



***ELLEN
GLASGOW***

***VEIN
OF IRON***

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Vein of Iron

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PART I

TOWARD LIFE

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I

Children were chasing an idiot boy up the village street to the churchyard.

'Run, run, oh, what fun!' sang little Ada Fincastle, as she raced with the pursuers. Flushed and breathless, panting with delight, she felt that the whole round world and the short December day were running too. The steep street and the shingled roofs of Ironside rocked upward. The wind whistled as it sped on. Dust whirled and scattered and whirled again. The sunshine was spinning. A bird and its shadow flashed over the winter fields. Clouds flew in the sky. The road beyond the church reared and plunged into the shaggy hills. The hills shook themselves like ponies and rushed headlong among the mountains. The Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies toppled over and tumbled far down into the Valley of Virginia. 'Run, run, oh, what fun to be flying!' Then suddenly the world balanced itself, revolved slowly, and settled to rest. She had stopped.

Past the old stone church, on the edge of a field, the idiot turned and spat at his tormentors. His mouth was only a crooked hole in his face; his small dull eyes squinted between inflamed eyelids. Without dropping his pail of refuse, he squawked with rage and dodged from side to side as the boys pelted his shoulders. 'Go home, Toby, go home

to your mammy!' the little girls mocked, dancing about him. 'Go home to your piggie--pig--pigs!'

Across the field, beyond the last sunken mound in the churchyard, the fallow land broke and fell into Murderer's Grave, a bare ravine, once a watercourse, where the body of a hanged man had been buried nearly a hundred years before. Since that time, Ada knew, there had been no hanging at Ironside; but some people said that the lost spirit of the murderer, with a red stripe round its neck, still prowled on stormy nights outside the churchyard. In a hovel perched on the rim of the ravine Toby Waters, the idiot, lived with his mother.

'He's afraid to go home,' Willie Andrews cried. 'His mother got drunk yesterday and beat him with her hickory stick. She sold her last petticoat for moonshine to the people on Lightnin' Ridge.'

Darting into the field, he seized the idiot's cap and stuffed it with cow droppings. Willie, the children shrieked, could always think of something to do. A great sport, he was, with the funniest face and the quickest tongue in the village. 'He wants his cap,' Janet Rowan trilled in her childish falsetto. She had an innocent rosebud face, and was fond of sticking out a small rosy tongue which the Sunday school teacher had once brushed with quinine because it told fibs. 'He's crying for his dirty old cap.'

'Oh, he won't mind,' Willie retorted. 'He eats slops. I've seen him.'

'But it hurts him,' Ada Fincastle answered slowly. 'It hurts him to cry.'

Excitement had ebbed, and her voice sounded far off and troubled. She glanced uneasily from the idiot's face to the spoiled cap (such a ragged cap!) and back again to the idiot's face, which was sagging with grief. Sudden light broke within. It was just as if her heart, too, had turned over. 'I don't like to hurt things,' she said, and there was surprise in her tone.

In a flash of vision it seemed to her that she and Toby had changed places, that they were chasing her over the fields into that filthy hovel. But it wasn't the first time she had felt like this. Last summer she had seen a rabbit torn to pieces by hounds (their own young Horace, for all his noble bearing, was among them) and she had heard it cry out like a baby. She had watched its eyes throbbing with fear and pain, like small terrified hearts. Since then she had never been able to eat rabbit unless she pretended it was chicken. Aunt Abigail Geddy said chickens were not nearly so much like babies. She said chickens didn't really mind having their necks wrung if you did it the right way.

'It does hurt him, Ralph. I know it hurts him.' Her voice was firmer now, and she looked round at Ralph McBride, who was the only boy she trusted. She could not remember when her confidence in him had begun. From the time she could crawl she had tried to follow his auburn head everywhere.

'He likes it,' Ralph replied impatiently. 'If he didn't like it, he could run home.'

'But he's lost his cap. Maybe he knows his mother will whip him if he comes home without it.' Moved by a reckless impulse, she jerked off her own cap of knitted red wool and

held it out to the idiot. 'You may have mine, Toby. I don't need it.'

'What bedevilment are you up to now?' a voice shouted from the churchyard, and at the first word the children scattered and fled squealing down the village street. 'I'm sometimes tempted to think,' the voice continued, 'that children are more savage than savages.'

'He won't hurt me. I shan't run,' Ada thought. It could be nobody but Mr. Black, the minister, she knew, and she knew also, though he was a man of humane instincts, that he preferred children in Sunday school.

'Can't you leave off tormenting that unfortunate?' he called again, as he opened the gate and came out into the road where she waited alone. 'Did he snatch your cap?' he asked, glancing severely at Toby.

