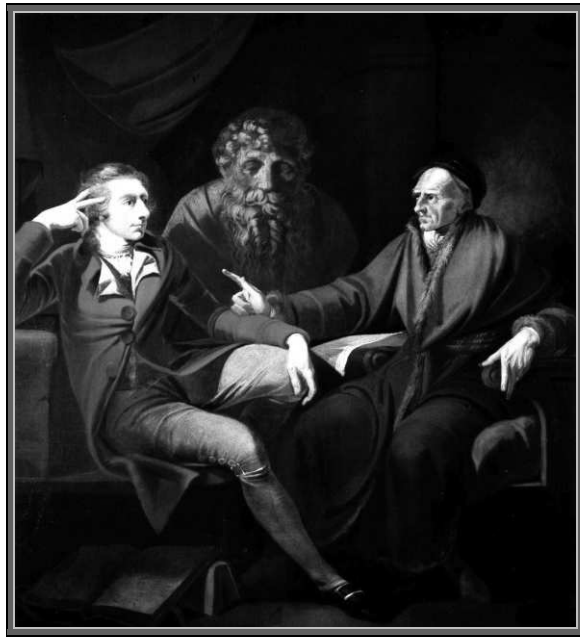


The "Genius"



Theodore Dreiser

The “Genius”

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The "Genius"

THE "GENIUS"
BY
THEODORE DREISER

AUTHOR OF
SISTER CARRIE
JENNIE GERHARDT
A TRAVELER AT FORTY

A TRILOGY OF DESIRE

1. THE FINANCIER

2. THE TITAN

3.

THEODORE DREISER
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
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"Eugene Witla, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour her, and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will."

BOOK I - YOUTH

CHAPTER I

This story has its beginnings in the town of Alexandria, Illinois, be-

tween 1884 and 1889, at the time when the place had a population of somewhere near ten thousand. There was about it just enough of the air of a city to relieve it of the sense of rural life. It had one street-car line, a theatre,—or rather, an opera house, so-called (why no one might say, for no opera was ever performed there)—two railroads, with their stations, and a business district, composed of four brisk sides to a public square. In the square were the county court-house and four newspapers. These two morning and two evening papers made the population fairly aware of the fact that life was full of issues, local and national, and that there were many interesting and varied things to do. On the edge of town, several lakes and a pretty stream—perhaps Alexandria's most pleasant feature—gave it an atmosphere not unakin to that of a moderate-priced summer resort. Architecturally the town was not new. It was mostly built of wood, as all American towns were at this time, but laid out prettily in some sections, with houses that sat back in great yards, far from the streets, with flower beds, brick walks, and green trees as concomitants of a comfortable home life. Alexandria was a city of young Americans. Its spirit was young. Life was all before almost everybody. It was really good to be alive.

In one part of this city there lived a family which in its character and composition might well have been considered typically American and middle western. It was not by any means poor—or, at least, did not consider itself so; it was in no sense rich. Thomas Jefferson Witla, the father, was a sewing machine agent with the general agency in that county of one of the best known and best selling machines made. From each twenty, thirty-five or sixty-dollar machine which he sold, he took a profit of thirty-five per cent. The sale of machines was not great, but it was enough to yield him nearly two thousand dollars a year; and on that he had managed to buy a house and lot, to furnish it comfortably, to send his children to school, and to maintain a local store on the public square where the latest styles of machines were displayed. He also took old machines of other makes in exchange, allowing ten to fifteen dollars on the purchase price of a new machine. He also repaired machines,—and with that peculiar energy of the American mind, he

tried to do a little insurance business in addition. His first idea was that his son, Eugene Tennyson Witla, might take charge of this latter work, once he became old enough and the insurance trade had developed sufficiently. He did not know what his son might turn out to be, but it was always well to have an anchor to windward.

He was a quick, wiry, active man of no great stature, sandy-haired, with blue eyes with noticeable eye-brows, an eagle nose, and a rather radiant and ingratiating smile. Service as a canvassing salesman, endeavoring to persuade recalcitrant wives and indifferent or conservative husbands to realize that they really needed a new machine in their home, had taught him caution, tact, savoir faire. He knew how to approach people pleasantly. His wife thought too much so.

Certainly he was honest, hard working, and thrifty. They had been waiting a long time for the day when they could say they owned their own home and had a little something laid away for emergencies. That day had come, and life was not half bad. Their house was neat,—white with green shutters, surrounded by a yard with well kept flower beds, a smooth lawn, and some few shapely and broad spreading trees. There was a front porch with rockers, a swing under one tree, a hammock under another, a buggy and several canvassing wagons in a nearby stable. Witla liked dogs, so there were two collies. Mrs. Witla liked live things, so there were a canary bird, a cat, some chickens, and a bird house set aloft on a pole where a few blue-birds made their home. It was a nice little place, and Mr. and Mrs. Witla were rather proud of it.

Miriam Witla was a good wife to her husband. A daughter of a hay and grain dealer in Wooster, a small town near Alexandria in McLean County, she had never been farther out into the world than Springfield and Chicago. She had gone to Springfield as a very young girl, to see Lincoln buried, and once with her husband she had gone to the state fair or exposition which was held annually in those days on the lake front in Chicago. She was well preserved, good looking, poetic under a marked outward reserve. It was she who had insisted upon naming her only son Eugene Tennyson, a tribute at once to a brother Eugene, and to the celebrated romanticist of verse, because she had been so impressed with his "Idylls of the King."

Eugene Tennyson seemed rather strong to Witla père, as the name of a middle-western American boy, but he loved his wife and gave her her way in

most things. He rather liked the names of Sylvia and Myrtle with which she had christened the two girls. All three of the children were good looking,—Sylvia, a girl of twenty-one, with black hair, dark eyes, full blown like a rose, healthy, active, smiling. Myrtle was of a less vigorous constitution, small, pale, shy, but intensely sweet—like the flower she was named after, her mother said. She was inclined to be studious and reflective, to read verse and dream. The young bloods of the high school were all crazy to talk to Myrtle and to walk with her, but they could find no words. And she herself did not know what to say to them.

Eugene Witla was the apple of his family's eye, younger than either of his two sisters by two years. He had straight smooth black hair, dark almond-shaped eyes, a straight nose, a shapely but not aggressive chin; his teeth were even and white, showing with a curious delicacy when he smiled, as if he were proud of them. He was not very strong to begin with, moody, and to a notable extent artistic. Because of a weak stomach and a semi-anæmic condition, he did not really appear as strong as he was. He had emotion, fire, longings, that were concealed behind a wall of reserve. He was shy, proud, sensitive, and very uncertain of himself.

When at home he lounged about the house, reading Dickens, Thackeray, Scott and Poe. He browsed idly through one book after another, wondering about life. The great cities appealed to him. He thought of travel as a wonderful thing. In school he read Taine and Gibbon between recitation hours, wondering at the luxury and beauty of the great courts of the world. He cared nothing for grammar, nothing for mathematics, nothing for botany or physics, except odd bits here and there. Curious facts would strike him—the composition of clouds, the composition of water, the chemical elements of the earth. He liked to lie in the hammock at home, spring, summer or fall, and look at the blue sky showing through the trees. A soaring buzzard poised in speculative flight held his attention fixedly. The wonder of a snowy cloud, high piled like wool, and drifting as an island, was like a song to him. He had wit, a keen sense of humor, a sense of pathos. Sometimes he thought he would draw; sometimes write. He had a little talent for both, he thought, but did practically nothing with either. He would sketch now and then, but only fragments—a small roof-top, with smoke curling from a chimney and birds flying; a bit of water with a willow bending over it and perhaps a boat anchored; a mill pond with ducks afloat, and a boy or woman on the bank. He really had no great talent for interpretation at this time, only an intense

sense of beauty. The beauty of a bird in flight, a rose in bloom, a tree swaying in the wind—these held him. He would walk the streets of his native town at night, admiring the brightness of the store windows, the sense of youth and enthusiasm that went with a crowd; the sense of love and comfort and home that spoke through the glowing windows of houses set back among trees.

He admired girls,—was mad about them,—but only about those who were truly beautiful. There were two or three in his school who reminded him of poetic phrases he had come across—"beauty like a tightened bow," "thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face," "a dancing shape, an image gay"—but he could not talk to them with ease. They were beautiful but so distant. He invested them with more beauty than they had; the beauty was in his own soul. But he did not know that. One girl whose yellow hair lay upon her neck in great yellow braids like ripe corn, was constantly in his thoughts. He worshiped her from afar but she never knew. She never knew what solemn black eyes burned at her when she was not looking. She left Alexandria, her family moving to another town, and in time he recovered, for there is much of beauty. But the color of her hair and the wonder of her neck stayed with him always.

There was some plan on the part of Witla to send these children to college, but none of them showed any great desire for education. They were perhaps wiser than books, for they were living in the realm of imagination and feeling. Sylvia longed to be a mother, and was married at twenty-one to Henry Burgess, the son of Benjamin C. Burgess, editor of the *Morning Appeal*. There was a baby the first year. Myrtle was dreaming through algebra and trigonometry, wondering whether she would teach or get married, for the moderate prosperity of the family demanded that she do something. Eugene mooned through his studies, learning nothing practical. He wrote a little, but his efforts at sixteen were puerile. He drew, but there was no one to tell him whether there was any merit in the things he did or not. Practical matters were generally without significance to him. But he was overawed by the fact that the world demanded practical service—buying and selling like his father, clerking in stores, running big business. It was a confusing maze, and he wondered, even at this age, what was to become of him. He did not object to the kind of work his father was doing, but it did not interest him. For himself he knew it would be a pointless, dreary way of making a living, and as for insurance, that was equally bad. He could hardly bring himself to read through the long rigamarole of specifications which each insurance pa-

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per itemized. There were times—evenings and Saturdays—when he clerked in his father's store, but it was painful work. His mind was not in it.

As early as his twelfth year his father had begun to see that Eugene was not cut out for business, and by the time he was sixteen he was convinced of it. From the trend of his reading and his percentage marks at school, he was equally convinced that the boy was not interested in his studies. Myrtle, who was two classes ahead of him but sometimes in the same room, reported that he dreamed too much. He was always looking out of the window.

Eugene's experience with girls had not been very wide. There were those very minor things that occur in early youth—girls whom we furtively kiss, or who furtively kiss us—the latter had been the case with Eugene. He had no particular interest in any one girl. At fourteen he had been picked by a little girl at a party as an affinity, for the evening at least, and in a game of "post-office" had enjoyed the wonder of a girl's arms around him in a dark room and a girl's lips against his; but since then there had been no re-encounter of any kind. He had dreamed of love, with this one experience as a basis, but always in a shy, distant way. He was afraid of girls, and they, to tell the truth, were afraid of him. They could not make him out.

But in the fall of his seventeenth year Eugene came into contact with one girl who made a profound impression on him. Stella Appleton was a notably beautiful creature. She was very fair, Eugene's own age, with very blue eyes and a slender sylph-like body. She was gay and debonair in an enticing way, without really realizing how dangerous she was to the average, susceptible male heart. She liked to flirt with the boys because it amused her, and not because she cared for anyone in particular. There was no petty meanness about it, however, for she thought they were all rather nice, the less clever appealing to her almost more than the sophisticated. She may have liked Eugene originally because of his shyness.

He saw her first at the beginning of his last school year when she came to the city and entered the second high school class. Her father had come from Moline, Illinois, to take a position as manager of a new pulley manufactory which was just starting. She had quickly become friends with his sister Myrtle, being perhaps attracted by her quiet ways, as Myrtle was by Stella's gaiety.

One afternoon, as Myrtle and Stella were on Main Street, walking home from the post office, they met Eugene, who was on his way to visit a boy

friend. He was really bashful; and when he saw them approaching he wanted to escape, but there was no way. They saw him, and Stella approached confidently enough. Myrtle was anxious to intercept him, because she had her pretty companion with her.

"You haven't been home, have you?" she asked, stopping. This was her chance to introduce Stella; Eugene couldn't escape. "Miss Appleton, this is my brother Eugene."

Stella gave him a sunny encouraging smile, and her hand, which he took gingerly. He was plainly nervous.

"I'm not very clean," he said apologetically. "I've been helping father fix a buggy."

"Oh, we don't mind," said Myrtle. "Where are you going?"

"Over to Harry Morris's," he explained.

"What for?"

"We're going for hickory nuts."

"Oh, I wish I had some," said Stella.

"I'll bring you some," he volunteered gallantly.

She smiled again. "I wish you would."

She almost proposed that they should be taken along, but inexperience hindered her.

Eugene was struck with all her charm at once. She seemed like one of those unattainable creatures who had swum into his ken a little earlier and disappeared. There was something of the girl with the corn-colored hair about her, only she had been more human, less like a dream. This girl was fine, delicate, pink, like porcelain. She was fragile and yet virile. He caught his breath, but he was more or less afraid of her. He did not know what she might be thinking of him.

"Well, we're going on to the house," said Myrtle.

"I'd go along if I hadn't promised Harry I'd come over."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Myrtle. "We don't mind."

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He withdrew, feeling that he had made a very poor impression. Stella's eyes had been on him in a very inquiring way. She looked after him when he had gone.

"Isn't he nice?" she said to Myrtle frankly.

"I think so," replied Myrtle; "kind o'. He's too moody, though."

"What makes him?"

"He isn't very strong."

"I think he has a nice smile."

"I'll tell him!"

"No, please don't! You won't, will you?"

"No."

"But he *has* a nice smile."

"I'll ask you round to the house some evening and you can meet him again."

"I'd like to," said Stella. "It would be a lot of fun."

"Come out Saturday evening and stay all night. He's home then."

"I will," said Stella. "Won't that be fine!"

"I believe you like him!" laughed Myrtle.

"I think he's awfully nice," said Stella, simply.

The second meeting happened on Saturday evening as arranged, when he came home from his odd day at his father's insurance office. Stella had come to supper. Eugene saw her through the open sitting room door, as he bounded upstairs to change his clothes, for he had a fire of youth which no sickness of stomach or weakness of lungs could overcome at this age. A thrill of anticipation ran over his body. He took especial pains with his toilet, adjusting a red tie to a nicety, and parting his hair carefully in the middle. He came down after a while, conscious that he had to say something smart, worthy of himself, or she would not see how attractive he was; and yet he was fearful as to the result. When he entered the sitting room she was sitting with his sister before an open fire-place, the glow of a lamp with a red-flowered shade warmly illuminating the room. It was a commonplace room,

with its blue cloth-covered center table, its chairs of stereotyped factory design, and its bookcase of novels and histories, but it was homey, and the sense of hominess was strong.

