Roads from Rome eBook

Roads from Rome

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I

In the effort to dull the edge of his mental anguish by physical exhaustion Catullus had walked far out from the town, through vineyards and fruit-orchards displaying their autumnal stores and clamorous with eager companies of pickers and vintagers. On coming back to the eastern gate he found himself reluctant to pass from the heedless activities of the fields to the bustle of the town streets and the formal observances of his father's house. Seeking a quiet interlude, he turned northward and climbed the hill which rose high above the tumultuous Adige. The shadows of the September afternoon had begun to lengthen when he reached the top and threw himself upon the ground near a green ash tree.

The bodily exercise had at least done him this service, that the formless misery of the past weeks, the monstrous, wordless sense of desolation, now resolved itself into a grief for which inner words, however comfortless, sprang into being. Below him Verona, proud sentinel between the North and Rome, offered herself to the embrace of the wild, tawny river, as if seeking to retard its ominous journey from Rhaetia's barbarous mountains to Italy's sea by Venice. Far to the northeast ghostly Alpine peaks awaited their coronal of sunset rose. Southward stretched the plain of Lombardy. Within easy reach of his eye shimmered the lagoon that lay about Mantua. The hour veiled hills and plain in a luminous blue from which the sun's radiance was excluded. Through the thick leaves of the ash tree soughed the evening wind, giving a voice to the dying day. In its moan Catullus seemed to find his own words: "He is dead, he is dead." His brother was dead. This fact became at last clear in his consciousness and he began to take it up and handle it.

The news had come two weeks ago, just as he was on the point of flying from Rome and the autumn fevers to the gaieties of Naples and Baiae. That was an easy escape for a youth whose only taskmasters were the Muses and who worked or played at the behest of his own mood. But his brother, Valerius, had obeyed the will of Rome, serving her, according to her need, at all seasons and in all places. Stationed this year in Asia Minor he had fallen a victim to one of the disastrous eastern fevers. And now Troy held his ashes, and never again would he offer thanks to Jupiter Capitolinus for a safe return to Rome.

As soon as the letter from Valerius's comrade reached him, Catullus had started for Verona. For nearly ten years he had spoken of himself as living in Rome, his house and his work, his friendships and his love knitting him closely, he had supposed, into the city's life. But in this naked moment she had shown him her alien and indifferent face and he knew that he must go *home* or die. It was not until he saw his father's stricken eyes that he realised that, for once, impulse had led him into the path of filial duty. In the days that

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followed, however, except by mere presence, neither mourner could help the other. His father's inner life had always been inaccessible to Catullus and now in a common need it seemed more than ever impossible to penetrate beyond the outposts of his noble stoicism. With Catullus, on the other hand, a moved or troubled mind could usually find an outlet in swift, hot words, and, in the unnatural restraint put upon him by his father's speechlessness, his despair, like a splinter of steel, had only encysted itself more deeply. To-day he welcomed the relief of being articulate.

The tie between his brother and himself was formed on the day of his own birth, when the two year old Valerius—how often their old nurse had told the story!—had been led in to see him, his little feet stumbling over each other in happy and unjealous haste. Through the years of tutelage they had maintained an offensive and defensive alliance against father, nurses and teachers; and their playmates, even including Caelius, who was admitted into a happy triumvirate, knew that no intimacy could exact concessions from their fraternal loyalty. Their days were spent in the same tasks and the same play, and the nights, isolating them from the rest of their little world, nurtured confidence and candour. Memories began to gather and to torture him: smiling memories of childish nights in connecting bedrooms, when, left by their nurse to sleep, each boy would slip down into the middle of his bed, just catching sight of the other through the open door in the dim glow of the nightlamp, and defy Morpheus with lively tongue; poignant memories of youthful nights, when elaborate apartments and separate servants had not checked the emergence into wholesome speech of vague ambitions, lusty hopes and shy emotions. It was in one of these nights that Valerius had first hit upon his favourite nickname for his brother. Pretty Aufilena had broken a promise and Catullus had vehemently maintained that she was less honest than a loose woman who kept her part of a bargain. It was surprising that a conversation so trifling should recur in this hour, but he could see again before him his brother's smiling face and hear him saying: "My Diogenes, never let your lantern go out. It will light your own feet even if you never find a truthful woman."