'No, sir, he didn't snatch it. I gave it to him.'

Standing her ground, she stared up at the ungainly figure in the long black greatcoat and the scarred face under the slouch hat of black felt. His eyes were dark and piercing; his long bony nose curved in a beak; and his smooth-shaven chin was veined in splotches like spilled blackberry wine. A livid birthmark was branded on the left side of his face between nose and temple, and this, with the drooping eye above, as defiant as the eye of a caged hawk, gave him the look of a man who had fought his way through a forest fire. Only the fire seemed to be burning not without but within. He was a saint, Ada's grandmother, who ought to have known, had insisted, and because he was a saint he had been able, in spite of his disfigurement, to attach to himself, with brief intervals of widowerhood, three excellent wives.

'What will your mother say to that?' The minister's tone was stern.

'I have another, sir. Grandmother knitted two red caps for me. One for everyday, and one for Sunday.'

He smiled, and she told herself that he no longer frightened her. 'And you have a red lining to your squirrel-skin coat.'

She looked down. Yes, 'twas true, but she hadn't thought the minister would notice what she had on. Her short coat of squirrel skins stitched together in squares had been lined by Aunt Meggie with the red flannel from one of grandmother's old petticoats. Beneath the coat she wore a frock of brown and yellow sprigged calico, chosen dark to save washing. She hoped the minister couldn't see the top of her red flannel underbody, which would poke up at the neck, though it was sewed to her petticoat of the same scratchy material. Was there anything wrong, she wondered, while her anxious gaze travelled to her brown woollen stockings with yellow stripes at the top, and farther down, but not so very far, after all, to her stout leather shoes made by old Mr. Borrows, the cobbler, who still sewed so neatly that his shoes lasted for ever. They looked clumsy, she thought; but he had assured her they would wear until her feet grew too big for them.

Though she flushed when the minister glanced down at her, she was not ashamed of her appearance. She had been told, and saw no reason to doubt, that she had a perfectly good face. 'A large mouth, but perfectly good,' Aunt Meggie had said, and Ada's mother, overhearing this, had laughed and added, 'A blunt nose, but perfectly good too'. Only, it

seemed, her eyes were uncertain, or, as her mother insisted, 'improbable'. She had discovered this a year before, when she was nine, and Aunt Meggie was writing a letter about the family to a relative they had never seen, a blind and crippled old lady in Scotland. 'Shall I say that Ada's eyes are dark grey or smoky blue?' Aunt Meggie had asked, turning, pen in hand, to the child's father. 'Tell her,' he had replied quickly, 'that she has eyes like the Hebrides.' When Ada had demanded eagerly, 'What are the Hebrides, father?' he had answered mysteriously, 'The Western Isles'.

She would remember this always because it had happened the day she won her gold medal for reciting the Shorter Catechism. The medal was very thin and scarcely bigger than her thumb-nail, but it was solid gold, the minister had said when he presented it. Her name was engraved on one side in letters so fine she couldn't read them, and on the other side there was the single word 'Catechism', with the year 1900 beneath. She wore the medal threaded on a shoestring round her neck, except on special occasions when mother would search in her bureau drawers until she found a bit of old ribbon.

Suddenly, when she thought he had finished, she became aware that Mr. Black was asking another question.

'Why did you give away your cap?'

'The boys spoiled Toby's. And he was crying. He was afraid his mother might whip him.'

Mr. Black frowned. He always frowned, as Ada learned afterwards, whenever he was brought face to face with the misery of the world. It was not easy, she could see, too, for him to avoid it. His sacred calling and the whole scheme of

salvation depended upon misery, mother had once complained when she was having a toothache.

'Well, I shouldn't trust her if she can lay hands on him,' he said.

While he spoke he wagged his head under the slouched brim, and because she thought it more polite to assent, she wagged back at him like a solid shadow.

'How old are you, my child?' Mr. Black inquired, after a pause.

'Ten, sir. I've been going on eleven ever since last summer.'

He nodded abruptly, and then appeared, even more abruptly, to forget her. His countenance shone in the sunlight, and her own small image seemed to wink at her from its glassy surface. She saw the drift of red in her cheeks, the freckles that never faded from her nose even in winter, and her flying hair, between brown and black, cut short to her shoulders, and curving up till it was like a drake's tail, Aunt Abigail said. She couldn't see the colour of her eyes, but that might be because they had that far-away look.

A stuttering noise at her back made her wheel round, and she saw that Toby was trying to stretch her cap over his deformed head. When she looked at him, he threw the cap in the road and held out his hands, babbling 'Sugar, sugar!'

