with

odd grotesquery from her lonely perch, as a gargoyle of stone staring down from its medieval tower. Yet some humanizing touch of wistfulness in her face prompted Endicott to wonder if she too could be shadowed by a trace of that same isolation which clouded his own heart. He asked himself why he should suddenly think of her as a child, as a lonely child surrounded by an aura of pathos. For she looked ridiculously small and ridiculously youthful in her trivial wisp of a suit. And she gave him an impression of careless fastidiousness, with her sinewy young body, slender as a dryad's, leaning listlessly forward with the narrowing brown chin cupped in the palm of her hand.

Surely, he felt as he moved so wearily toward where she sat, she was worth saving, worth saving in some way or another?

"Hello!" was all she said, without any trace of emotion, as he came and stood beside her.

"Hello, Clannie!" was his reply to her, equally casual, equally barricading.

"When'd you get back?" she asked as she stooped to wring the water from her trunk-leg.

"To-night," he told her. He sat heavily down on the other end of the Roman bench. "Hot, isn't it?"

"Like hell!" she said in a small voice flat with weariness.

He resented that, yet it gave him a point about which to centralize still earlier resentments.

"It doesn't seem to have interfered with your fun," he retorted.

She looked languidly up, at the barb of bitterness in his voice.

"Oh, *that!*" she scoffed with a small hand-movement of indifference. "You heard us, of course?"

"Most all the countryside did, I imagine!" Then he added, gathering momentum as he went: "Yes, I've been both hearing and seeing you. And it's been giving me a great deal to think over."

She gazed directly up at him, for the first time, with her limpid and fearless eyes fixed on his face. She had courage, the man looking so intently down at her was forced to admit; she had courage and a something beyond courage. He would have found it hard to define that added something, but he tended to the belief that it was a stubborn quality akin to sportsmanship, a sort of skeletonized code of ethics evolved out of the one normalizing phase of her existence, her athletics. Whatever she did, she would at least sullenly prefer to have it known as the sporting thing to do. But life, Endicott was remembering, was a trifle more complicated than a squash-court.

"And what did you think about us?" his daughter was asking him, almost insolently.

Some instinct, kenneled deep in his indignation, warned him to be calm. Tragically little, he remembered, was to be gained by passion, with a girl like that. So he waited a moment or two, determined to have his voice a steady one.

"They impressed me as a pretty rotten lot," he finally asserted. But the casualness of his tone was discredited by the granitic grimness of his jaw.

"Yes, I know," said the girl, with quite unlooked-for quietness. "But it seems the only way out."

"Out of what?"

She emitted a ghost of a sigh, before speaking.

"Oh, I don't know. Out of being bored, I suppose."

A second tide of indignation rose and ebbed through Endicott, rose and ebbed without her knowledge, before he spoke again.

"Have you any idea what you're heading for?" he suddenly demanded of her.

She laughed, quietly and indifferently. But there was bitterness about the youthful lips bent over the pool.

"That's the trouble," she complained. "I'm not heading for anything." She felt about on the wet bench until she found a gold cigarette-case. "I'm just drifting."

"Then I imagine it's about time somebody interfered with your movements," said the man at her side.

"Who?" she asked, audaciously abstracted.

"Your father," he announced, refusing to countenance the tide of frustration that was creeping through him.

"How?" she inquired in her indifferent small voice. And with that one word, in some way, she had been able to reaffirm the fact of their remoteness, their astral remoteness, from each other.

"To begin with, this pool swimming is going to be stopped, and stopped right now," he heard his own irate voice proclaiming.

"Isn't that rather ridiculous?" demanded the girl in the wet bathing-suit.

"No, it's more like getting back to sanity."

"You mean," she challenged amiably enough, "you're telling me I'm not to swim in this pool?"

"Precisely!"

"But Montie and Gypsy Bowers and Milt are coming back a little after midnight, when the moon's up. And it would be rather humiliating, to have to leave word that I'd been scolded and sent up to bed, wouldn't it?"

He stared at her, wondering what would have happened to her if she had lived in an earlier and more rudimentary generation. He stared at the two brown hands buckled over a bare brown knee, realizing how small and helpless she would be in the face of physical violence. But physical violence, he remembered, would never tame her, would never altogether break down her spirit.

"You are not going to swim in this pool to-night," he announced with a fierceness which brought her narrow face slowly around to his.

"Nor any other night?" she studiously interrogated.

"Nor any other night," he just as studiously asserted, with the thought of history so ironically repeating itself making his face more haggard than he imagined. "Is that clearly understood?"

"I heard you the first time," she said with her barricading flippancy.

