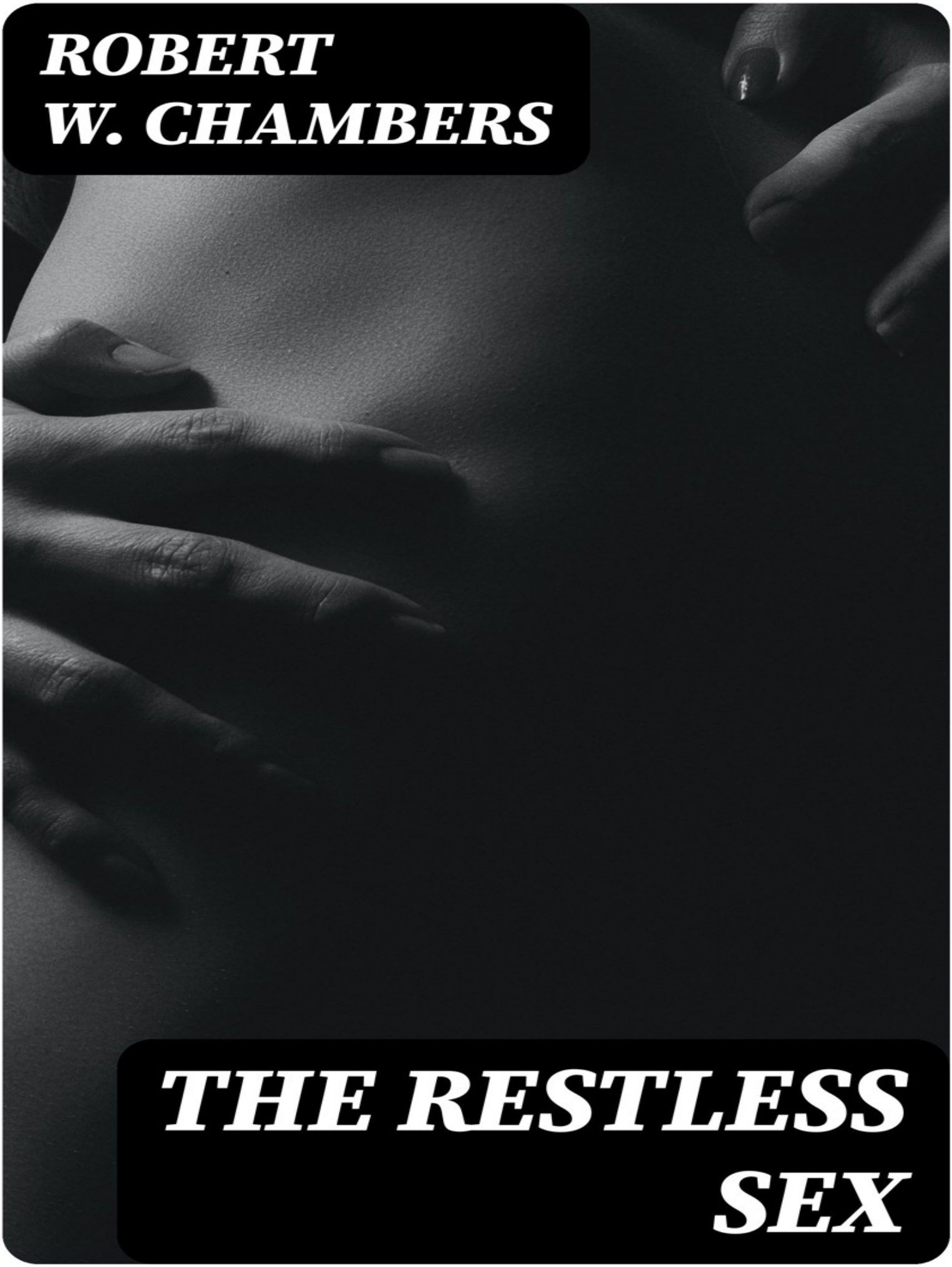
ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS
THE RESTLESS
SEX

Robert W. Chambers

The Restless Sex

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To
MILDRED SISSON

THE RESTLESS SEX

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PREFACE

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Created complete, equipped for sporadic multiplication and later for auto-fertilization, the restless sex, intensely bored by the process of procreation, presently invented an auxiliary and labeled him [male symbol].