Mrs. Witla was in and out occasionally, looking for things which appertained to her functions as house-mother. The father was not home yet; he would get there by supper-time, having been to some outlying town of the county trying to sell a machine. Eugene was indifferent to his presence or absence. Mr. Witla had a fund of humor which extended to joking with his son and daughters, when he was feeling good, to noting their budding interest in the opposite sex; to predicting some commonplace climax to their one grand passion when it should come. He was fond of telling Myrtle that she would one day marry a horse-doctor. As for Eugene, he predicted a certain Elsa Brown, who, his wife said, had greasy curls. This did not irritate either Myrtle or Eugene. It even brought a wry smile to Eugene's face for he was fond of a jest; but he saw his father pretty clearly even at this age. He saw the smallness of his business, the ridiculousness of any such profession having any claim on him. He never wanted to say anything, but there was in him a burning opposition to the commonplace, a molten pit in a crater of reserve, which smoked ominously now and then for anyone who could have read. Neither his father nor his mother understood him. To them he was a peculiar boy, dreamy, sickly, unwitting, as yet, of what he really wanted.

"Oh, here you are!" said Myrtle, when he came in. "Come and sit down."

Stella gave him an enticing smile.

He walked to the mantel-piece and stood there, posing. He wanted to impress this girl, and he did not quite know how. He was almost lost for anything to say.

"You can't guess what we've been doing!" his sister chirped helpfully.

"Well—what?" he replied blankly.

"You ought to guess. Can't you be nice and guess?"

"One guess, anyhow," put in Stella.

"Toasting pop-corn," he ventured with a half smile.

"You're warm." It was Myrtle speaking.

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Stella looked at him with round blue eyes. "One more guess," she suggested.

"Chestnuts!" he guessed.

She nodded her head gaily. "What hair!" he thought. Then—"Where are they?"

"Here's one," laughed his new acquaintance, holding out a tiny hand.

Under her laughing encouragement he was finding his voice. "Stingy!" he said.

"Now isn't that mean," she exclaimed. "I gave him the only one I had. Don't you give him any of yours, Myrtle."

"I take it back," he pleaded. "I didn't know."

"I won't!" exclaimed Myrtle. "Here, Stella," and she held out the few nuts she had left, "take these, and don't you give him any!" She put them in Stella's eager hands.

He saw her meaning. It was an invitation to a contest. She wanted him to try to make her give him some. He fell in with her plan.

"Here!" He stretched out his palm. "That's not right!"

She shook her head.

"One, anyhow," he insisted.

Her head moved negatively from side to side slowly.

"One," he pleaded, drawing near.

Again the golden negative. But her hand was at the side nearest him, where he could seize it. She started to pass its contents behind her to the other hand but he jumped and caught it.

"Myrtle! Quick!" she called.

Myrtle came. It was a three-handed struggle. In the midst of the contest Stella twisted and rose to her feet. Her hair brushed his face. He held her tiny hand firmly. For a moment he looked into her eyes. What was it? He could not say. Only he half let go and gave her the victory.

"There," she smiled. "Now I'll give you one."

He took it, laughing. What he wanted was to take her in his arms.

A little while before supper his father came in and sat down, but presently took a Chicago paper and went into the dining room to read. Then his mother called them to the table, and he sat by Stella. He was intensely interested in what she did and said. If her lips moved he noted just how. When her teeth showed he thought they were lovely. A little ringlet on her forehead beckoned him like a golden finger. He felt the wonder of the poetic phrase, "the shining strands of her hair."

After dinner he and Myrtle and Stella went back to the sitting room. His father stayed behind to read, his mother to wash dishes. Myrtle left the room after a bit to help her mother, and then these two were left alone. He hadn't much to say, now that they were together—he couldn't talk. Something about her beauty kept him silent.

"Do you like school?" she asked after a time. She felt as if they must talk.

"Only fairly well," he replied. "I'm not much interested. I think I'll quit one of these days and go to work."

"What do you expect to do?"

"I don't know yet—I'd like to be an artist." He confessed his ambition for the first time in his life—why, he could not have said.

Stella took no note of it.

"I was afraid they wouldn't let me enter second year high school, but they did," she remarked. "The superintendent at Moline had to write the superintendent here."

"They're mean about those things," he cogitated.

She got up and went to the bookcase to look at the books. He followed after a little.

"Do you like Dickens?" she asked.

He nodded his head solemnly in approval. "Pretty much," he said.

"I can't like him. He's too long drawn out. I like Scott better."

"I like Scott," he said.

"I'll tell you a lovely book that I like." She paused, her lips parted trying to remember the name. She lifted her hand as though to pick the title out of the air. "The Fair God," she exclaimed at last.

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"Yes—it's fine," he approved. "I thought the scene in the old Aztec temple where they were going to sacrifice Ahwahee was so wonderful!"

"Oh, yes, I liked that," she added. She pulled out "Ben Hur" and turned its leaves idly. "And this was so good."

"Wonderful!"

They paused and she went to the window, standing under the cheap lace curtains. It was a moonlight night. The rows of trees that lined the street on either side were leafless; the grass brown and dead. Through the thin, inter-laced twigs that were like silver filigree they could see the lamps of other houses shining through half-drawn blinds. A man went by, a black shadow in the half-light.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said.

Eugene came near. "It's fine," he answered.

"I wish it were cold enough to skate. Do you skate?" She turned to him.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

"My, it's so nice on a moonlit night. I used to skate a lot at Moline."

"We skate a lot here. There're two lakes, you know."

He thought of the clear crystal nights when the ice of Green Lake had split every so often with a great resounding rumble. He thought of the crowds of boys and girls shouting, the distant shadows, the stars. Up to now he had never found any girl to skate with successfully. He had never felt just easy with anyone. He had tried it, but once he had fallen with a girl, and it had almost cured him of skating forever. He felt as though he could skate with Stella. He felt that she might like to skate with him.

"When it gets colder we might go," he ventured. "Myrtle skates."

"Oh, that'll be fine!" she applauded.

Still she looked out into the street.

After a bit she came back to the fire and stood before him, pensively looking down.

"Do you think your father will stay here?" he asked.

"He says so. He likes it very much."

"Do you?"

"Yes—now."

"Why *now*?"

"Oh, I didn't like it at first."

"Why?"

"Oh, I guess it was because I didn't know anybody. I like it though, now."
She lifted her eyes.

He drew a little nearer.

"It's a nice place," he said, "but there isn't much for me here. I think I'll leave next year."

"Where do you think you'll go?"

"To Chicago. I don't want to stay here."

She turned her body toward the fire and he moved to a chair behind her, leaning on its back. She felt him there rather close, but did not move. He was surprising himself.

"Aren't you ever coming back?" she asked.

"Maybe. It all depends. I suppose so."

"I shouldn't think you'd want to leave yet."

"Why?" "You say it's so nice."

He made no answer and she looked over her shoulder. He was leaning very much toward her.

"Will you skate with me this winter?" he asked meaningly.

She nodded her head.

Myrtle came in.

"What are you two talking about?" she asked.

"The fine skating we have here," he said.

"I love to skate," she exclaimed.

"So do I," added Stella. "It's heavenly."

CHAPTER II

Some of the incidents of this courtship that followed, ephemeral as it

was, left a profound impression on Eugene's mind. They met to skate not long after, for the snow came and the ice and there was wonderful skating on Green Lake. The frost was so prolonged that men with horses and ice-saws were cutting blocks a foot thick over at Miller's Point, where the ice houses were. Almost every day after Thanksgiving there were crowds of boys and girls from the schools scooting about like water skippers. Eugene could not always go on week evenings and Saturdays because he had to assist his father at the store. But at regular intervals he could ask Myrtle to get Stella and let them all go together at night. And at other times he would ask her to go alone. Not infrequently she did.

On one particular occasion they were below a group of houses which crept near the lake on high ground. The moon was up, its wooing rays reflected in the polished surfaces of the ice. Through the black masses of trees that lined the shore could be seen the glow of windows, yellow and homey. Eugene and Stella had slowed up to turn about, having left the crowd of skaters some distance back. Stella's golden curls were covered, except for a few ringlets, with a French cap; her body, to below the hips, encased in a white wool Jersey, close-fitting and shapely. The skirt below was a grey mixture of thick wool and the stockings were covered by white woolen leggings. She looked tempting and knew it.

Suddenly, as they turned, one of her skates came loose and she hobbled and exclaimed about it. "Wait," said Eugene, "I'll fix it."

She stood before him and he fell to his knees, undoing the twisted strap. When he had the skate off and ready for her foot he looked up, and she looked down on him, smiling. He dropped the skate and flung his arms around her hips, laying his head against her waist.

"You're a bad boy," she said.

For a few minutes she kept silent, for as the center of this lovely scene she was divine. While he held her she pulled off his wool cap and laid her hand on his hair. It almost brought tears to his eyes, he was so happy. At

the same time it awakened a tremendous passion. He clutched her significantly.

"Fix my skate, now," she said wisely.

He got up to hug her but she would not let him.

"No, no," she protested. "You mustn't do like that. I won't come with you if you do."

"Oh, Stella!" he pleaded.

"I mean it," she insisted. "You mustn't do like that."

He subsided, hurt, half angry. But he feared her will. She was really not as ready for caresses as he had thought.

Another time a sleighing party was given by some school girls, and Stella, Eugene and Myrtle were invited. It was a night of snow and stars, not too cold but bracing. A great box-wagon had been dismantled of its body and the latter put on runners and filled with straw and warm robes. Eugene and Myrtle, like the others, had been picked up at their door after the sleigh had gone the rounds of some ten peaceful little homes. Stella was not in yet, but in a little while her house was reached.

"Get in here," called Myrtle, though she was half the length of the box away from Eugene. Her request made him angry. "Sit by me," he called, fearful that she would not. She climbed in by Myrtle but finding the space not to her liking moved farther down. Eugene made a special effort to have room by him, and she came there as though by accident. He drew a buffalo robe around her and thrilled to think that she was really there. The sleigh went jingling around the town for others, and finally struck out into the country. It passed great patches of dark woods silent in the snow, little white frame farmhouses snuggled close to the ground, and with windows that gleamed in a vague romantic way. The stars were countless and keen. The whole scene made a tremendous impression on him, for he was in love, and here beside him, in the shadow, her face palely outlined, was this girl. He could make out the sweetness of her cheek, her eyes, the softness of her hair.

There was a good deal of chatter and singing, and in the midst of these distractions he managed to slip an arm about her waist, to get her hand in his, to look close into her eyes, trying to divine their expression. She was always coy with him, not wholly yielding. Three or four times he kissed her

cheek furtively and once her mouth. In a dark place he pulled her vigorously to him, putting a long, sensuous kiss on her lips that frightened her.

"No," she protested, nervously. "You mustn't."

He ceased for a time, feeling that he had pressed his advantage too closely. But the night in all its beauty, and she in hers made a lasting impression.

"I think we ought to get Eugene into newspaper work or something like that," Witla senior suggested to his wife.

"It looks as though that's all he would be good for, at least now," replied Mrs. Witla, who was satisfied that her boy had not yet found himself. "I think he'll do something better later on. His health isn't very good, you know."

Witla half suspected that his boy was naturally lazy, but he wasn't sure. He suggested that Benjamin C. Burgess, the prospective father-in-law of Sylvia and the editor and proprietor of the *Morning Appeal*, might give him a place as a reporter or type-setter in order that he might learn the business from the ground up. The *Appeal* carried few employees, but Mr. Burgess might have no objections to starting Eugene as a reporter if he could write, or as a student of type-setting, or both. He appealed to Burgess one day on the street.

"Say, Burgess," he said, "you wouldn't have a place over in your shop for that boy of mine, would you? He likes to scribble a little, I notice. I think he pretends to draw a little, too, though I guess it doesn't amount to much. He ought to get into something. He isn't doing anything at school. Maybe he could learn type-setting. It wouldn't hurt him to begin at the bottom if he's going to follow that line. It wouldn't matter what you paid him to begin with."

Burgess thought. He had seen Eugene around town, knew no harm of him except that he was lackadaisical and rather moody.

"Send him in to see me some day," he replied noncommittally. "I might do something for him."

"I'd certainly be much obliged to you if you would," said Witla. "He is not doing much good as it is now," and the two men parted.

He went home and told Eugene. "Burgess says he might give you a position as a type-setter or a reporter on the *Appeal* if you'd come in and see him some day," he explained, looking over to where his son was reading by the lamp.

"Does he?" replied Eugene calmly. "Well, I can't write. I might set type. Did you ask him?"

"Yes," said Witla. "You'd better go to him some day."

Eugene bit his lip. He realized this was a commentary on his loafing propensities. He wasn't doing very well, that was certain. Still type-setting was no bright field for a person of his temperament. "I will," he concluded, "when school's over."

"Better speak before school ends. Some of the other fellows might ask for it around that time. It wouldn't hurt you to try your hand at it."

"I will," said Eugene obediently.

He stopped in one sunny April afternoon at Mr. Burgess' office. It was on the ground floor of the three-story *Appeal* building in the public square. Mr. Burgess, a fat man, slightly bald, looked at him quizzically over his steel rimmed spectacles. What little hair he had was gray.

"So you think you would like to go into the newspaper business, do you?" queried Burgess.

"I'd like to try my hand at it," replied the boy. "I'd like to see whether I like it."

"I can tell you right now there's very little in it. Your father says you like to write."

"I'd like to well enough, but I don't think I can. I wouldn't mind learning type-setting. If I ever could write I'd be perfectly willing to."

"When do you think you'd like to start?"

"At the end of school, if it's all the same to you."

"It doesn't make much difference. I'm not really in need of anybody, but I could use you. Would you be satisfied with five a week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come in when you are ready. I'll see what I can do."

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He waved the prospective type-setter away with a movement of his fat hand, and turned to his black walnut desk, dingy, covered with newspapers, and lit by a green shaded electric light. Eugene went out, the smell of fresh printing ink in his nose, and the equally aggressive smell of damp newspapers. It was going to be an interesting experience, he thought, but perhaps a waste of time. He did not think so much of Alexandria. Some time he was going to get out of it.

The office of the *Appeal* was not different from that of any other country newspaper office within the confines of our two hemispheres. On the ground floor in front was the business office, and in the rear the one large flat bed press and the job presses. On the second floor was the composing room with its rows of type cases on their high racks—for this newspaper was, like most other country newspapers, still set by hand; and in front was the one dingy office of the so-called editor, or managing editor, or city editor—for all three were the same person, a Mr. Caleb Williams whom Burgess had picked up in times past from heaven knows where. Williams was a small, lean, wiry man, with a black pointed beard and a glass eye which fixed you oddly with its black pupil. He was talkative, skipped about from duty to duty, wore most of the time a green shade pulled low over his forehead, and smoked a brown briar pipe. He had a fund of knowledge, piled up in metropolitan journalistic experience, but he was anchored here with a wife and three children, after sailing, no doubt, a chartless sea of troubles, and was glad to talk life and experiences after office hours with almost anybody. It took him from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon to gather what local news there was, and either write it or edit it. He seemed to have a number of correspondents who sent him weekly batches of news from surrounding points. The Associated Press furnished him with a few minor items by telegraph, and there was a "patent insides," two pages of fiction, household hints, medicine ads. and what not, which saved him considerable time and stress. Most of the news which came to him received short shrift in the matter of editing. "In Chicago we used to give a lot of attention to this sort of thing," Williams was wont to declare to anyone who was near, "but you can't do it down here. The readers really don't expect it. They're looking for local items. I always look after the local items pretty sharp."