'Can you understand what this unfortunate is saying?' Mr. Black asked.

'He's begging for something sweet. His mother taught him to say "Sugar, sugar" like that whenever he meets

anybody. No, I haven't anything sweet to give you, Toby,' she said severely.

'Go home!' Mr. Black commanded, with a queer distortion of his mouth, and Toby picked up the half-emptied pail of refuse and trotted obediently along the twisted path that led across the field to the hovel.

'You ought not to throw away the caps your grandmother knits for you.' The minister's voice had saddened. 'Her fingers are not so nimble as they used to be, and her bones are more brittle. But in her prime, before that attack of lumbago last winter, you couldn't have found her match anywhere. Many of our people back in the mountains owe their lives to her and to the medicine in her saddle-bag. Often on stormy nights when word came down from Thunder Mountain that somebody was near death, and the doctor was away on another case, she would pack her saddle-bag with medicine and bandages, not forgetting cloth for a winding-sheet, and start with me on horseback up Lightning or Burned Timber Ridge.'

It's all true, Ada told herself proudly, tossing back the hair from her shoulders. Everyone spoke that way of grandmother, especially her daughter-in-law, who had come from the Tidewater and had been a belle in the gay, fast set there Aunt Meggie said, until she met father when he had his first charge in Queenborough. A fine church it was, too, the largest Presbyterian congregation in that part of the country. Why had they left there, she wondered, and come back to live with grandmother in the old manse? Would that always, even when she grew up, be a mystery? From a word Aunt Meggie had let fall, she suspected that the change had

had something to do with losing their church. And then, when they were all safely at Ironside and father had begun to preach in the old stone church, which his great-great-grandfather, John Fincastle, pioneer, and his flock had built with their own hands, he had lost this charge also as soon as the second volume of his book had come from the press. It was dreadful, she couldn't help thinking, though grandmother had rebuked her for the opinion, the way pastors were dismissed just as soon as they were comfortably settled. Father had been obliged to turn into a schoolmaster and fill the parlour with rows of ugly green benches. She had heard somebody say that he was allowed to teach only profane learning, and even that was on grandmother's account, because she had done so much good in her life.

'Did your father go to Doncaster, this morning?' Mr. Black's question trailed off into the sigh she had learned to expect when anyone spoke of her father.

'Yes, sir. He went with Mr. Rowan in his two-horse gig. They started before day, and he said they would be back, if nothing happened, about sundown. It's a long way.'

'Not as the crow flies. But all ways are long over bad roads.'

'He had to go about the mortgage.' A mortgage was nothing to be ashamed of if you were self-respecting. Nor, for that matter, was being poor and doing without things, so long as you saved your pride and didn't stoop to receive charity.

What troubled her was not the mortgage, but the endless sigh that fluttered about father's name. He had been a more

eloquent preacher than Mr. Black, mother declared, and after the second volume of his book was published (the book that had cost him two pulpits) famous men from all over the world had written to ask his opinion of the philosophers in the olden time. For he himself was one of the greatest. Had he lived long ago, mother had said, carefully pronouncing the syllables, he might have walked with Socrates, he might have been the companion of Plato.

There was a brief silence while the man and the child gazed up the steep road from the church to a grove of giant oaks and a red brick house flanked by a stony hill which was used as a pasture for three infirm sheep. The dwelling stood slightly withdrawn from the village, on land that had belonged to the Fincastles ever since Ironside had been a part of the frontier and John Fincastle had led his human flock up from the Indian savannahs, running in wild grass and pea-vine, to the bowed shoulder of the mountain. Near the timbered ridges he had felled trees and built the original manse, a cabin of round logs with a stone chimney. He had always believed, grandmother said, that the Lord had directed him to their grove of oaks in Shut-in Valley. Far into the night he had prayed, asking a sign, and in the morning when he had risen to fetch water he had seen a finger of light pointing straight from the sky to the topmost bough of an oak. After more than a century and a half, in which the log cabin had given way first to a small stone house and then to the square brick house, the Fincastle place was still known as 'the old manse', while the minister's home in the village was called 'the new parsonage'. The child, who had heard all this and much more, imagined that the fine town

of Fincastle, and the lost county as well, had been named after the pioneer for whom God made a sign. But the minister might have told her, had he felt the wish to shatter a harmless myth, that these historic scenes commemorated not an act of God, but the family seat of Lord Botetourt in England.

'Is there anybody at the gate?' Mr. Black inquired presently, shielding his eyes from the sun. 'It may be only a sheep. It's queer, isn't it,' he continued solemnly, 'how little difference there is between a human being and a sheep to near-sighted eyes?'