A fool proceeding, for the inherited mania for invention obsessed him and he began to invent gods. The only kind of gods that his imagination could conceive were various varieties of supermen, stronger, more cruel, craftier than he. And with these he continued to derive satisfaction by scaring himself.

But the restless sex remained restless; the invention of the sign of Mars ([Mars symbol]), far from bringing content, merely increased the capacity of the sex for fidgeting. And

its insatiate curiosity concerning its own handiwork increased.

This handiwork, however, fulfilled rather casually the purpose of its inventor, and devoted the most of its time to the invention of gods, endowing the most powerful of them with all its own cowardice, vanity, intolerance and ferocity.

"He made us," they explained with a modesty attributable only to forgetfulness.

"Believe in him or he'll damn you. And if he doesn't, we will!" they shouted to one another. And appointed representatives of various denominations to deal exclusively in damnation.

Cede Deo! And so, in conformity with the edict of this man-created creator, about a decade before the Great Administration began, a little girl was born.

She should not have been born, because she was not wanted, being merely the by-product of an itinerant actor—Harry Quest, juveniles—stimulated to casual procreation by idleness, whiskey, and phthisis.

The other partner in this shiftless affair was an uneducated and very young girl named Conway, who tinted photographs for a Utica photographer while daylight lasted, and doubled her small salary by doing fancy skating at a local "Ice Palace" in the evenings. So it is very plain that the by-product of this partnership hadn't much chance in the world which awaited her; for, being neither expected nor desired, and, moreover, being already a prenatal heiress to obscure, unknown traits scarcely as yet even developed in the pair responsible for her advent on earth, what she might turn into must remain a problem to be solved by time alone.

Harry Quest, the father of this unborn baby, was an actor. Without marked talent and totally without morals, but well educated and of agreeable manners, he was a natural born swindler, not only of others but of himself. In other words, an optimist.

His father, the Reverend Anthony Quest, retired, was celebrated for his wealth, his library, and his amazing and heartless parsimony. And his morals. No wonder he had grimly kicked out his only son who had none.

The parents of the mother of this little child not yet born, lived in Utica, over a stationery and toy shop which they kept. Patrick Conway was the man's name. He had a pension for being injured on the railway, and sat in a peculiarly constructed wheeled chair, moving himself about by pushing the rubber-tired wheels with both hands and steering with his remaining foot.

He had married a woman rather older than himself, named Jessie Grismer, a school teacher living in Herkimer.

To Utica drifted young Quest, equipped only with the remains of one lung, and out of a job as usual. At the local rink he picked up Laura Conway, after a mindless flirtation, and ultimately went to board with her family over the stationery shop.

So the affair in question was a case of propinquity as much as anything, and was consummated with all the detached irresponsibility of two sparrows.

However, Quest, willing now to be supported, married the girl without protest. She continued to tint photographs and skate as long as she was able to be about; he loafed in front of theatres and hotels, with a quarter in change in his

pockets, but always came back to meals. On sunny afternoons, when he felt well, he strolled about the residence section or reposed in his room waiting, probably, for Opportunity to knock and enter.

But nothing came except the baby.

About that time, too, both lungs being in bad condition, young Quest began those various and exhaustive experiments in narcotics, which sooner or later interest such men. And he finally discovered heroin. Finding it an agreeable road to hell, the symptomatic characteristics of an addict presently began to develop in him, and he induced his young wife to share the pleasures of his pharmaceutical discovery.

They and their baby continued to encumber the apartment for a year or two before the old people died—of weariness perhaps, perhaps of old age—or grief—or some similar disease so fatal to the aged.

Anyway, they died, and there remained nothing in the estate not subject to creditors. And, as tinted photographs had gone out of fashion even in Utica, and as the advent of moving pictures was beginning to kill vaudeville everywhere except in New York, the ever-provincial, thither the Quest family drifted. And there, through the next few years, they sifted downward through stratum after stratum of the metropolitan purlieus, always toward some darker substratum—always a little lower.