Mr. Burgess took care of the advertising sections. In fact he solicited advertising personally, saw that it was properly set up as the advertiser wanted it, and properly placed according to the convenience of the day and the

rights and demands of others. He was the politician of the concern, the handshaker, the guider of its policy. He wrote editorials now and then, or, with Williams, decided just what their sense must be, met the visitors who came to the office to see the editor, and arbitrated all known forms of difficulties. He was at the beck and call of certain Republican party-leaders in the county; but that seemed natural, for he was a Republican himself by temperament and disposition. He was appointed postmaster once to pay him for some useful services, but he declined because he was really making more out of his paper than his postmastership would have brought. He received whatever city or county advertising it was in the power of the Republican leaders to give him, and so he did very well. The complications of his political relationships Williams knew in part, but they never troubled that industrious soul. He dispensed with moralizing. "I have to make a living for myself, my wife and three children. That's enough to keep me going without bothering my head about other people." So this office was really run very quietly, efficiently, and in most ways pleasantly. It was a sunny place to work.

Witla, who came here at the end of his eleventh school year and when he had just turned seventeen, was impressed with the personality of Mr. Williams. He liked him. He came to like a Jonas Lyle who worked at what might be called the head desk of the composing room, and a certain John Summers who worked at odd times—whenever there was an extra rush of job printing. He learned very quickly that John Summers, who was fifty-five, grey, and comparatively silent, was troubled with weak lungs and drank. Summers would slip out of the office at various times in the day and be gone from five to fifteen minutes. No one ever said anything, for there was no pressure here. What work was to be done was done. Jonas Lyle was of a more interesting nature. He was younger by ten years, stronger, better built, but still a character. He was semi-phlegmatic, philosophic, feebly literary. He had worked, as Eugene found out in the course of time, in nearly every part of the United States—Denver, Portland, St. Paul, St. Louis, where not, and had a fund of recollections of this proprietor and that. Whenever he saw a name of particular distinction in the newspapers he was apt to bring the paper to Williams—and later, when they became familiar, to Eugene—and say, "I knew that fellow out in——. He was postmaster (or what not) at X——. He's come up considerably since I knew him." In most cases he did not know these celebrities personally at all, but he knew of them, and the echo of their fame sounding in this out-of-the-way corner of the world impressed him. He was a careful reader of proof for Williams in a rush, a quick type-setter, a

man who stayed by his tasks faithfully. But he hadn't got anywhere in the world, for, after all, he was little more than a machine. Eugene could see that at a glance.

It was Lyle who taught him the art of type-setting. He demonstrated the first day the theory of the squares or pockets in a case, how some letters were placed more conveniently to the hand than others, why some letters were well represented as to quantity, why capitals were used in certain offices for certain purposes, in others not. "Now on the Chicago *Tribune* we used to italicize the names of churches, boats, books, hotels, and things of that sort. That's the only paper I ever knew to do that," he remarked. What slugs, sticks, galleys, turnovers, meant, came rapidly to the surface. That the fingers would come to recognize weights of leads by the touch, that a letter would almost instinctively find its way back to its proper pocket, even though you were not thinking, once you became expert, were facts which he cheerfully communicated. He wanted his knowledge taken seriously, and this serious attention, Eugene, because of his innate respect for learning of any kind, was only too glad to give him. He did not know what he wanted to do, but he knew quite well that he wanted to see everything. This shop was interesting to him for some little time for this reason, for though he soon found that he did not want to be a type-setter or a reporter, or indeed anything much in connection with a country newspaper, he was learning about life. He worked at his desk cheerfully, smiling out upon the world, which indicated its presence to him through an open window, read the curious bits of news or opinion or local advertisements as he set them up, and dreamed of what the world might have in store for him. He was not vastly ambitious as yet, but hopeful and, withal, a little melancholy. He could see boys and girls whom he knew, idling in the streets or on the corner squares; he could see where Ted Martinwood was driving by in his father's buggy, or George Anderson was going up the street with the air of someone who would never need to work. George's father owned the one and only hotel. There were thoughts in his mind of fishing, boating, lolling somewhere with some pretty girl, but alas, girls did not apparently take to him so very readily. He was too shy. He thought it must be nice to be rich. So he dreamed.

Eugene was at that age when he wished to express himself in ardent phrases. He was also at the age when bashfulness held him in reserve, even though he were in love and intensely emotional. He could only say to Stella what seemed trivial things, and look his intensity, whereas it was the trivial

things that were most pleasing to her, not the intensity. She was even then beginning to think he was a little strange, a little too tense for her disposition. Yet she liked him. It became generally understood around town that Stella was *his* girl. School day mating usually goes that way in a small city or village. He was seen to go out with her. His father teased him. Her mother and father deemed this a manifestation of calf love, not so much on her part, for they were aware of her tendency to hold lightly any manifestation of affection on the part of boys, but on his. They thought his sentimentalism would soon be wearisome to Stella. And they were not far wrong about her. On one occasion at a party given by several high school girls, a "country post office" was organized. That was one of those games which mean kissing only. A system of guessing results in a series of forfeits. If you miss you must be postmaster, and call someone for "mail." *Mail* means to be kissed in a dark room (where the postmaster stands) by someone whom you like or who likes you. You, as postmaster, have authority or compulsion—however you feel about it—to call whom you please.

In this particular instance Stella, who was caught before Eugene, was under compulsion to call someone to kiss. Her first thought was of him, but on account of the frankness of the deed, and because there was a lurking fear in her of his eagerness, the name she felt impelled to speak was Harvey Rutter. Harvey was a handsome boy whom Stella had met after her first encounter with Eugene. He was not as yet fascinating to her, but pleasing. She had a coquettish desire to see what he was like. This was her first direct chance.

He stepped gaily in, and Eugene was at once insane with jealousy. He could not understand why she should treat him in that way. When it came to his turn he called for Bertha Shoemaker, whom he admired, and who was sweet in a way, but who was as nothing to Stella in his estimation. The pain of kissing her when he really wanted the other girl was great. When he came out Stella saw moodiness in his eyes, but chose to ignore it. He was obviously half-hearted and downcast in his simulation of joy.

A second chance came to her and this time she called him. He went, but was in a semi-defiant mood. He wanted to punish her. When they met in the dark she expected him to put his arms around her. Her own hands were up to about where his shoulders should be. Instead he only took hold of one of her arms with his hand and planted a chilly kiss on her lips. If he had only asked, "Why did you?" or held her close and pleaded with her not to treat him so badly, the relationship might have lasted longer. Instead he said

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nothing, and she grew defiant and she went out gaily. There was a strain of reserve running between them until the party broke up and he took her home.

"You must be melancholy tonight," she remarked, after they had walked two blocks in complete silence. The streets were dark, and their feet sounded hollowly on the brick pavement.

"Oh, I'm feeling all right," he replied moodily.

"I think it's awfully nice at the Weimers', we always have so much fun there."

"Yes, lots of fun," he echoed contemptuously.

"Oh, don't be so cross!" she flared. "You haven't any reason for fussing."

"Haven't I?"

"No, you haven't."

"Well if that's the way you feel about it I suppose I haven't. I don't see it that way."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference to me how you see it."

"Oh, doesn't it?"

"No, it doesn't." Her head was up and she was angry.

"Well I'm sure then it doesn't to me."

There was another silence which endured until they were almost home.

"Are you coming to the sociable next Thursday?" he inquired. He was referring to a Methodist evening entertainment which, although he cared very little about it, was a convenience as it enabled him to see her and take her home. He was prompted to ask by the fear that an open rupture was impending.

"No," she said. "I don't think I will."

"Why not?"

"I don't care to."

"I think you're mean," he said reprovingly.

"I don't care," she replied. "I think you're too bossy. I don't think I like you very much anyhow."

His heart contracted ominously.

"You can do as you please," he persisted.

They reached her gate. It was his wont to kiss her in the shadow—to hold her tight for a few minutes in spite of her protests. Tonight, as they approached, he thought of doing it, but she gave him no chance. When they reached the gate she opened it quickly and slipped in. "Good-night," she called.

"Good-night," he said, and then as she reached her door, "Stella!"

It was open, and she slipped in. He stood in the dark, hurt, sore, oppressed. What should he do? He strolled home cudgelling his brain whether never to speak to or look at her again until she came to him, or to hunt her up and fight it all out with her. She was in the wrong, he knew that. When he went to bed he was grieving over it, and when he awoke it was with him all day.

He had been gaining rather rapidly as a student of type-setting, and to a certain extent of the theory of reporting, and he worked diligently and earnestly at his proposed trade. He loved to look out of the window and draw, though of late, after knowing Stella so well and coming to quarrel with her because of her indifference, there was little heart in it. This getting to the office, putting on an apron, and starting in on some local correspondence left over from the day before, or some telegraph copy which had been freshly filed on his hook, had its constructive value. Williams endeavored to use him on some local items of news as a reporter, but he was a slow worker and almost a failure at getting all the facts. He did not appear to know how to interview anybody, and would come back with a story which needed to be filled in from other sources. He really did not understand the theory of news, and Williams could only make it partially clear to him. Mostly he worked at his case, but he did learn some things.

For one thing, the theory of advertising began to dawn on him. These local merchants put in the same ads. day after day, and many of them did not change them noticeably. He saw Lyle and Summers taking the same ads. which had appeared unchangingly from month to month in so far as their main features were concerned, and alter only a few words before returning

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them to the forms. He wondered at the sameness of them, and when, at last, they were given to him to revise he often wished he could change them a little. The language seemed so dull.

"Why don't they ever put little drawings in these ads?" he asked Lyle one day. "Don't you think they'd look a little better?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jonas. "They look pretty good. These people around here wouldn't want anything like that. They'd think it was too fancy." Eugene had seen and in a way studied the ads. in the magazines. They seemed so much more fascinating to him. Why couldn't newspaper ads. be different?

Still it was never given to him to trouble over this problem. Mr. Burgess dealt with the advertisers. He settled how the ads were to be. He never talked to Eugene or Summers about them, not always to Lyle. He would sometimes have Williams explain just what their character and layout was to be. Eugene was so young that Williams at first did not pay very much attention to him, but after a while he began to realize that there was a personality here, and then he would explain things,—why space had to be short for some items and long for others, why county news, news of small towns around Alexandria, and about people, was much more important financially to the paper than the correct reporting of the death of the sultan of Turkey. The most important thing was to get the local names right. "Don't ever misspell them," he once cautioned him. "Don't ever leave out a part of a name if you can help it. People are awfully sensitive about that. They'll stop their subscription if you don't watch out, and you won't know what's the matter."

Eugene took all these things to heart. He wanted to see how the thing was done, though basically it seemed to be a little small. In fact people seemed a little small, mostly.

One of the things that did interest him was to see the paper put on the press and run off. He liked to help lock up the forms, and to see how they were imposed and registered. He liked to hear the press run, and to help carry the wet papers to the mailing tables and the distributing counter out in front. The paper hadn't a very large circulation but there was a slight hum of life about that time and he liked it. He liked the sense of getting his hands and face streaked and not caring, and of seeing his hair tousled, in the mirror. He tried to be useful and the various people on the paper came to like him, though he was often a little awkward and slow. He was not strong at this period and his stomach troubled him. He thought, too, that the smell of the ink might affect his lungs, though he did not seriously fear it. In the main it was interesting but small; there was a much larger world outside, he knew that. He hoped to go to it some day; he hoped to go to Chicago.

CHAPTER III

Eugene grew more and more moody and rather restless under Stella's

increasing independence. She grew steadily more indifferent because of his moods. The fact that other boys were crazy for her consideration was a great factor; the fact that one particular boy, Harvey Rutter, was persistently genial, not insistent, really better looking than Eugene and much better tempered, helped a great deal. Eugene saw her with him now and then, saw her go skating with him, or at least with a crowd of which he was a member. Eugene hated him heartily; he hated her at times for not yielding to him wholly; but he was none the less wild over her beauty. It stamped his brain with a type or ideal. Thereafter he knew in a really definite way what womanhood ought to be, to be really beautiful.

Another thing it did was to bring home to him a sense of his position in the world. So far he had always been dependent on his parents for food, clothes and spending money, and his parents were not very liberal. He knew other boys who had money to run up to Chicago or down to Springfield—the latter was nearer—to have a Saturday and Sunday lark. No such gaieties were for him. His father would not allow it, or rather would not pay for it. There were other boys who, in consequence of amply provided spending money, were the town dandies. He saw them kicking their heels outside the corner book store, the principal loafing place of the elite, on Wednesdays and Saturdays and sometimes on Sunday evenings preparatory to going somewhere, dressed in a luxury of clothing which was beyond his wildest dreams. Ted Martinwood, the son of the principal drygoods man, had a frock coat in which he sometimes appeared when he came down to the barber shop for a shave before he went to call on his girl. George Anderson was possessed of a dress suit, and wore dancing pumps at all dances. There was Ed Waterbury, who was known to have a horse and runabout of his own. These youths were slightly older, and were interested in girls of a slightly older set, but the point was the same. These things hurt him.

He himself had no avenue of progress which, so far as he could see, was going to bring him to any financial prosperity. His father was never going to be rich, anybody could see that. He himself had made no practical progress in schoolwork—he knew that. He hated insurance—soliciting or writing, des-

pised the sewing machine business, and did not know where he would get with anything which he might like to do in literature or art. His drawing seemed a joke, his writing, or wish for writing, pointless. He was broodingly unhappy.

One day Williams, who had been watching him for a long time, stopped at his desk.

"I say, Witla, why don't you go to Chicago?" he said. "There's a lot more up there for a boy like you than down here. You'll never get anywhere working on a country newspaper."

"I know it," said Eugene.

"Now with me it's different," went on Williams. "I've had my rounds. I've got a wife and three children and when a man's got a family he can't afford to take chances. But you're young yet. Why don't you go to Chicago and get on a paper? You could get something."

"What could I get?" asked Eugene.

"Well, you might get a job as type-setter if you'd join the union. I don't know how good you'd be as a reporter—I hardly think that's your line. But you might study art and learn to draw. Newspaper artists make good money."

Eugene thought of his art. It wasn't much. He didn't do much with it. Still he thought of Chicago; the world appealed to him. If he could only get out of here—if he could only make more than seven or eight dollars a week. He brooded about this.

One Sunday afternoon he and Stella went with Myrtle to Sylvia's home, and after a brief stay Stella announced that she would have to be going; her mother would be expecting her back. Myrtle was for going with her, but altered her mind when Sylvia asked her to stay to tea. "Let Eugene take her home," Sylvia said. Eugene was delighted in his persistent, hopeless way. He was not yet convinced that she could not be won to love. When they walked out in the fresh sweet air—it was nearing spring—he felt that now he should have a chance of saying something which would be winning—which would lure her to him.