"There are a number of other things you're going to hear!"

"What?"

"Things we've got to talk over."

"Isn't it horribly hot," she complained, "for that sort of thing?"

"There are worse misfortunes than mere heat," he reminded her. And he was reminding himself, at the same

moment, that she would not be easily driven, that she was not even bridle-wise. She had never bowed to authority. She was his daughter, his one and only child. Yet they had no points of contact, apparently, except that of brute force. And he suspected that she would break, under force, before she would yield.

She surprised him by getting languidly up from the stone bench.

"Then I'd better phone Milt and the others," she casually announced.

"And what are you going to do after that?" he demanded.

"I don't know," was her listless retort. "It seems so hot in the house."

His scrutinizing eyes followed her as she moved moodily away. Then he went to the valve that emptied the pool. Still again, as he turned the brass wheel and heard the rash of the escaping water, he was oppressed by the sense of history repeating itself. His heart was heavy as he moved slowly on to the grotto and switched out the lights.

"I've emptied the pool," he announced as he passed the slim figure of his daughter groping through the half-lighted sun-room.

"I know," she said in a neutral voice.

"Then where are you going?" he demanded.

"I want to sit outside for a while," she answered in her insouciant cool way.

"We understand each other, don't we?" he challenged.

"I wonder if we do?" she countered in her careless soprano.

"We'd better!" he called out with a harshness which arrested her, for a minute or two, in the outer doorway.

Endicott watched her as she passed down the balustraded terrace into the garden. Then he went up to his room.



CHAPTER III

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Endicott went up to his room, but he did not sleep. He sat at his open window overlooking the pool, which took on fantastic shadows under the filtered light of the late moon. Claire, he saw, had gone back to the Roman bench. He could make her out only vaguely, in the broken shadows, sitting inert and motionless, with her hands clasped over her knee. The solitariness of her figure distressed him as he watched it. She had grown away from him, calamitously, just as he had grown away from her. She was all he had, he remembered for the second time that night. She was all he had, yet of late he had seen little of her, had known tragically little of her companionship.

That, in some way, would have to be corrected. Yet he could see no immediate promise of change in his mode of life. And he could anticipate still less in hers. Before another week was over he would be once more on the wing: this time it was the Little Elk Lake project that was demanding his presence. Within two weeks he would be well beyond the rail-head, half-way up to the Circle itself, trafficking by canoe and yolk-boat toward the Barrier Camp on the fringe of the Barren Grounds. There Shomer Grimshaw held disturbingly ambitious plans to lay before his attention. That restless-souled young engineer even wanted a portable saw-mill and a hydroplane and a shallow-draught side-wheeler sent up in sections to his wilderness outpost beyond the Pas. And there was a showing of gold in the pre-Cambrian to the east of Barrier Lake. And the sooner

Endicott was on the ground to look over his claims the better for all concerned.

The thought suddenly occurred to him that he might do worse than take his Clannie along with him. That would get her out of the welter into which she had drifted. It would lift her out of that cloying mess, the same as one lifts a drowning mouse out of a cream-pitcher. She was ear-deep in enervating softnesses that were smothering her, the same as so many women of to-day were being smothered. And the other thing would rather shock her into some sort of reason. She would find herself confronted by raw life, up in that mine camp. She would face sterner conditions and stabilizing roughnesses and a man or two with a backbone. And that would do her good.

Endicott stopped short, trying to picture Shomer Grimshaw, his field-engineer, confronted by a girl like Clannie. She would be new to him, for women had never seriously entered into Grimshaw's scheme of things. He had not permitted them to. It was not without reason that he had been called Shomer, the Watcher. But Endicott had no wish to bring that old story up out of the depths of the past. He preferred to think of Grimshaw as functioning like a Diesel engine, efficient and silent, as self-contained as a Salteaux, but by instinct and training still a woodsman, a man who preferred always to go ahead of the steel and map the lonelier frontiers for those who came after him. He had seen much of the world, but he preferred to remember only his woodcraft. He had a working knowledge of seven Indian languages and could shoulder a barrel of flour over a broken portage, but in his sleeping-tent he read Pater and Francis

Thompson. No, a man like Grimshaw could never grow into an understanding of a girl like Claire. She would be something undecipherable to that single-track mind of his. She would probably knock his camp discipline into a cocked hat and criticize the grub-tent cuisine and announce that the smell of fly-oil was objectionable to her fastidious young nostrils. It would, ten to one, result in trouble. For Clannie, of course, liked to have her own way. And Shomer, on the other hand, knew a grimness of purpose that had proved not without its value. In his rough young veins ran that commendable enough thing that has been called the blood of the conqueror. And Endicott, lounging at the open window, wondered half idly which of the two would win out, if it ever came to some final contest of will.