The childishly attractive mother, in blue velvet and white cat's fur, still did fancy skating at rink and Hippodrome. The father sometimes sat dazed and coughing in the chilly waiting rooms of theatrical agencies. Fortified by drugs and

by a shabby fur overcoat, he sometimes managed to make the rounds in pleasant weather; and continued to die rather slowly, considering his physical condition.

But his father, who had so long ago disowned him—the Reverend Anthony Quest—being in perfect moral condition, caught a slight cold in his large, warm library, and died of pneumonia in forty-eight hours—a frightful example of earthly injustice, doubtless made all right in Heaven.

Young Quest, forbidden the presence for years, came skulking around after a while with a Jew lawyer, only to find that his one living relative, a predatory aunt, had assimilated everything and was perfectly qualified to keep it under the terms of his father's will.

Her attorneys made short work of the shyster. She herself, many times a victim to her nephew's deceit in former years, and once having stood between him and prison concerning the matter of a signature for thousands of dollars—the said signature not being hers but by her recognised for the miserable young man's sake—this formidable and acidulous old lady wrote to her nephew in reply to a letter of his:

You always were a liar. I do not believe you are married. I do not believe you have a baby. I send you—not a cheque, because you'd probably raise it—but enough money to start you properly.

Keep away from me. You are what you are partly through your father's failure to do his duty by you. An optimist taken at birth and patiently trained can be saved. Nobody saved

you; you were merely punished. And you, naturally, became a swindler.

But I can't help that now. It's too late. I can only send you money. And if it's true you have a child, for God's sake take her in time or she'll turn into what you are.

And *that* is why I send you any money at all—on the remote chance that you are not lying. Keep away from me, Harry.

ROSALINDA QUEST.

So he did not trouble her, he knew her of old; and besides he was too ill, too dazed with drugs to bother with such things.

He lost every penny of the money in Quint's gambling house within a month.

So the Quest family, father, mother and little daughter sifted through the wide, coarse meshes of the very last social stratum that same winter, and landed on the ultimate mundane dump heap.

Quest now lay all day across a broken iron bed, sometimes stupefied, sometimes violent; his wife, dismissed from the Hippodrome for flagrant cause, now picked up an intermittent living and other things in an east-side rink. The child still remained about, somewhere, anywhere—a dirty, ragged, bruised, furtive little thing, long accustomed to extremes of maudlin demonstration and drug-crazed cruelty, frightened witness of dreadful altercations and of more dreadful reconciliations, yet still more stunned than

awakened, more undeveloped than precocious, as though the steady accumulation of domestic horrors had checked mental growth rather than sharpened her wits with cynicism and undesirable knowledge.

Not yet had her environment distorted and tainted her speech, for her father had been an educated man, and what was left of him still employed grammatical English, often correcting the nasal, up-state vocabulary of the mother—the beginning of many a terrible quarrel.

So the child skulked about, alternately ignored or whined over, cursed or caressed, petted or beaten, sometimes into insensibility.

Otherwise she followed them about instinctively, like a crippled kitten.

Then there came one stifling night in that earthly hell called a New York tenement, when little Stephanie Quest, tortured by prickly heat, gasping for the relief which the western lightning promised, crept out to the fire escape and lay there gasping like a minnow.

Fate, lurking in the reeking room behind her, where her drugged parents lay in merciful stupor, unloosed a sudden breeze from the thunderous west, which blew the door shut with a crash. It did not awaken the man. But, among other things, it did jar loose a worn-out gas jet.... That was the verdict, anyway.

Pluris est oculatus testis unus quam auriti decem.

But, as always, the Most High remained silent, offering no testimony to the contrary.

This episode in the career of Stephanie Quest happened in the days of the Great Administration, an administration

not great in the sense of material national prosperity, great only in spirit and in things of the mind and soul.

Even the carpenter, Albrecht Schmidt, across the hallway in the tenement, rose to the level of some unexplored spiritual stratum, for he had a wife and five children and only his wages, and he did not work every week.

"Nein," he said, when approached for contributions toward the funeral, "I haff no money for dead people. I don't giff, I don't lend. Vat it iss dot Shakespeare says? Don't neffer borrow und don't neffer lend noddings.... But I tell you what I do! I take dot leedle child!"