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They went out on a street next to the one she lived on quite to the confines of the town. She wanted to turn off at her street, but he had urged her not to. "Do you have to go home just yet?" he asked, pleadingly.

"No, I can walk a little way," she replied.

They reached a vacant place—the last house a little distance back—talking idly. It was getting hard to make talk. In his efforts to be entertaining he picked up three twigs to show her how a certain trick in balancing was performed. It consisted in laying two at right angles with each other and with a third, using the latter as an upright. She could not do it, of course. She was not really very much interested. He wanted her to try and when she did, took hold of her right hand to steady her efforts.

"No, don't," she said, drawing her hand away. "I can do it."

She trifled with the twigs unsuccessfully and was about to let them fall, when he took hold of both her hands. It was so sudden that she could not free herself, and so she looked him straight in the eye.

"Let go, Eugene, please let go."

He shook his head, gazing at her.

"Please let go," she went on. "You mustn't do this. I don't want you to."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Well, because I don't."

"Don't you like me any more, Stella, really?" he asked.

"I don't think I do, not that way."

"But you did."

"I thought I did."

"Have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, I think I have."

He dropped her hands and looked at her fixedly and dramatically. The attitude did not appeal to her. They strolled back to the street, and when they

neared her door he said, "Well, I suppose there's no use in my coming to see you any more."

"I think you'd better not," she said simply.

She walked in, never looking back, and instead of going back to his sister's he went home. He was in a very gloomy mood, and after sitting around for a while went to his room. The night fell, and he sat there looking out at the trees and grieving about what he had lost. Perhaps he was not good enough for her—he could not make her love him. Was it that he was not handsome enough—he did not really consider himself good looking—or what was it, a lack of courage or strength?

After a time he noticed that the moon was hanging over the trees like a bright shield in the sky. Two layers of thin clouds were moving in different directions on different levels. He stopped in his cogitations to think where these clouds came from. On sunny days when there were great argosies of them he had seen them disappear before his eyes, and then, marvel of marvels, reappear out of nothingness. The first time he ever saw this it astonished him greatly, for he had never known up to then what clouds were. Afterward he read about them in his physical geography. Tonight he thought of that, and of the great plains over which these winds swept, and of the grass and trees—great forests of them—miles and miles. What a wonderful world! Poets wrote about these things, Longfellow, and Bryant, and Tennyson. He thought of "Thanatopsis," and of the "Elegy," both of which he admired greatly. What was this thing, life?

Then he came back to Stella with an ache. She was actually gone, and she was so beautiful. She would never really talk to him any more. He would never get to hold her hand or kiss her. He clenched his hands with the hurt. Oh, that night on the ice; that night in the sleigh! How wonderful they were! Finally he undressed and went to bed. He wanted to be alone—to be lonely. On his clean white pillow he lay and dreamed of the things that might have been, kisses, caresses, a thousand joys.

One Sunday afternoon he was lying in his hammock thinking, thinking of what a dreary place Alexandria was, anyhow, when he opened a Chicago Saturday afternoon paper, which was something like a Sunday one because it had no Sunday edition,—and went gloomily through it. It was as he had always found, full of a subtle wonder, the wonder of the city, which drew him like a magnet. Here was the drawing of a big hotel someone was going

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to build; there was a sketch of a great pianist who was coming to play. An account of a new comedy drama; of a little romantic section of Goose Island in the Chicago river, with its old decayed boats turned into houses and geese waddling about; an item of a man falling through a coal hole on South Halstead street fascinated him. This last was at sixty-two hundred and something and the idea of such a long street seized on his imagination. What a tremendous city Chicago must be. The thought of car lines, crowds, trains, came to him with almost a yearning appeal.

All at once the magnet got him. It gripped his very soul, this wonder, this beauty, this life.

"I'm going to Chicago," he thought, and got up.

There was his nice, quiet little home laid out before him. Inside were his mother, his father, Myrtle. Still he was going. He could come back. "Sure I can come back," he thought. Propelled by this magnetic power he went in and upstairs to his room, and got a little grip or portmanteau he had. He put in it the things he thought he would immediately need. In his pocket were nine dollars, money he had been saving for some time. Finally he came downstairs and stood in the door of the sitting room.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother, looking at his solemn introspective face.

"I'm going to Chicago," he said.

"When?" she asked, astonished, a little uncertain of just what he meant.

"Today," he said.

"No, you're joking." She smiled unbelievably. This was a boyish prank.

"I'm going today," he said. "I'm going to catch that four o'clock train."

Her face saddened. "You're not?" she said.

"I can come back," he replied, "if I want to. I want to get something else to do."

His father came in at this time. He had a little work room out in the barn where he sometimes cleaned machines and repaired vehicles. He was fresh from such a task now.

"What's up?" he asked, seeing his wife close to her boy.

"Eugene's going to Chicago."

"Since when?" he inquired amusedly.

"Today. He says he's going right now."

"You don't mean it," said Witla, astonished. He really did not believe it. "Why don't you take a little time and think it over? What are you going to live on?"

"I'll live," said Eugene. "I'm going. I've had enough of this place. I'm going to get out."

"All right," said his father, who, after all, believed in initiative. Evidently after all he hadn't quite understood this boy. "Got your trunk packed?"

"No, but mother can send me that."

"Don't go today," pleaded his mother. "Wait until you get something ready, Eugene. Wait and do a little thinking about it. Wait until tomorrow."

"I want to go today, ma." He slipped his arm around her. "Little ma." He was bigger than she by now, and still growing.

"All right, Eugene," she said softly, "but I wish you wouldn't." Her boy was leaving her—her heart was hurt.

"I can come back, ma. It's only a hundred miles."

"Well, all right," she said finally, trying to brighten. "I'll pack your bag."

"I have already."

She went to look.

"Well, it'll soon be time," said Witla, who was thinking that Eugene might back down. "I'm sorry. Still it may be a good thing for you. You're always welcome here, you know."

"I know," said Eugene.

They went finally to the train together, he and his father and Myrtle. His mother couldn't. She stayed to cry.

On the way to the depot they stopped at Sylvia's.

"Why, Eugene," she exclaimed, "how ridiculous! Don't go."

"He's set," said Witla.

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Eugene finally got loose. He seemed to be fighting love, home ties, everything, every step of the way. Finally he reached the depot. The train came. Witla grabbed his hand affectionately. "Be a good boy," he said, swallowing a gulp.

Myrtle kissed him. "You're so funny, Eugene. Write me."

"I will."

He stepped on the train. The bell rang. Out the cars rolled—out and on. He looked out on the familiar scenes and then a real ache came to him—Stella, his mother, his father, Myrtle, the little home. They were all going out of his life.

"Hm," he half groaned, clearing his throat. "Gee!"

And then he sank back and tried, as usual, not to think. He must succeed. That's what the world was made for. That was what he was made for. That was what he would have to do....

CHAPTER IV

The city of Chicago—who shall portray it! This vast ruck of life that

had sprung suddenly into existence upon the dank marshes of a lake shore. Miles and miles of dreary little houses; miles and miles of wooden block-paved streets, with gas lamps placed and water mains laid, and empty wooden walks set for pedestrians; the beat of a hundred thousand hammers; the ring of a hundred thousand trowels! Long, converging lines of telegraph poles; thousands upon thousands of sentinel cottages, factory plants, towering smoke stacks, and here and there a lone, shabby church steeple, sitting out pathetically upon vacant land. The raw prairie stretch was covered with yellow grass; the great broad highways of the tracks of railroads, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, laid side by side and strung with thousands upon thousands of shabby cars, like beads upon a string. Engines clanging, trains moving, people waiting at street crossings—pedestrians, wagon drivers, street car drivers, drays of beer, trucks of coal, brick, stone, sand—a spectacle of new, raw, necessary life!

As Eugene began to draw near it he caught for the first time the sense and significance of a great city. What were these newspaper shadows he had been dealing with in his reading compared to this vivid, articulate, eager thing? Here was the substance of a new world, substantial, fascinating, different. The handsome suburban station at South Chicago, the first of its kind he had ever seen, took his eye, as the train rolled cityward. He had never before seen a crowd of foreigners—working men—and here were Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, waiting for a local train. He had never seen a really large factory plant, and here was one, and another, and another—steel works, potteries, soap-factories, foundries, all gaunt and hard in the Sunday evening air. There seemed to be, for all it was Sunday, something youthful, energetic and alive about the streets. He noted the streetcars waiting; at one place a small river was crossed on a draw,—dirty, gloomy, but crowded with boats and lined with great warehouses, grain elevators, coal pockets—that architecture of necessity and utility. His imagination was fired by this for here was something that could be done brilliantly in black—a spot of red or green for ship and bridge lights. There were some men on the magazines who did things like this, only not so vivid.

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The train threaded its way through long lines of cars coming finally into an immense train shed where arc lights were spluttering—a score under a great curved steel and glass roof, where people were hurrying to and fro. Engines were hissing; bells clanging raucously. He had no relatives, no soul to turn to, but somehow he did not feel lonely. This picture of life, this newness, fascinated him. He stepped down and started leisurely to the gate, wondering which way he should go. He came to a corner where a lamp post already lit blazoned the name Madison. He looked out on this street and saw, as far as the eye could reach, two lines of stores, jingling horse cars, people walking. What a sight, he thought, and turned west. For three miles he walked, musing, and then as it was dark, and he had arranged for no bed, he wondered where he should eat and sleep. A fat man sitting outside a livery stable door in a tilted, cane-seated chair offered a possibility of information.

"Do you know where I can get a room around here?" asked Eugene.

The loungeer looked him over. He was the proprietor of the place.

"There's an old lady living over there at seven-thirty-two," he said, "who has a room, I think. She might take you in." He liked Eugene's looks.

Eugene crossed over and rang a downstairs bell. The door was opened shortly by a tall, kindly woman, of a rather matriarchal turn. Her hair was gray.

"Yes?" she inquired.

"The gentleman at the livery stable over there said I might get a room here. I'm looking for one."

She smiled pleasantly. This boy looked his strangeness, his wide-eyed interest, his freshness from the country. "Come in," she said. "I have a room. You can look at it."

It was a front room—a little bed-room off the one main living room, clean, simple, convenient. "This looks all right," he said.

She smiled.

"You can have it for two dollars a week," she proffered.

"That's all right," he said, putting down his grip. "I'll take it."

"Have you had supper?" she asked.

"No, but I'm going out soon. I want to see the streets. I'll find some place."

"I'll give you something," she said.

Eugene thanked her, and she smiled. This was what Chicago did to the country. It took the boys.

He opened the closed shutters of his window and knelt before it, leaning on the sill. He looked out idly, for it was all so wonderful. Bright lights were burning in store windows. These people hurrying—how their feet sounded—clap, clap, clap. And away east and away west it was all like this. It was all like this everywhere, a great big, wonderful city. It was nice to be here. He felt that now. It was all worth while. How could he have stayed in Alexandria so long! He would get along here. Certainly he would. He was perfectly sure of that. He knew.

Chicago at this time certainly offered a world of hope and opportunity to the beginner. It was so new, so raw; everything was in the making. The long lines of houses and stores were mostly temporary make-shifts—one and two story frame affairs—with here and there a three and four story brick building which spoke of better days to come. Down in the business heart which lay between the lake and the river, the North Side and the South Side, was a region which spoke of a tremendous future, for here were stores which served the buying public, not only of Chicago, but of the Middle West. There were great banks, great office buildings, great retail stores, great hotels. The section was running with a tide of people which represented the youth, the illusions, the untrained aspirations, of millions of souls. When you walked into this area you could feel what Chicago meant—eagerness, hope, desire. It was a city that put vitality into almost every wavering heart: it made the beginner dream dreams; the aged to feel that misfortune was never so grim that it might not change.

Underneath, of course, was struggle. Youth and hope and energy were setting a terrific pace. You had to work here, to move, to step lively. You had to have ideas. This city demanded of you your very best, or it would have little to do with you. Youth in its search for something—and age—were quickly to feel this. It was no fool's paradise.

Eugene, once he was settled, realized this. He had the notion, somehow, that the printer's trade was all over for him. He wanted no more of that. He wanted to be an artist or something like that, although he hardly knew how

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to begin. The papers offered one way, but he was not sure that they took on beginners. He had had no training whatever. His sister Myrtle had once said that some of his little thumb-nail sketches were pretty, but what did she know? If he could study somewhere, find someone who would teach him.... Meanwhile he would have to work.

He tried the newspapers first of course, for those great institutions seemed the ideal resort for anyone who wanted to get up in the world, but the teeming offices with frowning art directors and critical newspaper workers frightened him. One art director did see something in the three or four little sketches he showed, but he happened to be in a crusty mood, and did not want anybody anyway. He simply said no, there was nothing. Eugene thought that perhaps as an artist also, he was destined to be a failure.

The trouble with this boy was really that he was not half awake yet. The beauty of life, its wonder, had cast a spell over him, but he could not yet interpret it in line and color. He walked about these wonderful streets, gazing in the windows, looking at the boats on the river, looking at the ships on the lake. One day, while he was standing on the lake shore, there came a ship in full sail in the offing—the first he had ever seen. It gripped his sense of beauty. He clasped his hands nervously and thrilled to it. Then he sat down on the lake wall and looked and looked and looked until it gradually sank below the horizon. So this was how the great lakes were; and how the great seas must be—the Atlantic and the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Ah, the sea! Some day, perhaps he would go to New York. That was where the sea was. But here it was also, in miniature, and it was wonderful.

One cannot moon by lake shores and before store windows and at bridge draws and live, unless one is provided with the means of living, and this Eugene was not. He had determined when he left home that he would be independent. He wanted to get a salary in some way that he could at least live on. He wanted to write back and be able to say that he was getting along nicely. His trunk came, and a loving letter from his mother, and some money, but he sent that back. It was only ten dollars, but he objected to beginning that way. He thought he ought to earn his own way, and he wanted to try, anyhow.

After ten days his funds were very low, a dollar and seventy-five cents, and he decided that any job would have to do. Never mind about art or type-setting now. He could not get the last without a union card, he must take

anything, and so he applied from store to store. The cheap little shops in which he asked were so ugly they hurt, but he tried to put his artistic sensibilities aside. He asked for anything, to be made a clerk in a bakery, in a dry goods store, in a candy store. After a time a hardware store loomed up, and he asked there. The man looked at him curiously. "I might give you a place at storing stoves."

Eugene did not understand, but he accepted gladly. It only paid six dollars a week, but he could live on that. He was shown to a loft in charge of two rough men, stove fitters, polishers, and repairers, who gruffly explained to him that his work was to brush the rust off the decayed stoves, to help piece and screw them together, to polish and lift things, for this was a second hand stove business which bought and repaired stoves from junk dealers all over the city. Eugene had a low bench near a window where he was supposed to do his polishing, but he very frequently wasted his time here looking out into the green yards of some houses in a side street. The city was full of wonder to him—its every detail fascinating. When a rag-picker would go by calling "rags, old iron," or a vegetable vender crying "tomatoes, potatoes, green corn, peas," he would stop and listen, the musical pathos of the cries appealing to him. Alexandria had never had anything like this. It was all so strange. He saw himself making pen and ink sketches of things, of the clothes lines in the back yards and of the maids with baskets.