The child laughed shyly because she knew, though it did not seem funny, that he expected her to be amused. "'Tis grandmother,' she replied. 'She's picking up sticks. Every evening, just before sundown, she goes out and picks up all the sticks that have dropped since the day before.'

The queer frown that bore so strong a resemblance to misery, and yet was not misery, distorted the minister's face. 'But that is bad for her rheumatism.'

'She doesn't stoop all the time. Father made her a pair of wooden tongs to pick up with.'

'Do you never help her?'

'We all pick up every evening. Sometimes father and I go down into the woods and gather the handcart full of light-wood. 'Tis a great saving,' she explained in an elderly tone, 'on the backlogs father cut last summer.'

'I dare say. Well, you'd better run home now and help your grandmother.'

'I'm not going home.' Her voice was faltering but brave. 'I'm going over to the flat rock by the big pine to watch for

father.' Had the minister forgotten that Christmas was coming soon, and the Ladies' Missionary Society was holding a festival on Tuesday to raise money for the heathen in China?

'Is he going to bring you something?' Again he smiled, and again she thought in surprise, I am not afraid of him.

'He's going to bring me a doll with real hair.' Her eyes shone and the red drifted back into her cheeks.

'But won't a doll with real hair cost a good deal?'

'I saved up my berry money. Mrs. Rowan paid me two dollars and a half for picking berries for her last summer.'

'Will a doll cost all of two dollars and a half?'

'I hope not.' She appeared anxious, as indeed she was. 'I had to spend a dollar. I simply had to spend a dollar.'

'Well, run on. He may come sooner than you expect. Isn't the nearest way through the village?'

'No, sir, I know a sheep track over the fields. The track goes by the flat rock all the way down to Smiling Creek.'

But he had not, she realized after a moment, listened to a word she had said. His gaze was sweeping the Appalachian uplands and the unbroken chain of mountains to the farthest and highest blue summit. While she waited for him to dismiss her, she saw his mouth quiver and move stiffly in silent prayer. Then, as she was about to slip away, the words fluttered and came to roost on his lips. 'Whenever I look at God's Mountain, I know what is meant by *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.*'

Vaguely bewildered, but still eager to be all that he required of a child who knew the Catechism by heart, she hesitated and raised her eyes to a face that had become

luminous with worship. Then, turning away softly, she tied her knitted scarf over her head and ran into the near field to pick out the old sheep track, which was scarcely wider than a seam in the ground.

II

The child lay on the flat rock and watched the road that climbed through the small valleys within the Great Valley.

God's Mountain, father said, was the oversoul of Appalachian Virginia. Whenever she gazed at it alone for a long time, the heavenly blue seemed to flood into her heart and rise there in a peak. That must have been the first thing God created, and blue, she supposed, was the oldest colour in the world. When she was studying the Alps in her geography class, father had said that the Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies were older. And the streams were old too. That was why there were no lakes or ponds in the hollows of Indian Rock County, not even in Campbell's Valley or Aunt Mary's Valley or Can't Whistle Creek Valley or, of course, in their very own Shut-in Valley. But there were many rivers and creeks and runs and trickling ice-green freshets from the melted snows in the mountains. Scattered among them, she could see the comfortable farmhouses, with roofs of red painted tin or grey weather-beaten shingles. For Shut-in Valley was not really shut in except at the farther end.

A doll with real hair--the thought ran in a bright skein through her mind. She had never in all her life had a doll with real hair. And she was buying it with her own money that she had earned, so she might look at it as soon as it came, without waiting for Christmas. Mother had given her a scrap of pink baby ribbon to tie round its head; she knew

Aunt Meggie was making a dress as a surprise; and grandmother, she was almost sure, had crocheted a pink coat, and perhaps tiny shoes, of worsted for it to wear when she took it into the village. She would call it Flora because that name sounded pink and smooth and smiling, with yellow hair.

Leaning down from the rock, she looked far over Little River, which reflected the sky through shadows of scudding clouds. Immense, clear, glittering, the even summit of God's Mountain broke on the western horizon. She could smell the crystal scent of winter in the air, like the taste of wild strawberries. Nearer, yet still far away, she could make out the twin crests of Rain and Cloud Mountains, and when she turned and glanced over her shoulder, there was Thunder Mountain, the nearest of all. On the very top of Thunder Mountain, father said, there was a heap of brown stones. Nobody could tell how it had come there, or why the Indians had raised it. Some people believed it was the burial mound of an Indian chief. But father thought that when the Shawnees went by on the warpath, each brave had dropped a stone as an offering to the Great Spirit, just as she dropped a penny in the plate Deacon McClung passed in church.