The slim, emaciated child, frightened white, had flattened herself against the dirty wall of the hallway to let the policemen and ambulance surgeon pass.

The trampling, staring inmates of the tenement crowded the stairs, a stench of cabbage and of gas possessed the place.

The carpenter's wife, a string around her shapeless middle, and looking as though she might add to her progeny at any minute, came to the door of her two-room kennel.

"Poor little Stephanie," she said, "you come right in and make you'self at home along of us!"

And, as the child did not stir, seemingly frozen there against the stained and battered wall, the carpenter said:

"*Du*! Stephanie! Hey you, Steve! Come home und get you some breakfast right away quick!"

"Is that their kid?" inquired a policeman coming out of the place of death and wiping the sweat from his face.

"Sure. I take her in."

"Well, you'll have to fix that matter later——"

"I fix it now. I take dot little Steve for mine——"

The policeman yawned over the note book in which he was writing.

"It ain't done that way, I'm tellin' you! Well, all *right*! You can keep her until the thing is fixed up——" He went on writing.

The carpenter strode over to the child; his blond hair bristled, his beard was fearsome and like an ogre's. But his voice trembled with Teuton sentiment.

"You got a new mamma, Steve!" he rumbled. "Now, you run in und cry mit her so much as you like." He pulled the little girl gently toward his rooms; the morbid crowd murmured on the stairs at the sight of the child of suicides.

"Mamma, here iss our little Steve alretty!" growled Schmidt. "Now, py Gott! I got to go to my job! A hellofa business iss it! Schade—immer—schade! Another mouth to feed, py Gott!"

FOREWORD

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On the Christmas-tide train which carried homeward those Saint James schoolboys who resided in or near New York, Cleland Junior sat chattering with his comrades in a drawing-room car entirely devoted to the Saint James boys, and resounding with the racket of their interminable gossip and laughter.

The last number of their school paper had come out on the morning of their departure for Christmas holidays at home; every boy had a copy and was trying to read it aloud to his neighbour; shrieks of mirth resounded, high, shrill arguments, hot disputes, shouts of approval or of protest.

"Read this! Say, did you get this!" cried a tall boy named Grismer. "Jim Cleland wrote it! What do you know about our own pet novelist——"

"*Shut* up!" retorted Cleland Junior, blushing and abashed by accusation of authorship.

"He wrote it all right!" repeated Grismer exultantly. "Oh, girls! Just listen to this mush about the birds and the bees and the bright blue sky——"

"Jim, you're all right! That's the stuff!" shouted another. "The girl in the story's a peach, and the battle scene is great!"

"Say, Jim, where do you get your battle stuff?" inquired another lad respectfully.

"Out of the papers, of course," replied Cleland Junior. "All you have to do is to read 'em, and you can think out the way it really looks."

The only master in the car, a young Harvard graduate, got up from his revolving chair and came over to Cleland Junior.

The boy rose immediately, standing slender and handsome in the dark suit of mourning which he still wore after two years.

"Sit down, Jim," said Grayson, the master, seating himself on the arm of the boy's chair. And, as the boy diffidently resumed his seat: "Nice little story of yours, this. Just

finished it. Co you still think of making writing your profession?"

"I'd like to, sir."

"Many are called, you know," remarked the master with a smile.

"I know, sir. I shall have to take my chance."

Phil Grayson, baseball idol of the Saint James boys, and himself guilty of several delicate verses in the Century and Scribner's, sat on the padded arm of the revolving chair and touched his slight moustache thoughtfully.

"One's profession, Jim, ought to be one's ruling passion. To choose a profession, choose what you most care to do in your leisure moments. That should be your business in life."

The boy said:

"I like about everything, Mr. Grayson, but I think I had rather write than anything else."

John Belter, a rotund youth, listening and drawing caricatures on the back of the school paper, suggested that perhaps Cleland Junior was destined to write the Great American Novel.

Grayson said pleasantly:

"It was the great American ass who first made inquiries concerning the Great American Novel."

"Oh, what a knock!" shouted Oswald Grismer, delighted.