On one of the days when he thought he was working fairly well (he had been there two weeks), one of the two repairers said, "Hey, get a move on you. You're not paid to look out the window." Eugene stopped. He had not realized that he was loafing.

"What have you got to do with it?" he asked, hurt and half defiant. He was under the impression that he was working with these men, not under them.

"I'll show you, you fresh kid," said the older of the two, who was an individual built on the order of "Bill Sykes." "You're under me. You get a move on you, and don't give me any more of your lip."

Eugene was startled. It was a flash of brutality out of a clear sky. The animal, whom he had been scanning as an artist would, as a type, out of the corner of his eye, was revealing himself.

"You go to the devil," said Eugene, only half awake to the grim reality of the situation.

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"What's that!" exclaimed the man, making for him. He gave him a shove toward the wall, and attempted to kick him with his big, hob-nailed boot. Eugene picked up a stove leg. His face was wax white.

"Don't you try that again," he said darkly. He fixed the leg in his hand firmly.

"Call it off, Jim," said the other man, who saw the uselessness of so much temper. "Don't hit him. Send him down stairs if you don't like him."

"You get to hell out of here, then," said Eugene's noble superior.

Eugene walked to a nail where his hat and coat were, carrying the stove leg. He edged past his assailant cautiously, fearing a second attack. The man was inclined to kick at him again because of his stubbornness, but forebore.

"You're too fresh, Willie. You want to wake up, you dough face," he said as Eugene went.

Eugene slipped out quietly. His spirit was hurt and torn. What a scene! He, Eugene Witla, kicked at, and almost kicked out, and that in a job that paid six dollars a week. A great lump came up in his throat, but it went down again. He wanted to cry but he could not. He went downstairs, stovepolish on his hands and face and slipped up to the desk.

"I want to quit," he said to the man who had hired him.

"All right, what's the matter?"

"That big brute up there tried to kick me," he explained.

"They're pretty rough men," answered the employer. "I was afraid you wouldn't get along. I guess you're not strong enough. Here you are." He laid out three dollars and a half. Eugene wondered at this queer interpretation of his complaint. He must get along with these men? They musn't get along with him? So the city had that sort of brutality in it.

He went home and washed up, and then struck out again, for it was no time now to be without a job. After a week he found one,—as a house runner for a real estate concern, a young man to bring in the numbers of empty houses and post up the "For Rent" signs in the windows. It paid eight dollars and seemed to offer opportunities of advancement. Eugene might have stayed there indefinitely had it not failed after three months. He had reached the season of fall clothes then, and the need of a winter overcoat, but he

made no complaint to his family. He wanted to appear to be getting along well, whether he was or not.

One of the things which tended to harden and sharpen his impressions of life at this time was the show of luxury seen in some directions. On Michigan Avenue and Prairie Avenue, on Ashland Avenue and Washington Boulevard, were sections which were crowded with splendid houses such as Eugene had never seen before. He was astonished at the magnificence of their appointments, the beauty of the lawns, the show of the windows, the distinction of the equipages which accompanied them and served them. For the first time in his life he saw liveried footmen at doors: he saw at a distance girls and women grown who seemed marvels of beauty to him—they were so distinguished in their dress; he saw young men carrying themselves with an air of distinction which he had never seen before. These must be the society people the newspapers were always talking about. His mind made no distinctions as yet. If there were fine clothes, fine trappings, of course social prestige went with them. It made him see for the first time what far reaches lay between the conditions of a beginner from the country and what the world really had to offer—or rather what it showered on some at the top. It subdued and saddened him a little. Life was unfair.

These fall days, too, with their brown leaves, sharp winds, scudding smoke and whirls of dust showed him that the city could be cruel. He met shabby men, sunken eyed, gloomy, haggard, who looked at him, apparently out of a deep despair. These creatures all seemed to be brought where they were by difficult circumstances. If they begged at all,—and they rarely did of him, for he did not look prosperous enough, it was with the statement that unfortunate circumstances had brought them where they were. You could fail so easily. You could really starve if you didn't look sharp,—the city quickly taught him that.

During these days he got immensely lonely. He was not very sociable, and too introspective. He had no means of making friends, or thought he had none. So he wandered about the streets at night, marveling at the sights he saw, or staying at home in his little room. Mrs. Woodruff, the landlady, was nice and motherly enough, but she was not young and did not fit into his fancies. He was thinking about girls and how sad it was not to have one to say a word to him. Stella was gone—that dream was over. When would he find another like her?

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After wandering around for nearly a month, during which time he was compelled to use some money his mother sent him to buy a suit of clothes on an instalment plan, he got a place as driver of a laundry, which, because it paid ten dollars a week, seemed very good. He sketched now and then when he was not tired, but what he did seemed pointless. So he worked here, driving a wagon, when he should have been applying for an art opening, or taking art lessons.

During this winter Myrtle wrote him that Stella Appleton had moved to Kansas, whither her father had gone; and that his mother's health was bad, and that she did so want him to come home and stay awhile. It was about this time that he became acquainted with a little Scotch girl named Margaret Duff, who worked in the laundry, and became quickly involved in a relationship which established a precedent in his experiences with women. Before this he had never physically known a girl. Now, and of a sudden, he was plunged into something which awakened a new, and if not evil, at least disrupting and disorganizing propensity of his character. He loved women, the beauty of the curves of their bodies. He loved beauty of feature and after a while was to love beauty of mind,—he did now, in a vague, unformed way,—but his ideal was as yet not clear to him. Margaret Duff represented some simplicity of attitude, some generosity of spirit, some shapeliness of form, some comeliness of feature,—it was not more. But, growing by what it fed on, his sex appetite became powerful. In a few weeks it had almost mastered him. He burned to be with this girl daily—and she was perfectly willing that he should, so long as the relationship did not become too conspicuous. She was a little afraid of her parents, although those two, being working people, retired early and slept soundly. They did not seem to mind her early philanderings with boys. This latest one was no novelty. It burned fiercely for three months—Eugene was eager, insatiable: the girl not so much so, but complaisant. She liked this evidence of fire in him,—the hard, burning flame she had aroused, and yet after a time she got a little tired. Then little personal differences arose,—differences of taste, differences of judgment, differences of interest. He really could not talk to her of anything serious, could not get a response to his more delicate emotions. For her part she could not find in him any ready appreciation of the little things she liked—theater jests, and the bright remarks of other boys and girls. She had some conception of what was tasteful in dress, but as for anything else, art, literature, public affairs, she knew nothing at all, while Eugene, for all his youth, was intensely alive to what was going on in the great world. The sound of great names and

great fames was in his ears,—Carlyle, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman. He read of great philosophers, painters, musicians, meteors that sped across the intellectual sky of the western world, and he wondered. He felt as though some day he would be called to do something—in his youthful enthusiasm he half-thought it might be soon. He knew that this girl he was trifling with could not hold him. She had lured him, but once lured he was master, judge, critic. He was beginning to feel that he could get along without her,—that he could find someone better.

Naturally such an attitude would make for the death of passion, as the satiation of passion would make for the development of such an attitude. Margaret became indifferent. She resented his superior airs, his top-lofty tone at times. They quarreled over little things. One night he suggested something that she ought to do in the haughty manner customary with him.

"Oh, don't be so smart!" she said. "You always talk as though you owned me."

"I do," he said jestingly.

"Do you?" she flared. "There are others."

"Well, whenever you're ready you can have them. I'm willing."

The tone cut her, though actually it was only an ill-timed bit of teasing, more kindly meant than it sounded.

"Well, I'm ready now. You needn't come to see me unless you want to. I can get along."

She tossed her head.

"Don't be foolish, Margy," he said, seeing the ill wind he had aroused. "You don't mean that."

"Don't I? Well, we'll see." She walked away from him to another corner of the room. He followed her, but her anger re-aroused his opposition. "Oh, all right," he said after a time. "I guess I'd better be going."

She made no response, neither pleas nor suggestions. He went and secured his hat and coat and came back. "Want to kiss me good-bye?" he inquired.

"No," she said simply.

"Good-night," he called.

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"Good-night," she replied indifferently.

The relationship was never amicably readjusted after this, although it did endure for some time.

CHAPTER V

For the time being this encounter stirred to an almost unbridled de-

gree Eugene's interest in women. Most men are secretly proud of their triumph with woman—their ability to triumph—and any evidence of their ability to attract, entertain, hold, is one of those things which tends to give them an air of superiority and self-sufficiency which is sometimes lacking in those who are not so victorious. This was, in its way, his first victory of the sort, and it pleased him mightily. He felt much more sure of himself instead of in any way ashamed. What, he thought, did the silly boys back in Alexandria know of life compared to this? Nothing. He was in Chicago now. The world was different. He was finding himself to be a man, free, individual, of interest to other personalities. Margaret Duff had told him many pretty things about himself. She had complimented his looks, his total appearance, his taste in the selection of particular things. He had felt what it is to own a woman. He strutted about for a time, the fact that he had been dismissed rather arbitrarily having little weight with him because he was so very ready to be dismissed, sudden dissatisfaction with his job now stirred up in him, for ten dollars a week was no sum wherewith any self-respecting youth could maintain himself,—particularly with a view to sustaining any such relationship as that which had just ended. He felt that he ought to get a better place.

Then one day a woman to whom he was delivering a parcel at her home in Warren Avenue, stopped him long enough to ask: "What do you drivers get a week for your work?"

"I get ten dollars," said Eugene. "I think some get more."

"You ought to make a good collector," she went on. She was a large, homely, incisive, straight-talking woman. "Would you like to change to that kind of work?"

Eugene was sick of the laundry business. The hours were killing. He had worked as late as one o'clock Sunday morning.

"I think I would," he exclaimed. "I don't know anything about it, but this work is no fun."

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"My husband is the manager of The People's Furniture Company," she went on. "He needs a good collector now and then. I think he's going to make a change very soon. I'll speak to him."

Eugene smiled joyously and thanked her. This was surely a windfall. He was anxious to know what collectors were paid but he thought it scarcely tactful to ask.

"If he gives you a job you will probably get fourteen dollars to begin with," she volunteered.

Eugene thrilled. That would be really a rise in the world. Four dollars more! He could get some nice clothes out of that and have spending money besides. He might get a chance to study art. His visions began to multiply. One could get up in the world by trying. The energetic delivery he had done for this laundry had brought him this. Further effort in the other field might bring him more. And he was young yet.

He had been working for the laundry company for six months. Six weeks later, Mr. Henry Mitchly, manager of the People's Furniture, wrote him care of the laundry company to call at his home any evening after eight and he would see him. "My wife has spoken to me of you," he added.

Eugene complied the same day that he received the note, and was looked over by a lean, brisk, unctuous looking man of forty, who asked him various questions as to his work, his home, how much money he took in as a driver, and what not. Finally he said, "I need a bright young man down at my place. It's a good job for one who is steady and honest and hardworking. My wife seems to think you work pretty well, so I'm willing to give you a trial. I can put you to work at fourteen dollars. I want you to come to see me a week from Monday."

Eugene thanked him. He decided, on Mr. Mitchly's advice, to give his laundry manager a full week's notice. He told Margaret that he was leaving and she was apparently glad for his sake. The management was slightly sorry, for Eugene was a good driver. During his last week he helped break in a new man in his place, and on Monday appeared before Mr. Mitchly.

Mr. Mitchly was glad to have him, for he had seen him as a young man of energy and force. He explained the simple nature of the work, which was to take bills for clocks, silverware, rugs, anything which the company sold, and go over the various routes collecting the money due,—which would average

from seventy five to a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day. "Most companies in our line require a bond," he explained, "but we haven't come to that yet. I think I know honest young men when I see them. Anyhow we have a system of inspection. If a man's inclined to be dishonest he can't get very far with us."

Eugene had never thought of this question of honesty very much. He had been raised where he did not need to worry about the matter of a little pocket change, and he had made enough at the *Appeal* to supply his immediate wants. Besides, among the people he had always associated with it was considered a very right and necessary thing to be honest. Men were arrested for not being. He remembered one very sad case of a boy he knew being arrested at Alexandria for breaking into a store at night. That seemed a terrible thing to him at the time. Since then he had been speculating a great deal, in a vague way as to what honesty was, but he had not yet decided. He knew that it was expected of him to account for the last penny of anything that was placed in his keeping and he was perfectly willing to do so. The money he earned seemed enough if he had to live on it. There was no need for him to aid in supporting anyone else. So he slipped along rather easily and practically untested.

Eugene took the first day's package of bills as laid out for him, and carefully went from door to door. In some places money was paid him for which he gave a receipt, in others he was put off or refused because of previous difficulties with the company. In a number of places people had moved, leaving no trace of themselves, and packing the unpaid for goods with them. It was his business, as Mr. Mitchly explained, to try to get track of them from the neighbors.

Eugene saw at once that he was going to like the work. The fresh air, the out-door life, the walking, the quickness with which his task was accomplished, all pleased him. His routes took him into strange and new parts of the city, where he had never been before, and introduced him to types he had never met. His laundry work, taking him from door to door, had been a freshening influence, and this was another. He saw scenes that he felt sure he could, when he had learned to draw a little better, make great things of,—dark, towering factory-sites, great stretches of railroad yards laid out like a puzzle in rain, snow, or bright sunlight; great smoke-stacks throwing their black heights athwart morning or evening skies. He liked them best in the late afternoon when they stood out in a glow of red or fading purple.

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"Wonderful," he used to exclaim to himself, and think how the world would marvel if he could ever come to do great pictures like those of Doré. He admired the man's tremendous imagination. He never thought of himself as doing anything in oils or water colors or chalk—only pen and ink, and that in great, rude splotches of black and white. That was the way. That was the way force was had.

But he could not do them. He could only think them.

One of his chief joys was the Chicago river, its black, mucky water churned by puffing tugs and its banks lined by great red grain elevators and black coal chutes and yellow lumber yards. Here was real color and life—the thing to draw; and then there were the low, drab, rain-soaked cottages standing in lonely, shabby little rows out on flat prairie land, perhaps a scrubby tree somewhere near. He loved these. He would take an envelope and try to get the sense of them—the feel, as he called it—but it wouldn't come. All he did seemed cheap and commonplace, mere pointless lines and stiff wooden masses. How did the great artists get their smoothness and ease? He wondered.