When she was old enough she meant to climb the mountain and see for herself. That was one of the things mother had always longed to do and had never done. 'Some day when we have nothing important to do,' mother said, 'and I don't have to lie on a sofa to spare my back, we'll take a whole day out of life and climb to the very top of Thunder Mountain. We'll go up as high as the Indian mount. From

there we can see nearly to the end of the world.' And ever since she was little, the child had asked, 'Is the end of the world blue, mother?'

Lower down on Thunder Mountain you could still see signs of the Shawnee warpath. Indian trail, they called it; and Ralph McBride had followed it with some deer-hunters last autumn. Over that trail the Shawnees had come for the massacre of Smiling Creek. Ralph had found arrow-heads and part of a tomahawk down under the rocks in the deepest bottom of the creek. When the Indians went back they had taken Great-great-grandmother Tod away into captivity. A little girl she had been, ten years old, no bigger than Ada. She had lived for seven long years a captive in a Shawnee village. When she was sixteen, they had married her to a young chief, and she had gone into his wigwam. Then peace with the red men had come soon afterwards, and when she was seventeen she was returned under the treaty, father said, that ended Pontiac's War. After all she had endured, she lived to be over a hundred.

In the middle of the road by the flat rock, two of the mountain people, a man and a boy, were swinging by with a slow, even gait. As they passed, they looked up and nodded gravely, and she nodded back without speaking. 'Somebody must be sick up there,' she thought; for the mountaineers seldom came down in winter, except to buy Jamaica ginger, or to summon Dr. Updike to visit the dying. Father had told her that they were a stalwart breed, the true American highlanders. In pioneer days their forefathers had fled from the strict settlements, some because they could breathe only in freedom, and others to escape punishment for

crimes against the laws of the Tidewater. But old black Aunt Abigail Geddy, who had Indian blood, muttered that there were fearful sights in the hills if you knew where to look for them. She had once gone to Panther's Gap to help grandmother take care of a family of half-wits. Three generations of half-wits, from a chattering crone of a granny to a newborn baby barely a day old! And the baby was the worst. If it had been a kitten, she said, they would have tossed it straight into Panther's Run. Aunt Abigail would have mumbled on over her pipe until the child was quaking with horror. But just as she approached the hair-raising part, mother came into the kitchen and spoke so severely that the old woman could never be persuaded to return to the subject. She would only shake her head and mutter that folks in Panther's Gap were all as poor as Job's turkey.

Ever since she was too little to lace her own shoes, Ada had wondered what it meant to be poor. She remembered, too, the very moment her wondering began. It was when she was five years old, and grandmother had taken her frock of yellow sprigged calico to give to the poor McAllisters, who lived up the road. She had loved her yellow sprigged frock, and she had hated to give it away. When she had cried, grandmother, who was rummaging in her closets to find clothes to put into a basket, had reproved her and said she ought to be glad to divide with God's poor. 'Are we poor, Grandmother?' she had asked. 'Not so poor,' grandmother had replied, 'as the poor McAllisters.' 'What does it mean,' the child had persisted, 'to be poor?' 'It means,' grandmother had answered, 'not to have enough to eat. It means not to have enough clothes to cover you.' 'Oh,

then, we aren't poor, grandmother,' Ada had cried joyfully. 'We have two bags of cornmeal in the storeroom, and two sides of bacon in the smokehouse, and a patch full of sweet potatoes in the garden. And all of us,' she had added in triumph, 'have our new red flannel petticoats for next winter.' Then mother had dropped on her knees, crying, while she folded her in her arms, 'You're right, darling,' she had said, 'we aren't really poor, and we have much to be thankful for.'

The shadow of the big pine had fallen aslant the rock, and rolling over in the crisp air, which was not too cold, Ada looked across the fields to the village and the stone chimneys of the church above the bare boughs in the churchyard. She knew the story of that church by heart, and she could listen for ever, she thought, to the adventures of the first settlers, as grandmother told them.

'Ours is a little church, but we have loved it,' grandmother would begin. 'Even if we've never been so well off as the congregations at New Providence and Timber Ridge and Falling Springs, still we were appointed to our humble work in the Lord's vineyard. The Fincastles, too, were always simple folk, though they had learning, and were as good as the best.'

'And are we as good as the best now, Grandmother?' Ada would ask.

'In everything but circumstances, my child. The Craigies were even less well-to-do than the Fincastles; but they were rooted like oaks.'