But young Belter joined in the roars of laughter, undisturbed, saying very coolly:

"Do you mean, sir, that the Great American Novel will never be written, or that it has already been written several times, or that there isn't any such thing?"

"I mean all three, Jack," explained Grayson, smiling. "Let me see that caricature you have been so busy over."

"It's—it's *you*, sir."

"What of it?" retorted the young master. "Do you think I can't laugh at myself?"

He took the paper so reluctantly tendered:

"Jack, you *are* a terror! You young rascal, you've made me look like a wax-faced clothing dummy!"

"Tribute to your faultless apparel, sir, and equally faultless features——"

A shriek of laughter from the boys who had crowded around to see; Grayson himself laughing unfeignedly and long; then the babel of eager, boyish voices again, loud, emphatic, merciless in discussion of the theme of the moment.

Into the swaying car and down the aisle came a negro in spotless white, repeating invitingly:

"First call for luncheon, gentlemen! Luncheon served in the dining car forward!"

His agreeable voice was drowned in the cheering of three dozen famished boys, stampeding.

Cleland Junior came last with the master.

"I hope you'll have a happy holiday, Jim," said Grayson, with quiet cordiality.

"I'm crazy to see father," said the boy. "I'm sure I'll have a good time."

At the vestibule he stepped aside, but the master bade him precede him.

And as the fair, slender boy passed out into the forward car, the breeze ruffling his blond hair, and his brown eyes

still smiling with the anticipation of home coming, he passed Fate, Chance, and Destiny, whispering together in the corner of the platform. But the boy could not see them; could not know that they were discussing him.

CHAPTER I

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An average New York house on a side street in winter is a dark affair; daylight comes reluctantly and late into the city; the south side of a street catches the first winter sun rays when there are any; the north side remains shadowy and chilly.

Cleland Senior's old-fashioned house stood on the north side of 80th Street; and on the last morning of Cleland Junior's Christmas vacation, while the first bars of sunshine fell across the brown stone façades on the opposite side of the street, the Clelands' breakfast room still remained dim, bathed in the silvery gray dusk of morning.

Father and son had finished breakfast, but Cleland Senior, whose other names were John and William, had not yet lighted the cigar which he held between thumb and forefinger and contemplated in portentous silence. Nor had he opened the morning paper to read paragraphs of interest to Cleland Junior, comment upon them, and encourage discussion, as was his wont when his son happened to be home from school.

The house was one of those twenty-foot brown stone houses—architecturally featureless—which was all there was to New York architecture fifty years ago.

But John William Cleland's dead wife had managed to make a gem of the interior, and the breakfast room on the second floor front, once his wife's bedroom, was charming

with its lovely early American furniture and silver, and its mellow, old-time prints in colour.

Cleland Junior continued to look rather soberly at the familiar pictures, now, as he sat in silence opposite his father, his heart of a boy oppressed by the approaching parting.

"So you think you'll make writing a profession, Jim?" repeated John Cleland, not removing his eyes from the cigar he was turning over and over.

"Yes, father."

"All right. Then a general education is the thing, and Harvard the place—unless you prefer another university."

"The fellows are going to Harvard—most of them," said the boy.

"A boy usually desires to go where his school friends go.... It's all right, Jim."

Cleland Junior's fresh, smooth face of a school boy had been slowly growing more and more solemn. Sometimes he looked at the prints on the wall; sometimes he glanced across the table at his father, who still sat absently turning over and over the unlighted cigar between his fingers. The approaching separation was weighing on them both. That, and the empty third chair by the bay window, inclined them to caution in speech, lest memory strike them suddenly, deep and unawares, and their voices betray their men's hearts to each other—which is not an inclination between men.

Cleland Senior glanced involuntarily from the empty chair to the table, where, as always, a third place had been laid

by Meachem, and, as always, a fresh flower lay beside the service plate.

No matter what the occasion, under all circumstances and invariably Meachem laid a fresh blossom of some sort beside the place which nobody used.

Cleland Senior gazed at the frail cluster of frisia in silence.

Through the second floor hallway landing, in the library beyond, the boy could see his suitcase, and, lying against it, his hockey stick. Cleland Senior's preoccupied glance also, at intervals, reverted to these two significant objects. Presently he got up and walked out into the little library, followed in silence by Cleland Junior.