CHAPTER VI

Eugene collected and reported faithfully every day, and had managed

to save a little money. Margaret was now a part of his past. His landlady, Mrs. Woodruff, had gone to live with a daughter in Sedalia, Missouri, and he had moved to a comparatively nice house in East Twenty-first Street on the South Side. It had taken his eye because of a tree in a fifty foot space of ground before it. Like his other room it cost him little, and he was in a private family. He arranged a twenty cent rate per meal for such meals as he took there, and thus he managed to keep his bare living expenses down to five dollars a week. The remaining nine he spent sparingly for clothes, carfare, and amusements—almost nothing of the latter. When he saw he had a little money in reserve he began to think of looking up the Art Institute, which had been looming up in his mind as an avenue of advancement, and find out on what condition he could join a night class in drawing. They were very reasonable, he heard, only fifteen dollars a quarter, and he decided to begin if the conditions were not too severe. He was beginning to be convinced that he was born to be an artist—how soon he could not tell.

The old Art Institute, which preceded the present impressive structure, was located at Michigan Avenue and Monroe Street, and presented an atmosphere of distinction which was not present in most of the structures representing the public taste of the period. It was a large six storey building of brown stone, and contained a number of studios for painters, sculptors, and music teachers, besides the exhibition rooms and the rooms for the classes. There were both day and evening classes, and even at that time a large number of students. The western soul, to a certain extent, was fired by the wonder of art. There was so little of it in the life of the people—the fame of those who could accomplish things in this field and live in a more refined atmosphere was great. To go to Paris! To be a student in any one of the great ateliers of that city! Or of Munich or Rome, to know the character of the artistic treasures of Europe—the life of the Art quarter—that was something. There was what might have been termed a wild desire in the breast of many an untutored boy and girl to get out of the ranks of the commonplace; to assume the character and the habiliments of the artistic temperament as they were then supposed to be; to have a refined, semi-languorous, semi-

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indifferent manner; to live in a studio, to have a certain freedom in morals and temperament not accorded to the ordinary person—these were the great things to do and be. Of course, art composition was a part of this. You were supposed ultimately to paint great pictures or do noble sculptures, but in the meanwhile you could and should live the life of the artist. And that was beautiful and wonderful and free.

Eugene had long had some sense of this. He was aware that there were studios in Chicago; that certain men were supposed to be doing good work—he saw it in the papers. There were mentions now and then of exhibitions, mostly free, which the public attended but sparingly. Once there was an exhibition of some of the war pictures of Verestchagin, a great Russian painter who had come West for some purpose. Eugene saw them one Sunday afternoon, and was enthralled by the magnificence of their grasp of the elements of battle; the wonder of color; the truth of character; the dramatic quality; the sense of force and danger and horror and suffering which was somehow around and in and through everything that was shown. This man had virility and insight; stupendous imagination and temperament. Eugene stood and stared, wondering how such things could be done. Ever afterward the name of Verestchagin was like a great call to his imagination; that was the kind of an artist to be if you were going to be one.

Another picture came there once, which appealed to another side of his nature, although primarily the basis of its appeal was artistic. It was a great, warm tinted nude by Bouguereau, a French artist who was startling his day with his daring portrayal of the nude. The types he depicted were not namby-pamby little slim-bodied women with spindling qualities of strength and passion, but great, full-blown women whose voluptuous contour of neck and arms and torso and hip and thigh was enough to set the blood of youth at fever heat. The man obviously understood and had passion, love of form, love of desire, love of beauty. He painted with a sense of the bridal bed in the background; of motherhood and of fat, growing babies, joyously nursed. These women stood up big in their sense of beauty and magnetism, the soft lure of desire in their eyes, their full lips parted, their cheeks flushed with the blood of health. As such they were anathema to the conservative and puritanical in mind, the religious in temperament, the cautious in training or taste. The very bringing of this picture to Chicago as a product for sale was enough to create a furore of objection. Such pictures should not be painted, was the cry of the press; or if painted, not exhibited. Bouguereau was con-

ceived of by many as one of those dastards of art who were endeavoring to corrupt by their talent the morals of the world; there was a cry raised that the thing should be suppressed; and as is always the case in all such outbursts of special class opposition, the interest of the general public was aroused.

Eugene was one of those who noted the discussion. He had never seen a picture by Bouguereau or, indeed, an original nude by any other artist. Being usually at liberty after three o'clock, he was free to visit some of these things, and having found it possible to do his work in good clothes he had come to wear his best suit every day. He was a fairly presentable youth with a solemn mien, and his request to be shown anything in any art store would have aroused no surprise. He looked as though he belonged to the intellectual and artistic classes.

Not being sure of what reception would be accorded one so young—he was now nearing twenty—he nevertheless ventured to stop at the gallery where the Bouguereau was being exhibited and ask to see it. The attendant in charge eyed him curiously, but led him back to a room hung in dark red, and turning on a burst of incandescent bulbs set in the ceiling of a red plush hung cabinet, pulled back the curtain revealing the picture. Eugene had never seen such a figure and face. It was a dream of beauty—his ideal come to life. He studied the face and neck, the soft mass of brown, sensuous hair massed at the back of the head, the flowerlike lips and soft cheeks. He marveled at the suggestion of the breasts and the abdomen, that potentiality of motherhood that is so firing to the male. He could have stood there hours dreaming, luxuriating, but the attendant who had left him alone with it for a few minutes returned.

"What is the price of this?" Eugene asked.

"Ten thousand dollars," was the reply.

He smiled solemnly. "It's a wonderful thing," he said, and turned to go. The attendant put out the light.

This picture, like those of Verestchagin, made a sharp impression on him. Curiously he had no longing to paint anything of this kind. He only rejoiced to look at it. It spoke to him of his present ideal of womanhood—physical beauty, and he longed with all his heart to find a creature like that who would look on him with favor.

There were other exhibitions—one containing a genuine Rembrandt—which impressed him, but none like these that had definitely stirred him. His interest in art was becoming eager. He wanted to find out all about it—to do something himself. One day he ventured to call at the Art Institute building and consult the secretary, who explained to him what the charges were. He learned from her, for she was a woman of a practical, clerical turn, that the classes ran from October to May, that he could enter a life or antique class or both, though the antique alone was advisable for the time, and a class in illustration, where costumes of different periods were presented on different models. He found that each class had an instructor of supposed note, whom it was not necessary for him to see. Each class had a monitor and each student was supposed to work faithfully for his own benefit. Eugene did not get to see the class rooms, but he gained a sense of the art of it all, nevertheless, for the halls and offices were decorated in an artistic way, and there were many plaster casts of arms, legs, busts, and thighs and heads. It was as though one stood in an open doorway and looked out upon a new world. The one thing that gratified him was that he could study pen and ink or brush in the illustration class, and that he could also join a sketch class from five to six every afternoon without extra charges if he preferred to devote his evening hours to studying drawing in the life class. He was a little astonished to learn from a printed prospectus given him that the life class meant nude models to work from—both men and women. He was surely approaching a different world now. It seemed necessary and natural enough, and yet there was an aloof atmosphere about it, something that suggested the inner precincts of a shrine, to which only talent was admitted. Was he talented? Wait! He would show the world, even if he was a raw country boy.

The classes which he decided to enter were first a life class which convened Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings at seven in one of the study rooms and remained in session until ten o'clock, and second a sketch class which met from five to six every afternoon. Eugene felt that he knew little or nothing about figure and anatomy and had better work at that. Costume and illustration would have to wait, and as for the landscapes, or rather cityscapes, of which he was so fond, he could afford to defer those until he learned something of the fundamentals of art.

Heretofore he had rarely attempted the drawing of a face or figure except in miniature and as details of a larger scene. Now he was confronted with the necessity of sketching in charcoal the head or body of a living person,

and it frightened him a little. He knew that he would be in a class with fifteen or twenty other male students. They would be able to see and comment on what he was doing. Twice a week an instructor would come around and pass upon his work. There were honors for those who did the best work during any one month, he learned from the prospectus, namely: first choice of seats around the model at the beginning of each new pose. The class instructors must be of considerable significance in the American art world, he thought, for they were N. A.'s, and that meant National Academicians. He little knew with what contempt this honor was received in some quarters, or he would not have attached so much significance to it.

One Monday evening in October, armed with the several sheets of paper which he had been told to purchase by his all-informing prospectus, he began his work. He was a little nervous at sight of the brightly lighted halls and class rooms, and the moving crowd of young men and women did not tend to allay his fears. He was struck at once with the quality of gaiety, determination and easy grace which marked the different members of this company. The boys struck him as interesting, virile, in many cases good looking; the girls as graceful, rather dashing and confident. One or two whom he noted were beautiful in a dark way. This was a wonderful world.

The rooms too, were exceptional. They were old enough in use to be almost completely covered, as to the walls, with the accumulation of paint scraped from the palettes. There were no easels or other paraphernalia, but simply chairs and little stools—the former, as Eugene learned, to be turned upside down for easels, the latter for the students to sit on. In the center of the room was a platform, the height of an ordinary table, for the model to pose on, and in one corner a screen which constituted a dressing room. There were no pictures or statuary—just the bare walls—but curiously, in one corner, a piano. Out in the halls and in the general lounging center were pictures of nude figures or parts of figures posed in all sorts of ways which Eugene, in his raw, youthful way, thought suggestive. He secretly rejoiced to look at them but he felt that he must not say anything about what he thought. An art student, he felt sure, must appear to be indifferent to such suggestion—to be above such desire. They were here to work, not to dream of women.

When the time came for the classes to assemble there was a scurrying to and fro, conferring between different students, and then the men found themselves in one set of rooms and the women in another. Eugene saw a

young girl in his room, sitting up near the screen, idly gazing about. She was pretty, of a slightly Irish cast of countenance, with black hair and black eyes. She wore a cap that was an imitation of the Polish national head-dress, and a red cape. Eugene assumed her to be the class model and secretly wondered if he was really to see her in the nude. In a few minutes all the students were gathered, and then there was a stir as there strolled in a rather vigorous and picturesque man of thirty-six or thereabouts, who sauntered to the front of the room and called the class to order. He was clad in a shabby suit of grey tweed and crowned with a little brown hat, shoved rakishly over one ear, which he did not trouble to take off. He wore a soft blue hickory shirt without collar or tie, and looked immensely self-sufficient. He was tall and lean and raw-boned, with a face which was long and narrow; his eyes were large and wide set, his mouth big and firm in its lines; he had big hands and feet, and an almost rolling gait. Eugene assumed instinctively that this was Mr. Temple Boyle, N. A., the class instructor, and he imagined there would be an opening address of some kind. But the instructor merely announced that Mr. William Ray had been appointed monitor and that he hoped that there would be no disorder or wasting of time. There would be regular criticism days by him—Wednesdays and Fridays. He hoped that each pupil would be able to show marked improvement. The class would now begin work. Then he strolled out.

Eugene soon learned from one of the students that this really was Mr. Boyle. The young Irish girl had gone behind the screen. Eugene could see partially, from where he was sitting, that she was disrobing. It shocked him a little, but he kept his courage and his countenance because of the presence of so many others. He turned a chair upside down as he saw the others do, and sat down on a stool. His charcoal was lying in a little box beside him. He straightened his paper on its board and fidgeted, keeping as still as he could. Some of the students were talking. Suddenly he saw the girl divest herself of a thin, gauze shirt, and the next moment she came out, naked and composed, to step upon the platform and stand perfectly erect, her arms by her side, her head thrown back. Eugene tingled and blushed and was almost afraid to look directly at her. Then he took a stick of charcoal and began sketching feebly, attempting to convey something of this personality and this pose to paper. It seemed a wonderful thing for him to be doing—to be in this room, to see this girl posing so; in short, to be an art student. So this was what it was, a world absolutely different from anything he had ever known. And he was self-called to be a member of it.

CHAPTER VII

It was after he had decided to enter the art class that Eugene paid his

first visit to his family. Though they were only a hundred miles away, he had never felt like going back, even at Christmas. Now it seemed to him he had something definite to proclaim. He was going to be an artist; and as to his work, he was getting along well in that. Mr. Mitchly appeared to like him. It was to Mr. Mitchly that he reported daily with his collections and his unsatisfied bills. The collections were checked up by Mr. Mitchly with the cash, and the unpaid bills certified. Sometimes Eugene made a mistake, having too much or too little, but the "too much" was always credited against the "too little," so that in the main he came out even. In money matters there was no tendency on Eugene's part to be dishonest. He thought of lots of things he wanted, but he was fairly well content to wait and come by them legitimately. It was this note in him that appealed to Mitchly. He thought that possibly something could be made of Eugene in a trade way.

He left the Friday night preceding Labor Day, the first Monday in September, which was a holiday throughout the city. He had told Mr. Mitchly that he thought of leaving Saturday after work for over Sunday and Monday, but Mr. Mitchly suggested that he might double up his Saturday's work with Thursday's and Friday's if he wished, and go Friday evening.

"Saturday's a short day, anyhow," he said. "That would give three days at home and still you wouldn't be behind in your work."

Eugene thanked his employer and did as suggested. He packed his bag with the best he had in the way of clothes, and journeyed homeward, wondering how he would find things. How different it all was! Stella was gone. His youthful unsophistication had passed. He could go home as a city man with some prospects. He had no idea of how boyish he looked—how much the idealist he was—how far removed from hard, practical judgment which the world values so highly.

When the train reached Alexandria, his father and Myrtle and Sylvia were at the depot to greet him—the latter with her two year old son. They had all come down in the family carryall, which left one seat for Eugene. He greeted

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them warmly and received their encomiums on his looks with a befitting sense of humility.

"You're bigger," his father exclaimed. "You're going to be a tall man after all, Eugene. I was afraid you had stopped growing."

"I hadn't noticed that I had grown any," said Eugene.

"Ah, yes," put in Myrtle. "You're much bigger, Gene. It makes you look a little thinner. Are you good and strong?"

"I ought to be," laughed Eugene. "I walk about fifteen or twenty miles a day, and I'm out in the air all the time. If I don't get strong now I never will."

Sylvia asked him about his "stomach trouble." About the same, he told her. Sometimes he thought it was better, sometimes worse. A doctor had told him to drink hot water in the morning but he didn't like to do it. It was so hard to swallow the stuff.

While they were talking, asking questions, they reached the front gate of the house, and Mrs. Witla came out on the front porch. Eugene, at sight of her in the late dusk, jumped over the front wheel and ran to meet her.

"Little ma," he exclaimed. "Didn't expect me back so soon, did you?"

"So soon," she said, her arms around his neck. Then she held him so, quite still for a few moments. "You're getting to be a big man," she said when she released him.

He went into the old sitting room and looked around. It was all quite the same—no change. There were the same books, the same table, the same chairs, the same pulley lamp hanging from the center of the ceiling. In the parlor there was nothing new, nor in the bed rooms or the kitchen. His mother looked a little older—his father not. Sylvia had changed greatly—being slightly "peaked" in the face compared to her former plumpness; it was due to motherhood, he thought. Myrtle seemed a little more calm and happy. She had a real "steady" now, Frank Bangs, the superintendent of the local furniture factory. He was quite young, good-looking, going to be well-off some day, so they thought. "Old Bill," one of the big horses, had been sold. Rover, one of the two collies, was dead. Jake the cat had been killed in a night brawl somewhere.