Scottish-Irish, people called the pioneers, though after they were driven out of Strathclyde they had stayed to

themselves in Ulster, and had seldom or never crossed blood with the Irish. John Fincastle had brought his flock with him from County Donegal, all the elders and deacons of his church and a few humbler members of his congregation. They had sailed from Ulster in the ship *Martha and Mary*, and it had taken them one hundred and eighteen days to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Philadelphia. At first they had settled and practised their religion in Pennsylvania; but after a few restless years, the bolder spirits among the Ulstermen had pushed southward, with their families, over the old Indian Road, into Virginia. The Scholar Pioneer, the immigrants named John Fincastle, because he had brought not only his Bible, but as much of his library as he could stow away into a pack. Grandmother would chuckle over the legend that he had reduced his wife's pots and kettles to a single vessel in order to make room for volumes of profane learning. 'That's how your father came by his reason, if not by his use of it. Though I'm far from denying,' she would sigh, 'that, in spite of his backsliding, he is still a man of good parts.'

But the worst was not over. A thrilling quaver would creep into grandmother's voice. When the Indian Road led them into Virginia, they found the settlement too contentious for a worshipper who wanted peace with his Maker. After a few months John Fincastle thrust out toward the frontier. The mood of the wilderness flowed into him and ebbed back again. He was pursuing the dream of a free country, the dream of a country so vast that each man would have room to bury his dead on his own land.

The pioneers who had gone ahead had left not a single track, not even the print of a hoof, in the Indian meadows. There was nothing to guide them except the sun and the stars, and occasionally the faint signs of Indian hunters. No wagons could travel the wilderness, and all they needed, even profane learning, had to be carried on packhorses. No wonder, after climbing hills, fording rivers, defying forests, that a spear of light should seem to them to be the finger of Providence. Their first act was to drop on their knees; their first thought was to build a house of divine worship. But years passed before they could assemble material for the Ironside church, with the floor of walnut puncheons, the high-backed pews, the stone stairways to the gallery.

When the ground was broken, all the families in the clearings left their brush-harrows and ploughs and hastened with saws, axes, and hammers to the spot where they had knelt in the sunrise. Men and women worked together building the walls, and every grain of sand to make mortar was brought by the women on horseback. Mrs. Ettrick, a woman of great strength, was surprised by a redskin when she was fording a creek, but she felled him with the single blow of a hatchet and galloped back to warn the men who bore muskets. Grandmother's words would drop thick and fast, like the pelting of hail, while Ada's flesh crawled with fear that was somehow delicious.

John Fincastle was a merciful man. Though he was a trespasser on the hunting-grounds of the Indians, he became their friend and protector. Only his renowned piety had saved him from death when he tried to defend innocent tribes. He never forgave the settlers, especially his own

militia, for the murder of Cornstalk. In his last years, when he was upwards of eighty, and his eldest son, John II, had succeeded him in his ministry, he abandoned what was then called civilization (here grandmother would pause to shake her head), and went alone into the wilderness as a missionary to the Shawnees. All his worldly needs, he had declared, could be strapped on his back. He carried with him two Bibles and one other book, a copy in his own handwriting of the Meditations of a Heathen Emperor who had not even been converted and saved. That made some people think his years were beginning to tell on him. It seemed, whatever way you looked at it, a strange thing to do.

'Remember, my child, that you have strong blood,' grandmother would end proudly, for her forefathers, the Craigies, had been members of John Fincastle's flock. 'Never let it be weakened. Thin blood runs to wickedness.'

The sun was going down in a blaze, but as it sank behind the hills it shot up again in a fountain of light and scattered a sparkling spray into the clouds. Cramped from waiting so long, Ada felt that a chill had begun to creep up from the rock, where the sunshine had vanished, through the thickness of her woollen stockings and squirrel-skin coat. Springing to her feet, she jumped up and down until warmth ran in pinpricks over her arms and legs. When she moved to the edge of the rock, she could look through the last faded leaves on the oaks, which glimmered with a bluish tone in the flushed light, and see the dormer-windows and the sloping shingled roof of the manse. The darkness of ivy was

flung over the square front porch, with ends that groped toward the western wall and laced back the green shutters.