Then he noticed that the low-hung moon had gone under a cloud. He heard a growl or two of distant thunder and felt grateful for what he accepted as a promise of relief from the heat that was making even midnight intolerable. Men didn't think straight in such weather. And what he needed was sleep. But before turning back to his bed he stared once more down at the vague outlines of the pool.

Claire was smoking there. He could see the small cherry-glow of her moving cigarette-end and the dark blur of her body against the pale marble bench. Then his eye wavered on to the other end of the pool, attracted by what seemed a movement along the trellised foliage. He thought, for a moment, he saw a figure in white, a woman's figure, walking slowly along the wistaria-covered pergola, in the direction of the Roman bench. He pressed his face against the bronze screening, staring out with an odd quickening of the pulse.

Then, with an incredulous upthrust of the shoulders, he rubbed his eyes and looked out again. He could no longer decipher that drifting white shadow. He turned back to his room with what was almost a grunt of impatience.

"This heat's getting on my nerves," he said as he switched on his oscillating fan and pushed the bed out so that it would stand in the fuller play of its current. He lay down and covered himself with a sheet. But he did not sleep. He was thinking about his daughter.

He was still thinking about her, inconsequently and barrenly, when his wakeful ear caught the sound of his bedroom door being opened. He sat up at once as the vague blur of a figure crept in through the door.

"Father!"

It was his daughter Claire, calling to him in a voice thin with terror.

"What is it?" he asked as she groped, cowering, toward him. "What's happened?"

She sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling for his body in the darkness, craving, for the first time he could remember, some sustaining contact with him.

"What's happened?" he repeated as he became conscious of the tremor of her hand, which felt cold through the sheet.

"Something terrible," she said in a strangled whisper.

"But what is it?" he demanded. "Are you all right?"

She drew a long and quavering breath.

"Yes, I'm all right," she finally asserted. "But it—it was terrible."

"What was?" he insisted, letting his hot hand close about her cool small fingers.

"*Mother came back to the pool,*" the girl said in a quiet voice.

There was a silence of several seconds.

"You've been dreaming, child," Endicott was finally able to say. Yet an odd tingle of nerve-ends ran through his body as he spoke.

"She came to where I was sitting on the bench there," asserted the quiet but tremulous voice so close to him. "She was in white. I could see her distinctly, even before she spoke to me."

"You've been dreaming," repeated the girl's father.

"I tell you she came and spoke to me. She came and sat beside me and asked me not to go."

"Go where?" asked Endicott, reaching for the light-switch. But for some undefined reason he declined to turn it on.

The girl on the edge of the bed sat silent for several moments. Then she spoke, even more quietly than before.

"Milt Bisnett and I were going to run away to-night. We were to motor over to Morristown and then take a morning train in to New York to catch the steamer for Bermuda. We intended to stay there until Milt's wife could—could arrange about the divorce."

She moved abruptly in the darkness.

"Good God!" gasped Endicott, out of the silence.

"That's off now, of course," she said in her incomprehensibly quiet voice.

"Off? I should think it *is* off!" cried the man on the bed, startled by the vastness of his suddenly revealed

inadequacy. "Do you know what you're going to do, Claire?"

"No," she said, almost indifferently.

"When I go north on Saturday, you're coming with me."

"Going with you?" she repeated, her thoughts obviously not on what she was saying.

"Into clean, hard life, out of this muck," he announced with unlooked-for vigor.

So prolonged was her silence that he felt she was casting about for excuses, searching for some avenue of escape.

"All right," she said in her small voice. "I'll go!"

He found it hard to articulate a question obscurely clamoring for expression.

"It's—it's not too late?" he exacted.

She sat silent a moment, letting the full significance of his question filter through to her brain.

"It's not too late," she replied. The listlessness of her tone would have disheartened him, but for the tightening of the small fingers about his moist hand. Then she asked, almost dully, out of still another silence: "Why should she come back, like that?"

He compelled himself to stroke her shoulder reassuringly.

"You must have fallen asleep, child, and dreamed it," he valorously contended. But he felt the shiver that passed through her thin body.

"Do you mind if I leave the door open, between our rooms?" she asked as she rose to her feet.

"Of course, Clannie," he said, doing his best to control his voice, shaken as he was by the unexpected forlornness of her tones.

She groped toward him in the darkness.

"Good night, father," she cried, with her thin arms clinging to him.

And Endicott, with his hand on her childishly bobbed hair, kissed her for the first time that he could remember.