Somehow, as Eugene stood in the kitchen watching his mother fry a big steak and make biscuits and gravy in honor of his coming, he felt that he did

not belong to this world any more. It was smaller, narrower than he had ever thought. The town had seemed smaller as he had come through its streets, the houses too; and yet it was nice. The yards were sweet and simple, but countrified. His father, running a sewing machine business, seemed tremendously limited. He had a country or small town mind. It struck Eugene as curious now, that they had never had a piano. And Myrtle liked music, too. As for himself, he had learned that he was passionately fond of it. There were organ recitals in the Central Music Hall, of Chicago, on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, and he had managed to attend some after his work. There were great preachers like Prof. Swing and the Rev. H. W. Thomas and the Rev. F. W. Gunsaulus and Prof. Saltus, liberal thinkers all, whose public services in the city were always accompanied by lovely music. Eugene had found all these men and their services in his search for life and to avoid being lonely. Now they had taught him that his old world was no world at all. It was a small town. He would never come to this any more.

After a sound night's rest in his old room he went down the next day to see Mr. Caleb Williams at the *Appeal* office, and Mr. Burgess, and Jonas Lyle, and John Summers. As he went, on the court house square he met Ed Mitchell and George Taps and Will Groniger, and four or five others whom he had known in school. From them he learned how things were. It appeared that George Anderson had married a local girl and was in Chicago, working out in the stock yards. Ed Waterbury had gone to San Francisco. The pretty Sampson girl, Bessie Sampson, who had once gone with Ted Martinwood so much, had run away with a man from Anderson, Indiana. There had been a lot of talk about it at the time. Eugene listened.

It all seemed less, though, than the new world that he had entered. Of these fellows none knew the visions that were now surging in his brain. Paris—no less—and New York—by what far route he could scarcely tell. And Will Groniger had got to be a baggage clerk at one of the two depots and was proud of it. Good Heavens!

At the office of the *Appeal* things were unchanged. Somehow Eugene had had the feeling that two years would make a lot of difference, whereas the difference was in him only. He was the one who had undergone cataclysmic changes. He had been a stove polisher, a real estate assistant, a driver and a collector. He had known Margaret Duff, and Mr. Redwood, of the laundry, and Mr. Mitchly. The great city had dawned on him; Verestchagin, and

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Bouguereau, and the Art Institute. He was going on at one pace, the town was moving at another one—a slower, but quite as fast as it had ever gone.

Caleb Williams was there, skipping about as of yore, cheerful, communicative, interested. "I'm glad to see you back, Eugene," he declared, fixing him with the one good eye which watered. "I'm glad you're getting along—that's fine. Going to be an artist, eh? Well, I think that's what you were cut out for. I wouldn't advise every young fellow to go to Chicago, but that's where you belong. If it wasn't for my wife and three children I never would have left it. When you get a wife and family though—" he paused and shook his head. "I gad! You got to do the best you can." Then he went to look up some missing copy.

Jonas Lyle was as portly, phlegmatic and philosophic as ever. He greeted Eugene with a solemn eye in which there was inquiry. "Well, how is it?" he asked.

Eugene smiled. "Oh, pretty good."

"Not going to be a printer, then?"

"No, I think not."

"Well, it's just as well, there're an awful lot of them."

While they were talking John Summers sidled up.

"How are you, Mr. Witla?" he inquired.

Eugene looked at him. John was certainly marked for the grave in the near future. He was thinner, of a bluish-grey color, bent at the shoulders.

"Why, I'm fine, Mr. Summers," Eugene said.

"I'm not so good," said the old printer. He tapped his chest significantly. "This thing's getting the best of me."

"Don't you believe it," put in Lyle. "John's always gloomy. He's just as good as ever. I tell him he'll live twenty years yet."

"No, no," said Summers, shaking his head, "I know."

He left after a bit to "go across the street," his customary drinking excuse.

"He can't last another year," Lyle observed the moment the door was closed. "Burgess only keeps him because it would be a shame to turn him out. But he's done for."

"Anyone can see that," said Eugene. "He looks terrible."

So they talked.

At noon he went home. Myrtle announced that he was to come with her and Mr. Bangs to a party that evening. There were going to be games and refreshments. It never occurred to him that in this town there had never been dancing among the boys and girls he moved with, and scarcely any music. People did not have pianos—or at least only a few of them.

After supper Mr. Bangs called, and the three of them went to a typical small town party. It was not much different from the ones Eugene had attended with Stella, except that the participants were, in the main, just that much older. Two years make a great deal of difference in youth. There were some twenty-two young men and women all crowded into three fair sized rooms and on a porch, the windows and doors leading to which were open. Outside were brown grass and some autumn flowers. Early crickets were chirping, and there were late fire-flies. It was warm and pleasant.

The opening efforts to be sociable were a little stiff. There were introductions all around, much smart badinage among town dandies, for most of them were here. There were a number of new faces—girls who had moved in from other towns or blossomed into maturity since Eugene had left.

"If you'll marry me, Madge, I'll buy you a nice new pair of seal skin earrings," he heard one of the young bloods remark.

Eugene smiled, and the girl laughed back. "He always thinks he's so cute."

It was almost impossible for Eugene to break through the opening sense of reserve which clogged his actions at everything in the way of social diversion. He was a little nervous because he was afraid of criticism. That was his vanity and deep egotism. He stood about, trying to get into the swing of the thing with a bright remark or two. Just as he was beginning to bubble, a girl came in from one of the other rooms. Eugene had not met her. She was with his prospective brother-in-law, Bangs, and was laughing in a sweet, joyous way which arrested his attention. She was dressed in white, he noticed, with a band of golden brown ribbon pulled through the loops above the flounces at the bottom of her dress. Her hair was a wonderful ashen yellow, a great mass of it—and laid in big, thick braids above her forehead and ears. Her

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nose was straight, her lips were thin and red, her cheek-bones faintly but curiously noticeable. Somehow there was a sense of distinction about her—a faint aroma of personality which Eugene did not understand. It appealed to him.

Bangs brought her over. He was a tight, smiling youth, as sound as oak, as clear as good water.

"Here's Miss Blue, Eugene. She's from up in Wisconsin, and comes down to Chicago occasionally. I told her you ought to know her. You might meet up there sometime."

"Say, but that's good luck, isn't it?" smiled Eugene. "I'm sure I'm glad to know you. What part of Wisconsin do you come from?"

"Blackwood," she laughed, her greenish-blue eyes dancing.

"Her hair is yellow, her eyes are blue, and she comes from Blackwood," commented Bangs. "How's that?" His big mouth, with its even teeth, was wide with a smile.

"You left out the blue name and the white dress. She ought to wear white all the time."

"Oh, it does harmonize with my name, doesn't it?" she cried. "At home I do wear white mostly. You see I'm just a country girl, and I make most of my things."

"Did you make that?" asked Eugene.

"Of course I did."

Bangs moved away a little, looking at her as if critically. "Well, that's really pretty," he pronounced.

"Mr. Bangs is such a flatterer," she smiled at Eugene. "He doesn't mean any thing he says. He just tells me one thing after another."

"He's right," said Eugene. "I agree as to the dress, and it fits the hair wonderfully."

"You see, he's lost, too," laughed Bangs. "That's the way they all do. Well, I'm going to leave you two. I've got to get back. I left your sister in the hands of a rival of mine."

Eugene turned to this girl and laughed his reserved laugh. "I was just thinking what was going to become of me. I've been away for two years, and I've lost track of some of these people."

"I'm worse yet. I've only been here two weeks and I scarcely know anybody. Mrs. King takes me around everywhere, but it's all so new I can't get hold of it. I think Alexandria is lovely."

"It is nice. I suppose you've been out on the lakes?"

"Oh, yes. We've fished and rowed and camped. I have had a lovely time but I have to go back tomorrow."

"Do you?" said Eugene. "Why I do too. I'm going to take the four-fifteen."

"So am I!" she laughed. "Perhaps we can go together."

"Why, certainly. That's fine. I thought I'd have to go back alone. I only came down for over Sunday. I've been working up in Chicago."

They fell to telling each other their histories. She was from Blackwood, only eighty-five miles from Chicago, and had lived there all her life. There were several brothers and sisters. Her father was evidently a farmer and politician and what not, and Eugene gleaned from stray remarks that they must be well thought of, though poor. One brother-in-law was spoken of as a banker; another as the owner of a grain elevator; she herself was a school teacher at Blackwood—had been for several years.

Eugene did not realize it, but she was fully five years older than himself, with the tact and the superior advantage which so much difference in years brings. She was tired of school-teaching, tired of caring for the babies of married sisters, tired of being left to work and stay at home when the ideal marrying age was rapidly passing. She was interested in able people, and silly village boys did not appeal to her. There was one who was begging her to marry him at this moment, but he was a slow soul up in Blackwood, not actually worthy of her nor able to support her well. She was hopefully, sadly, vaguely, madly longing for something better, and as yet nothing had ever turned up. This meeting with Eugene was not anything which promised a way out to her. She was not seeking so urgently—nor did she give introductions that sort of a twist in her consciousness. But this young man had an appeal for her beyond anyone she had met recently. They were in sympathetic accord, apparently. She liked his clear, big eyes, his dark hair, his ra-

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ther waxen complexion. He seemed something better than she had known, and she hoped that he would be nice to her.

CHAPTER VIII

The rest of that evening Eugene spent not exactly with, but near Miss

Blue—Miss Angela Blue, as he found her name to be. He was interested in her not so much from the point of view of looks, though she was charming enough, but because of some peculiarity of temperament which lingered with him as a grateful taste might dwell on the palate. He thought her young; and was charmed by what he considered her innocence and unsophistication. As a matter of fact she was not so much young and unsophisticated as an unconscious simulator of simplicity. In the conventional sense she was a thoroughly good girl, loyal, financially honest, truthful in all commonplace things, and thoroughly virtuous, moreover, in that she considered marriage and children the fate and duty of all women. Having had so much trouble with other peoples' children she was not anxious to have any, or at least many, of her own. Of course, she did not believe that she would escape with what seemed to be any such good fortune. She fancied that she would be like her sisters, the wife of a good business or professional man; the mother of three or four or five healthy children; the keeper of an ideal middle class home; the handmaiden of her husband's needs. There was a deep current of passion in her which she had come to feel would never be satisfied. No man would ever understand, no man at least whom she was likely to meet; but she knew she had a great capacity to love. If someone would only come along and arouse that—be worthy of it—what a whirlwind of affection she would return to him! How she would love, how sacrifice! But it seemed now that her dreams were destined never to be fulfilled, because so much time had slipped by and she had not been courted by the right one. So here she was now at twenty-five, dreaming and longing—the object of her ideals thus accidentally brought before her, and no immediate consciousness that that was the case.

It does not take sexual affinity long to manifest itself, once its subjects are brought near to each other. Eugene was older in certain forms of knowledge, broader in a sense, potentially greater than she would ever comprehend; but nevertheless, swayed helplessly by emotion and desire. Her own emotions, though perhaps stronger than his, were differently aroused. The stars, the night, a lovely scene, any exquisite attribute of nature could fascinate him to the point of melancholy. With her, nature in its largest as-

pects passed practically unnoticed. She responded to music feelingly, as did Eugene. In literature, only realism appealed to him; for her, sentiment, strained though not necessarily unreal, had the greatest charm. Art in its purely æsthetic forms meant nothing at all to her. To Eugene it was the last word in the matter of emotional perception. History, philosophy, logic, psychology, were sealed books to her. To Eugene they were already open doors, or, better yet, flowery paths of joy, down which he was wandering. Yet in spite of these things they were being attracted toward each other.

And there were other differences. With Eugene convention meant nothing at all, and his sense of evil and good was something which the ordinary person would not have comprehended. He was prone to like all sorts and conditions of human beings—the intellectual, the ignorant, the clean, the dirty, the gay, the sorrowful, white, yellow, black. As for Angela, she had a distinct preference for those who conducted themselves according to given standards of propriety. She was brought up to think of those people as best who worked the hardest, denied themselves the most, and conformed to the ordinary notions of right and wrong. There was no questioning of current standards in her mind. As it was written socially and ethically upon the tables of the law, so was it. There might be charming characters outside the pale, but they were not admitted to association or sympathy. To Eugene a human being was a human being. The ruck of misfits or ne'er-do-wells he could laugh joyously with or at. It was all wonderful, beautiful, amusing. Even its grimness and tragedy were worth while, although they hurt him terribly at times. Why, under these circumstances, he should have been so thoroughly attracted to Angela remains a mystery. Perhaps they complemented each other at this time as a satellite complements a larger luminary—for Eugene's egoism required praise, sympathy, feminine coddling; and Angela caught fire from the warmth and geniality of his temperament.

On the train next day Eugene had nearly three hours of what he deemed most delightful talk with her. They had not journeyed far before he had told her how he had traveled this way, on this train, at this hour, two years before; how he had walked about the streets of the big city, looking for a place to sleep, how he had got work and stayed away until he felt that he had found himself. Now he was going to study art and then to New York or Paris, and do magazine illustrating and possibly paint pictures. He was truly your flamboyant youth of talent when he got to talking—when he had a truly sympathetic ear. He loved to boast to someone who really admired him, and

he felt that he had admiration here. Angela looked at him with swimming eyes. He was really different from anything she had ever known, young, artistic, imaginative, ambitious. He was going out into a world which she had longed for but never hoped to see—that of art. Here he was telling her of his prospective art studies, and talking of Paris. What a wonderful thing!

As the train neared Chicago she explained that she would have to make an almost immediate connection with one which left over the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul, for Blackwood. She was a little lonely, to tell the truth, a little sick at heart, for the summer vacation was over and she was going back to teach school. Alexandria, for the two weeks she had been there visiting Mrs. King (formerly a Blackwood girl and school-day chum of hers), was lovely. Her girlhood friend had tried to make things most pleasant and now it was all over. Even Eugene was over, for he said nothing much of seeing her again, or had not so far. She was wishing she might see more of this world he painted in such glowing colors, when he said:

"Mr. Bangs said that you come down to Chicago every now and then?"

"I do," she replied. "I sometimes come down to go to the theatres and shop." She did not say that there was an element of practical household commercialism in it, for she was considered one of the best buyers in the family and that she was sent to buy by various members of the family in quantities. From a practical household point of view she was a thoroughbred and was valued by her sisters and friends as someone who loved to do things. She might have come to be merely a family pack horse, solely because she loved to work. It was instinct to do everything she did thoroughly, but she worked almost exclusively in minor household matters.

"How soon do you expect to come down again?" he asked.

"Oh, I can't tell. I sometimes come down when Opera is on in the winter. I may be here around Thanksgiving."

"Not before that?"

"I don't think so," she replied archly.

"That's too bad. I thought maybe I'd see you a few times this fall. When you do come I wish you could let me know. I'd like to take you to the theatre."