In the side yard, over the fallen leaves, a dusky shape moved near the ground, and she knew that it was Horace on his way from Aunt Abigail Geddy's cabin, which he visited between meals in the hope of a sop of corn pone and gravy. The Geddys were the only coloured family in Ironside; they were all upright and independent, and they were proud of their Indian blood and straight features. Aunt Abigail had lived at the manse for forty-odd years. After father lost his church and had no money to pay her wages, she had stayed on because she said it was respectable to work for a minister, whether he preached or not, and her cabin between the garden and the sheep pasture, behind the row of sunflowers Aunt Meggie raised every summer for chicken feed, was all the home that she wanted. It was a good cabin. There were two rooms with a big stone fireplace and a floor of double boards to defend the old woman's bones from the dampness. Her son, Marcellus Geddy, had plastered the walls and whitewashed them within and without.

Between the green shutters the red eye of a window blinked from under the ivy, and while the child watched the flickering gleam she seemed to be in two places at once. The dusky shape of Horace barked at the door. It opened and shut again behind him when he had padded into the hall. Grandmother had filled her basket with sticks long ago, and had gone in to take up the ball of brown yarn and her steel knitting needles. She would sit erect in her deep chair with wings on her own side of the fireplace, near the lamp

on the round table and the front window where the shutters were held back by ivy. The big front room was mother's chamber. A log fire burned there all the time, and after supper the family gathered in front of the great fireplace to pray with grandmother, and to listen to father when he read aloud a chapter from *Old Mortality*. In one corner there was a high tester bed, and Ada's own trundle-bed, in which she had slept ever since she was a baby, was rolled out at night from under the hanging fringe of the counterpane. All the furniture, except a rosewood bookcase and sofa from the parsonage in Queenborough, was made of walnut or pine and had furnished the manse in her great-great-grandfather's day.

Grandmother was the kind of person you saw better when you were not looking straight at her. Even when she was young, mother said, she could never have been handsome; but she had the sort of ugliness that is more impressive than beauty. Her figure was tall, strong, rugged; her face reminded the child of the rock profile at Indian Head; and her eyes, small, bright, ageless, were like the eyes of an eaglet that had peered out from a crevice under the rock. At seventy, her eyebrows were still black and bushy, and in the left one there was a large brown mole from which three stiff black hairs bristled as sharply as needles in a pin-cushion. Summer and winter, except on the Sabbath, she wore the same dresses of black and grey calico with very full skirts, and a little crocheted shawl of grey or lavender wool was flung over her shoulders whenever she felt the edge of a chill. Ada had never seen her without a cap on her thick hair, which was not white but

grizzled. Even when her lumbago was so painful that she could not get out of bed, and a fire had to be kept up all night in her room, she would ask for her muslin day cap with its bunch of narrow black ribbon before she would swallow a morsel of breakfast.

Mother, who could never sit still, would be moving about, helping Aunt Meggie in the kitchen (for three days Aunt Abigail Geddy had been crippled with rheumatism), or running out on the porch to look for father or for Ada herself. Then in a flash, hurrying and laughing as she hurried, she would dart in through another door, crying, 'I forgot something! I know I forgot something, but I can't think what it was I forgot!' She was always like that, gay, amused, beautiful, even when she was faded and weather-beaten, making fun where there was no fun.

For a few years after she lost her two little sons from diphtheria, Aunt Meggie said, the heart had seemed to go out of her. But when father was obliged to resign from his church in Queenborough, and everything became suddenly so bad that it looked as if it could not be worse, mother grew brighter than she had ever been. She talked all the time, and no matter how poor they were, she could always find something to laugh at, if it were nothing more amusing than poverty. Yet it was true, as she would repeat over and over in her bright, tremulous voice, they had much to be thankful for. Never, as far back as Ada could remember, had they been hungry. Even if they needed clothes, and grandmother re-dipped and turned and pressed the ribbon on her caps until it was worn to a fringe, they had never been without corn bread and brown gravy and all the dried

beans and peas and tinned tomatoes that Aunt Meggie gathered in their garden and put up with the help of Aunt Abigail Geddy.

III

The dying flare of the sun cast a rust-coloured light down into the valley, and across this light a long black shape wavered suddenly from the blue crook in the hills.

That must be the two-horse gig, with father and Mr. Rowan side by side on the small seat. But was it? She couldn't be sure. Yes . . . no. Oh, it was, it was . . . Lightly as a squirrel, she balanced herself on the edge of the rock, bounded with a single flying leap into the road, and raced down toward the bottom of the hill, where the gig was splashing through a puddle before taking the climb. Like an enormous crow, the shadow hesitated, flapped, and then flitted onward before the vehicle, as if shadow and substance were two separate bodies. At last he was coming. He was bringing her doll with real hair that she could brush and comb and perhaps roll up in curl-papers. As she ran on, her breath came in gasps and words floated in wisps of fog out of her mouth. Never had she been so happy before. Her heart felt as if it would bubble over with joy.