There was a very tall clock in that room, which had been made by one of the Willards many years before the elder Cleland's birth; but it ticked now as aggressively and bumptiously as though it were brand new.

The father wandered about for a while, perhaps with the vague idea of finding a match for his cigar; the son's clear gaze followed his father's restless movements until the clock struck the half hour.

"Father?"

"Yes, dear—yes, old chap?"—with forced carelessness which deceived neither.

"It's half past nine."

"All right, Jim—any time you're ready."

"I hate to go back and leave you all alone here!" broke out the boy impulsively.

It was a moment of painful tension.

Cleland Senior did not reply; and the boy, conscious of the emotion which his voice had betrayed, and suddenly shy about it, turned his head and gazed out into the back yard.

Father and son still wore mourning; the black garments made the boy's hair and skin seem fairer than they really were—as fair as his dead mother's.

When Cleland Senior concluded that he was able to speak in a perfectly casual and steady voice, he said:

"Have you had a pretty good holiday, Jim?"

"Fine, father!"

"That's good. That's as it should be. We've enjoyed a pretty good time together, my son; haven't we?"

"Great! It was a dandy vacation!"

There came another silence. On the boy's face lingered a slight retrospective smile, as he mentally reviewed the two weeks now ending with the impending departure for school. Certainly he had had a splendid time. His father had engineered all sorts of parties and amusements for him—schoolboy gatherings at the Ice Rink; luncheons and little dances in their own home, to which school comrades and children of old friends were bidden; trips to the Bronx, to the Aquarium, to the Natural History Museum; wonderful evenings at home together.

The boy had gone with his father to see the "Wizard of Oz," to see Nazimova in "The Comet"—a doubtful experiment, but in line with theories of Cleland Senior—to see "The Fall of Port Arthur" at the Hippodrome; to hear Calvé at the Opera.

Together they had strolled on Fifth Avenue, viewed the progress of the new marble tower then being built on

Madison Square, had lunched together at Delmonico's, dined at Sherry's, motored through all the parks, visited Governor's Island and the Navy Yard—the latter rendezvous somewhat empty of interest since the great battle fleet had started on its pacific voyage around the globe.

Always they had been together since the boy returned from Saint James school for the Christmas holidays; and Cleland Senior had striven to fill every waking hour of his son's day with something pleasant to be remembered.

Always at breakfast he had read aloud the items of interest—news concerning President Roosevelt—the boy's hero—and his administration; Governor Hughes and *his* administration; the cumberous coming of Mr. Taft from distant climes; local squabbles concerning projected subways. All that an intelligent and growing boy ought to know and begin to think about, Cleland Senior read aloud at the breakfast table—for this reason, and also to fill in every minute with pleasant interest lest the dear grief, now two years old, and yet forever fresh, creep in between words and threaten the silences between them with sudden tears.

But two years is a long, long time in the life of the young—in the life of a fourteen-year-old boy; and yet, the delicate shadow of his mother still often dimmed for him the sunny sparkle of the winter's holiday. It fell across his clear young eyes now, where he sat thinking, and made them sombre and a deeper brown.

For he was going back to boarding school; and old memories were uneasily astir again; and Cleland Senior saw the shadow on the boy's face; understood; but now chose to remain silent, not intervening.

So memory gently enveloped them both, leaving them very still together, there in the library.

For the boy's mother had been so intimately associated with preparations for returning to school in those blessed days which already had begun to seem distant and a little unreal to Cleland Junior—so tenderly and vitally a part of them—that now, when the old pain, the loneliness, the eternal desire for her was again possessing father and son in the imminence of familiar departure, Cleland Senior let it come to the boy, not caring to avert it.

Thinking of the same thing, both sat gazing into the back yard. There was a cat on the whitewashed fence. Lizzie, the laundress—probably the last of the race of old-time family laundresses—stood bare-armed in the cold, pinning damp clothing to the lines, her Irish mouth full of wooden clothes-pins, her parboiled arms steaming.

At length Cleland Senior's glance fell again upon the tall clock. He swallowed nothing, stared grimly at the painted dial where a ship circumnavigated the sun, then squaring his big shoulders he rose with decision.