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Eugene spent precious little money on any entertainment, but he thought he could venture this. She would not be down often. Then, too, he had the notion that he might get a rise one of these days—that would make a difference. When she came again he would be in art school, opening up another field for himself. Life looked hopeful.

"That's so nice of you," she replied. "And when I come I'll let you know. I'm just a country girl," she added, with a toss of her head, "and I don't get to the city often."

Eugene liked what he considered the guileless naïveté of her confessions—the frankness with which she owned up to simplicity and poverty. Most girls didn't. She almost made a virtue out of these things—at least they were charming as a confession in her.

"I'll hold you to that," he assured her.

"Oh, you needn't. I'll be glad to let you know."

They were nearing the station. He forgot, for the moment that she was not as remote and delicate in her beauty as Stella, that she was apparently not as passionate temperamentally as Margaret. He saw her wonderfully dull hair and her thin lips and peculiar blue eyes, and admired her honesty and simplicity. He picked up her grip and helped her to find her train. When they came to part he pressed her hand warmly, for she had been very nice to him, so attentive and sympathetic and interested.

"Now remember!" he said gaily, after he had put her in her seat in the local.

"I won't forget."

"You wouldn't mind if I wrote you now and then?"

"Not at all. I'd like it."

"Then I will," he said, and went out.

He stood outside and looked at her through the train window as it pulled out. He was glad to have met her. This was the right sort of girl, clean, honest, simple, attractive. That was the way the best women were—good and pure—not wild pieces of fire like Margaret; nor unconscious, indifferent beauties like Stella, he was going to add, but couldn't. There was a voice within him that said that artistically Stella was perfect and even now it hurt him a

little to remember. But Stella was gone forever, there was no doubt about that.

During the days that followed he thought of the girl often. He wondered what sort of a town Blackwood was; what sort of people she moved with, what sort of a house she lived in. They must be nice, simple people like his own in Alexandria. These types of city bred people whom he saw—girls particularly—and those born to wealth, had no appeal for him as yet. They were too distant, too far removed from anything he could aspire to. A good woman such as Miss Blue obviously was, must be a treasure anywhere in the world. He kept thinking he would write to her—he had no other girl acquaintance now; and just before he entered art school he did this, penning a little note saying that he remembered so pleasantly their ride; and when was she coming? Her answer, after a week, was that she expected to be in the city about the middle or the end of October and that she would be glad to have him call. She gave him the number of an aunt who lived out on the North Side in Ohio Street, and said she would notify him further. She was hard at work teaching school now, and didn't even have time to think of the lovely summer she had had.

"Poor little girl," he thought. She deserved a better fate. "When she comes I'll surely look her up," he thought, and there was a lot that went with the idea. Such wonderful hair!

CHAPTER IX

The succeeding days in the art school after his first admission re-

vealed many new things to Eugene. He understood now, or thought he did, why artists were different from the rank and file of mankind. This Art Institute atmosphere was something so refreshing after his days rambling among poor neighborhoods collecting, that he could hardly believe that he, Eugene Witla, belonged there. These were exceptional young people; some of them, anyhow. If they weren't cut out to be good artists they still had imagination—the dream of the artist. They came, as Eugene gradually learned, from all parts of the West and South, from Chicago and St. Louis—from Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa—from Texas and California and Minnesota. One boy was in from Saskatchewan of the Canadian north west, another from the then territory of New Mexico. Because his name was Gill they called him the Gila monster—the difference in the pronunciation of the "G's" not troubling them at all. A boy who came down from Minnesota was a farmer's son, and talked about going back to plow and sow and reap during the next spring and summer. Another boy was the son of a Kansas City millionaire.

The mechanics of drawing interested Eugene from the first. He learned the first night that there was some defect in his understanding of light and shade as it related to the human form. He could not get any roundness or texture in his drawings.

"The darkest shadow is always closest to the high light," observed his instructor laconically on Wednesday evening, looking over his shoulder. "You're making everything a dull, even tone." So that was it.

"You're drawing this figure as a bricklayer who isn't an architect might start to build a house. You're laying bricks without having a plan. Where's your plan?" The voice was that of Mr. Boyle looking over his shoulder.

Eugene looked up. He had begun to draw the head only.

"A plan! A plan!" said his instructor, making a peculiar motion with his hands which described the outline of the pose in a single motion. "Get your general lines first. Then you can put in the details afterward."

Eugene saw at once.

Another time his instructor was watching him draw the female breast. He was doing it woodenly—without much beauty of contour.

"They're round! They're round! I tell you!" exclaimed Boyle. "If you ever see any square ones let me know."

This caught Eugene's sense of humor. It made him laugh, even though he flushed painfully, for he knew he had a lot to learn.

The cruelest thing he heard this man say was to a boy who was rather thick and fat but conscientious. "You can't draw," he said roughly. "Take my advice and go home. You'll make more money driving a wagon."

The class winced, but this man was ugly in his intolerance of futility. The idea of anybody wasting his time was obnoxious to him. He took art as a business man takes business, and he had no time for the misfit, the fool, or the failure. He wanted his class to know that art meant effort.

Aside from this brutal insistence on the significance of art, there was another side to the life which was not so hard and in a way more alluring. Between the twenty-five minute poses which the model took, there were some four or five minute rests during the course of the evening in which the students talked, relighted their pipes and did much as they pleased. Sometimes students from other classes came in for a few moments.

The thing that astonished Eugene though, was the freedom of the model with the students and the freedom of the students with her. After the first few weeks he observed some of those who had been there the year before going up to the platform where the girl sat, and talking with her. She had a little pink gauze veil which she drew around her shoulders or waist that instead of reducing the suggestiveness of her attitudes heightened them.

"Say, ain't that enough to make everything go black in front of your eyes," said one boy sitting next to Eugene.

"Well, I guess," he laughed. "There's some edge to that."

The boys would sit and laugh and jest with this girl, and she would laugh and coquette in return. He saw her strolling about looking at some of the students' drawings of her over their shoulders, standing face to face with others—and so calmly. The strong desire which it invariably aroused in Eugene he quelled and concealed, for these things were not to be shown on the surface. Once, while he was looking at some photographs that a student

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had brought, she came and looked over his shoulder, this little flower of the streets, her body graced by the thin scarf, her lips and cheeks red with color. She came so close that she leaned against his shoulder and arm with her soft flesh. It pulled him tense, like a great current; but he made no sign, pretending that it was the veriest commonplace. Several times, because the piano was there, and because students would sing and play in the interludes, she came and sat on the piano stool herself, strumming out an accompaniment to which some one or three or four would sing. Somehow this, of all things, seemed most sensuous to him—most oriental. It set him wild. He felt his teeth click without volition on his part. When she resumed her pose, his passion subsided, for then the cold, æsthetic value of her beauty became uppermost. It was only the incidental things that upset him.

In spite of these disturbances, Eugene was gradually showing improvement as a draughtsman and an artist. He liked to draw the figure. He was not as quick at that as he was at the more varied outlines of landscapes and buildings, but he could give lovely sensuous touches to the human form—particularly to the female form—which were beginning to be impressive. He'd got past the place where Boyle had ever to say "They're round." He gave a sweep to his lines that attracted the instructor's attention.

"You're getting the thing as a whole, I see," he said quietly, one day. Eugene thrilled with satisfaction. Another Wednesday he said:—"A little colder, my boy, a little colder. There's sex in that. It isn't in the figure. You ought to make a good mural decorator some day, if you have the inclination," Boyle went on; "you've got the sense of beauty." The roots of Eugene's hair tingled. So art was coming to him. This man saw his capacity. He really had art in him.

One evening a paper sign pasted up on the bulletin board bore the significant legend: "Artists! Attention! We eat! We eat! Nov. 16th. at Sofroni's. All those who want to get in give their names to the monitor."

Eugene had heard nothing of this, but he judged that it originated in one of the other classes. He spoke to the monitor and learned that only seventy-five cents was required of him. Students could bring girls if they wished. Most of them would. He decided that he would go. But where to get a girl? Sofroni's was an Italian restaurant in lower Clark Street, which had originally started out as an eating place for Italian laborers, because it was near an Italian boarding house section. It was located in an old house that was not

exactly homely. A yard in the back had been set with plain wooden tables, and benches had been placed for use in the summer time and, later, this had been covered with a mouldy tent-cloth to protect the diners from rain. Still later this became glass and was used in winter. The place was clean and the food good. Some struggling craftsman in journalism and art had found it and by degrees Signor Sofroni had come to realize that he was dealing with a better element. He began to exchange greetings with these people to set aside a little corner for them. Finally he entertained a small group of them at dinner—charging them hardly more than cost price—and so he was launched. One student told another. Sofroni now had his yard covered in so that he could entertain a hundred at dinner, even in winter. He could serve several kinds of wines and liquors with a dinner for seventy-five cents a piece. So he was popular.

The dinner was the culmination of several other class treats. It was the custom of a class, whenever a stranger, or even a new member appeared, to yell "Treat! Treat!" at which the victim or new member was supposed to produce two dollars as a contribution to a beer fund. If the money was not produced—the stranger was apt to be thrown out or some ridiculous trick played upon him—if it was forthcoming, work for the evening ceased. A collection was immediately taken up. Kegs of beer were sent for, with sandwiches and cheese. Drinking, singing, piano playing, jesting followed. Once, to Eugene's utter astonishment, one of the students—a big, good natured, carousing boy from Omaha—lifted the nude model to his shoulders, set her astride his neck and proceeded around the room, jigging as he went—the girl meantime pulling his black hair, the other students following and shouting uproariously. Some of the girls in an adjoining room, studying in an evening life class, stopped their work to peep through a half dozen small holes which had been punched in the intervening partition. The sight of Showalter carrying the girl so astonished the eavesdroppers that the news of it was soon all over the building. Knowledge of the escapade reached the Secretary and the next day the student was dropped. But the Bacchic dance had been enacted—its impression was left.

There were other treats like this in which Eugene was urged to drink, and he did—a very little. He had no taste for beer. He also tried to smoke, but he did not care for it. He could become nervously intoxicated at times, by the mere sight of such revelry, and then he grew witty, easy in his motions, quick to say bright things. On one of these occasions one of the models said

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to him: "Why, you're nicer than I thought. I imagined you were very solemn."

"Oh, no," he said, "only at times. You don't know me."

He seized her about the waist, but she pushed him away. He wished now that he danced, for he saw that he might have whirled her about the room then and there. He decided to learn at once.

The question of a girl for the dinner, troubled him. He knew of no one except Margaret, and he did not know that she danced. There was Miss Blue, of Blackwood—whom he had seen when she made her promised visit to the city—but the thought of her in connection with anything like this was to him incongruous. He wondered what she would think if she saw such scenes as he had witnessed.

It chanced that one day when he was in the members' room, he met Miss Kenny, the girl whom he had seen posing the night he had entered the school. Eugene remembered her fascination, for she was the first nude model he had ever seen and she was pretty. She was also the one who had come and stood by him when she was posing. He had not seen her since then. She had liked Eugene, but he had seemed a little distant and, at first, a little commonplace. Lately he had taken to a loose, flowing tie and a soft round hat which became him. He turned his hair back loosely and emulated the independent swing of Mr. Temple Boyle. That man was a sort of god to him—strong and successful. To be like that!

The girl noted a change for what she deemed the better. He was so nice now, she thought, so white-skinned and clear-eyed and keen.

She pretended to be looking at the drawing of a nude when she saw him.

"How are you?" he asked, smiling, venturing to speak to her because he was lonely and because he knew no other girl.

She turned gaily, and returned the question, facing him with smiling lips and genial eyes.

"I haven't seen you for some time," he said. "Are you back here now?"

"For this week," she said. "I'm doing studio work. I don't care for classes when I can get the other."

"I thought you liked them!" he replied, recalling her gaiety of mood.

"Oh, I don't dislike it. Only, studio work is better."

"We've missed you," he said. "The others haven't been nearly as nice."

"Aren't you complimentary," she laughed, her black eyes looking into his with a twinkle.

"No, it's so," he returned, and then asked hopefully, "Are you going to the dinner on the 16th?"

"Maybe," she said. "I haven't made up my mind. It all depends."

"On what?"

"On how I feel and who asks me."

"I shouldn't think there'd be any trouble about that," he observed. "If I had a girl I'd go," he went on, making a terrific effort to reach the point where he could ask her. She saw his intention.

"Well?" she laughed.

"Would you go with me?" he ventured, thus so shamelessly assisted.

"Sure!" she said, for she liked him.

"That's fine!" he exclaimed. "Where do you live? I'll want to know that." He searched for a pencil. She gave him her number on West Fifty-seventh Street.

Because of his collecting he knew the neighborhood. It was a street of shabby frame houses far out on the South Side. He remembered great mazes of trade near it, and unpaved streets and open stretches of wet prairie land. Somehow it seemed fitting to him that this little flower of the muck and coal yard area should be a model.

"I'll be sure and get you," he laughed. "You won't forget, will you, Miss—"

"Just Ruby," she interrupted. "Ruby Kenny."

"It's a pretty name, isn't it?" he said. "It's euphonious. You wouldn't let me come out some Sunday and see just where it is?"

"Yes, you may," she replied, pleased by his comment on her name. "I'm home most every Sunday. Come out next Sunday afternoon, if you want to."

"I will," said Eugene.

He walked out to the street with her in a very buoyant mood.

CHAPTER X

Ruby Kenny was the adopted child of an old Irish laborer and his

wife who had taken her from a quarrelling couple when they had practically deserted her at the age of four years. She was bright, good natured, not at all informed as to the social organization of the world, just a simple little girl with a passion for adventure and no saving insight which would indicate beforehand whither adventure might lead. She began life as a cash girl in a department store and was spoiled of her virtue at fifteen. She was rather fortunate in that her smartness attracted the rather superior, capable, self-protecting type of man; and these were fortunate too, in that she was not utterly promiscuous, appetite with her waiting on strong liking, and in one or two cases real affection, and culminating only after a period of dalliance which made her as much a victim of her moods as were her lovers. Her foster parents provided no guidance of any intelligent character. They liked her, and since she was brighter than they were, submitted to her rule, her explanations of conduct, her taste. She waved aside with a laughing rejoinder any slight objections they might make, and always protested that she did not care what the neighbors thought.

The visits which Eugene paid, and the companionship which ensued, were of a piece with every other relationship of this character which he ever entered into. He worshiped beauty as beauty, and he never wholly missed finding a certain quality of mind and heart for which he longed. He sought in women, besides beauty, good nature and sympathy; he shunned criticism and coldness, and was never apt to select for a sweetheart anyone who could outshine him either in emotion or rapidity or distinction of ideas.

He liked, at this time, simple things, simple homes, simple surroundings, the commonplace atmosphere of simple life, for the more elegant and imposing overawed him. The great mansions which he saw, the great trade structures, the great, significant personalities, seemed artificial and cold. He liked little people—people who were not known, but who were sweet and kindly in their moods. If he could find female beauty with anything like that as a background he was happy and settled down near it, if he could, in comfort. His drawing near to Ruby was governed by this mood.