'Did you bring it, Father?' she called, and he answered in his distant voice, so unlike her mother's near and thrilling tones, 'Yes, I brought it, my child. I did the best I could.' When the gig reached her, she was lifted into it and settled snugly between father's hard lean figure and Mr. Rowan's soft bulging one.

'I reckon he's got something for you stuffed away in that basket with the coffee and sugar,' Mr. Rowan remarked

pleasantly. She had always liked him, even if he was Janet's father and Janet would tag after her when she went climbing with Ralph. It wasn't any fun to climb with a baby that fell down and scratched her knee and then sat in the briars and cried if you didn't come back for her. But Mr. Rowan had a pleasant face (a red face was more cheerful, especially in winter time, than a pale one) and he had a good habit of carrying pink and white sugar animals in his pocket. This was because of Janet. Aunt Abigail said they had spoiled Janet till she was rotten, and some day, when the Lord had time to attend to it, they would be punished.

'It's a doll with real hair. I bought it with my berry money.'

'Well, well, I wish Janet would turn her hand to making money. She's never bought anything for herself.'

'But she's always had a wax doll this high.' She measured the height in the air. 'It's so beautiful she won't let any of us play with it.'

'Is that so? Well, I tell you what we'll do. You bring your doll to Janet's Christmas tree and we'll all play together.'

Daylight and shadow had both vanished now, and there was only the thin dusk on the road. Past the flat rock into the village, where she saw Mr. Borrows shutting his shop, and Judge Melrose walking along the cinder-strewn sidewalk with his brown spaniel Ruddy, and a white horse before the door of old Mr. Wertenbaker, who had come from the Shenandoah Valley, and Janet Rowan waving her hand to her father, and Ralph McBride opening the gate before the small house where his mother, a widow but proud, worked so hard to keep a roof over their heads. Then on beyond the church into the steep short road which led through the big

gate that sagged on its hinges, and over the crackling dead leaves in the yard of the manse.

'Well, I'll be turning home,' Mr. Rowan said, smiling and friendly, as he picked her up and swung her to the ground. 'It's been a long day, and we'll both be glad of a good supper with bed at the end of it. A cold wave is coming. We may have snow again by to-morrow.'

The gig rolled through the gate; the crackling died away in the leaves; there was the sound of wheels growing fainter; and then suddenly mother's voice called eagerly from the porch. 'Have you come, John?'

'May I have it now, Father?' the child asked.

They were standing under the oaks, and she waited while he glanced down uncertainly at the basket. His figure, tall, spare, with the straight spine of an Indian, seemed to sink into and become a part of the twilight.

'May I have my doll now, Father?' she asked again.

Stooping over the basket, he lifted the lid and drew out an oblong parcel wrapped in brown paper and neatly tied with a store string. 'I did the best I could, my child,' he repeated, as he put it into her hands. 'After the mortgage was settled, it took all I had left to buy coffee and sugar for your grandmother. She is old, and it's a deprivation for her to go without coffee.'

But she held the parcel tight, without untying the string or taking in a word that he said. Suddenly the whole world was swimming in bliss, the blue twilight, the dark afterglow, the far-off benevolent shape of God's Mountain. 'I'll undo it inside,' she whispered, catching her breath. 'I'll wait for mother and grandmother.'

Wheeling round, she ran across the yard, over the dead leaves which sighed as cheerfully as if they were not really dead. She would always remember that happy rustling underfoot, and the clinging smoky scents that sprang up out of the twilight--scents of earth and winter and frosty darkness, all shot through and mingled with a sensation of joy, a quiver of expectancy.

The door opened and shut. She ran into the room, straight to the fireplace, where grandmother was knitting and mother had hurried in, after calling father, to throw lightwood knots on the flames.

'He's come, Mother. He's brought my doll.'

'I'm glad, dear. I'm glad you have what you've wanted so much.' Mother's eyes, as she turned from the fire, were like lamps under a dark shade, and her thin cheeks, where all the dimples were sucked into hollows, were flaming with colour.

Grandmother peered over her spectacles, though her knitting needles continued to click busily, and Aunt Meggie, who was tying on an apron on her way to the kitchen, stopped and glanced back, with her round cheerful face and funny slanting eyes beneath wisps of sandy hair that strayed over her forehead.

'The only dolls little girls had in my day were rag dolls,' grandmother said, with a smile. 'Rag or corncob or hickory nut. I remember somebody, 'twas a member of your great-grandfather's congregation, gave me a wooden doll with arms and legs on hinges, and I nearly went out of my wits for happiness.' The sense of fun played over her as dawn skims over a mountain crag.