The boy got up too.

In the front hall they assisted each other with overcoats; the little, withered butler took the boy's luggage down the brown-stone steps to the car. A moment later father and son were spinning along Fifth Avenue toward Forty-second Street.

As usual, this ordeal of departure forced John Cleland to an unnatural, off-hand gaiety at the crisis, as though the parting amounted to nothing.

"Going to be a good kid in school, Jim?" he asked, casually humorous.

The boy nodded and smiled.

"That's right. And, Jim, stick to your Algebra, no matter how you hate it. I hated it too.... Going to get on your class hockey team?"

"I'll do my best."

"Right. Try for the ball team, too. And, Jim?"

"Yes, father?"

"You're all right so far. You know what's good and what's bad."

"Yes, sir."

"No matter what happens, you can always come to me. You thoroughly understand that."

"Yes, father."

"You've never known what it is to be afraid of me, have you?"

The boy smiled broadly; said no.

"Never be afraid of me, Jim. That's one thing I couldn't stand. I'm always here. All I'm here on earth for is you! Do you really understand me?"

"Yes, father."

Red-capped porter, father and son halted near the crowded train gate inside the vast railroad station.

Cleland Senior said briskly:

"Good-bye, old chap. See you at Easter. Good luck! Send me anything you write in the way of verses and stories."

Their clasped hands fell apart; the boy went through the gate, followed by his porter and by numerous respectable and negligible travelling citizens, male and female, bound

for destinations doubtless interesting to them. To John Cleland they were merely mechanically moving impedimenta which obscured the retreating figure of his only son and irritated him to that extent. And when the schoolboy cap of that only son disappeared, engulfed in the crowd, John Cleland went back to his car, back to his empty, old-fashioned brownstone house, seated himself in the library that his wife had made lovely, and picked up the *Times*, which he had not read aloud at breakfast.

He had been sitting there more than an hour before he thought of reading the paper so rigidly spread across his knees. But he was not interested in what he read. The battle fleet, it seemed, was preparing to sail from Port-of-Spain; Mr. Taft was preparing to launch his ponderous candidacy at the fat head of the Republican party; a woman had been murdered in the Newark marshes; the subway muddle threatened to become more muddled; somebody desired to motor from New York to Paris; President Roosevelt and Mr. Cortelyou had been in consultation about something or other; German newspapers accused the United States of wasting its natural resources; Scotti was singing *Scarpia* in "Tosca"; a new music hall had been built in the Bronx——

Cleland Senior laid the paper aside, stared at the pale winter sunshine on the back fence till things suddenly blurred, then he resumed his paper, sharply, and gazed hard at the print until his dead wife's smiling eyes faded from the page.

But in the paper there seemed nothing to hold his attention. He turned to the editorials, then to the last page. This, he noticed, was still entirely devoted to the "Hundred

Neediest Cases"—the yearly Christmastide appeal in behalf of specific examples of extreme distress. The United Charities Organization of the Metropolitan district always made this appeal every year.

Now, Cleland Senior had already sent various sums to that particular charity; and his eyes followed rather listlessly the paragraphs describing certain cases which still were totally unrelieved or only partially aided by charitable subscriptions. He read on as a man reads whose heart is still sore within him—not without a certain half irritable sense of sympathy, perhaps, but with an interest still dulled by the oppression which separation from his son always brought.

And still his preoccupied mind plodded on as he glanced over the several paragraphs of appeal, and after a while he yawned, wondering listlessly that such pitiable cases of need had not been relieved by somebody among the five million who so easily could give the trifles desired. For example:

> "Case No. 47. A young man, 25, hopelessly crippled and bedridden, could learn to do useful work, sufficient to support him, if $25 for equipment were sent to the United Charities office."

Contributors were asked to mention Case No. 47 when sending cheques for relief.

He read on mechanically:

"Case No. 108. This case has been partly relieved through contributions, but thirty dollars are still required. Otherwise, these two aged and helpless gentlewomen must lose their humble little home and an institution will have to take care of them. Neither one has many more years to live. A trifling aid, now, means that the few remaining days left to these old people will be tranquil days, free from the dread of separation and destitution."

"Case 113. The father, consumptive and unable to work; the mother still weak from childbirth; the only other wage-earner a daughter aged sixteen, under arrest; four little children dependent. Seventy dollars will tide them over until the mother can recover and resume her wage-earning, which, with the daughter's assistance, will be sufficient to keep the family together. Three of the children are defectives; the oldest sister, a cash-girl, has been arrested and held as a witness for attending, at her mother's request, a clinic conducted by people advocating birth-control; and the three dollars a week which she brought to the family has been stopped indefinitely."

"Case 119. For this case no money at all has been received so far. It is the case of a little child, Stephanie Quest, left an orphan by the death or suicide of both drug-addicted parents, and taken into the family of a kindly German carpenter two years ago. It is the first permanent shelter the child has ever known, the first kindness ever offered her,

the first time she has ever had sufficient nourishment in all her eleven years of life. Now she is in danger of losing the only home she has ever had. Stephanie is a pretty, delicate, winsome and engaging little creature of eleven, whose only experience with life had been savage cruelty, gross neglect, filth and immemorial starvation until the carpenter took her into his own too numerous family, and his wife cared for her as though she were their own child.

"But they have five children of their own, and the wife is soon to have another baby. Low wages, irregular employment, the constantly increasing cost of living, now make it impossible for them to feed and clothe an extra child.

"They are fond of the little girl; they are willing to keep and care for her if fifty dollars could be contributed toward her support. But if this sum be not forthcoming, little Stephanie will have to go to an institution.

"The child is now physically healthy. She is of a winning personality, but somewhat impulsive, unruly, and wilful at times; and it would be far better for her future welfare to continue to live with these sober, kindly, honest people who love her, than to be sent to an orphanage."

"Case No. 123. A very old man, desperately poor and ill and entirely——"

John Cleland dropped the paper suddenly across his knees. A fierce distaste for suffering, an abrupt disinclination for such details checked further perusal.

"Damnation!" he muttered, fumbling for another cigar.

His charities already had been attended to for the year. That portion of his income devoted to such things was now entirely used up. But he remained uneasily aware that the portion reserved for further acquisition of Americana—books, prints, pictures, early American silver, porcelains, furniture, was still intact for the new year now beginning.

That was his only refuge from loneliness and the ever-living grief—the plodding hunt for such things and the study connected with this pursuit. Except for his son—his ruling passion—he had no other interest, now that his wife was dead—nothing that particularly mattered to him in life except this collecting of Americana.

And now his son had gone away again. The day had to be filled—filled rather quickly, too; for the parting still hurt cruelly, and with a dull persistence that he had not yet shaken off. He must busy himself with something. He'd go out again presently, and mouse about among musty stacks of furniture "in the rough." Then he'd prowl through auction rooms and screw a jeweller's glass into his right eye and pore over mezzotints.

He allowed himself just so much to spend on Americana; just so much to spend on his establishment, so much to invest, so much to give to charity——

"Damnation!" he repeated aloud.

It was the last morning of the exhibition at the Christensen Galleries of early American furniture. That afternoon the sale was to begin. He had not had time for preliminary investigation. He realized the importance of the collection; knew that his friends would be there in force; and hated the thought of losing such a chance.

Turning the leaves or his newspaper for the advertisement, he found himself again confronted by the columns containing the dreary "Hundred Neediest Cases." And against every inclination he re-read the details of Case 119.

Odd, he thought to himself angrily, that there was nobody in the city to contribute the few dollars necessary to this little girl. The case in question required only fifty dollars. Fifty dollars meant a home, possibly moral salvation, to this child with her winning disposition and unruly ways.

He read the details again, more irritated than ever, yet grimly interested to note that, as usual, it is the very poor with many burdens who help the poor. This carpenter, living probably in a tenement, with a wife, an unborn baby, and a herd of squalling children to support, had still found room for another little waif, whose drug-sodden parents had been kind to her only by dying.

John Cleland turned the page, searched for the advertisement of the Christensen Galleries, discovered it, read it carefully. There were some fine old prints advertised to be sold. His hated rivals would be there—beloved friends yet hated rivals in the endless battle for bargains in antiquities.