All this exquisite identity of daily life had ended eight years ago. Catullus felt the weight of his twenty-six years when he realised that ever since he and Valerius had ceased to be boys they had lived apart, save for the occasional weeks of a soldier's furloughs. Their outward paths had certainly diverged very widely. He had chosen literature and Valerius the army. In politics they had fallen equally far apart, Catullus following Cicero in allegiance to the constitution and the senate, Valerius continuing his father's friendship for Caesar and faith in the new democratic ideal. Different friendships followed upon different pursuits, and divergent mental

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characteristics became intensified. Catullus grew more untamed in the pursuit of an untrammelled individual life, subversive of accepted standards, rich in emotional incident and sensuous perception. His adherence to the old political order was at bottom due to an aesthetic conviction that democracy was vulgar. To Valerius, on the contrary, the Republic was the chief concern and Caesar its saviour from fraud and greed. As the years passed he became more and more absorbed in his country's service at the cost of his own inclinations. Gravity and reserve grew upon him and the sacrifice of inherited moral standards to the claims of intellectual freedom would to him have been abhorrent.

And yet there had not been even one day in these eight years when Catullus had felt that he and his brother were not as close to each other as in the old Verona days. He had lived constantly with his friends and rarely with his brother, but below even such friendships as those with Caelius and Calvus, Nepos and Cornificius lay the bond of brotherhood. In view of their lives this bond had seemed to Catullus as incomprehensible as it was unbreakable. And he had often wondered—he wondered now as he lay under the ash tree and listened to the wind—whether it had had its origin in some urgent determination of his mother who had brooded over them both.

She had died before he was six years old, but he had one vivid memory of her, belonging to his fifth birthday, the beginning, indeed, of all conscious memory. The day fell in June and could be celebrated at Sirmio, their summer home on Lake Benacus. In the morning, holding his silent father's hand, he had received the congratulations of the servants, and at luncheon he had been handed about among the large company of June guests to be kissed and toasted. But the high festival began when all these noisy people had gone off for the siesta. Then, according to a deep-laid plan, his mother and Valerius and he had slipped unnoticed out of the great marble doorway and run hand in hand down the olive-silvery hill to the shore of the lake. She had promised to spend the whole afternoon with them. Never had he felt so happy. The deep blue water, ruffled by a summer breeze, sparkled with a million points of crystal light. Valerius became absorbed in trying to launch a tiny red-sailed boat, but Catullus rushed back to his mother, exclaiming, "Mother, mother, the waves are laughing too!" And she had caught him in her arms and smiled into his eyes and said: "Child, a great poet said that long ago. Are you going to be a poet some day? Is that all my bad dreams mean?"

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Then she had called Valerius and asked if they wanted a story of the sea, and they had curled up in the hollows of her arms and she had told them about the Argo, the first ship that ever set forth upon the waters; of how, when her prow broke through the waves, the sailors could see white-faced Nereids dance and beckon, and of how she bore within her hold many heroes dedicated to a great quest. It was the first time Catullus had heard the magic tale of the Golden Fleece and in his mother's harp-like voice it had brought him his first desire for strange lands and the wide, grey spaces of distant seas. Then he had felt his mother's arm tighten around him and something in her voice made his throat ache, as she went on to tell them of the sorceress Medea; how she brought the leader of the quest into wicked ways, so that the glory of his heroism counted for nothing and misery pursued him, and how she still lived on in one disguise after another, working ruin, when unresisted, by poisoned sheen or honeyed draught. Catullus began to feel very much frightened, and then all at once his mother jumped up and called out excitedly, "Oh, see, a Nereid, a Nereid!" And they had all three rushed wildly down the beach to the foamy edge of the lake, and there she danced with them, her blue eyes laughing like the waves and her loosened hair shining like the red-gold clouds around the setting sun. They had danced until the sun slipped below the clouds and out of sight, and a servant had come with cloaks and a reminder of the dinner hour.

Now from the hill above Verona Catullus could see the red gold of another sunset and he was alone. Valerius, who had known him with that Nereid-mother, had gone forever. Because they had lain upon the same mother's breast and danced with her upon the Sirmian shore, Catullus had always known that his older brother's sober life was the fruit of a wine-red passion for Rome's glory. And Valerius's knowledge of him—ah, how penetrating that had been!

Across the plain below him stretched the road to Mantua. Was it only last April that upon this road he and Valerius had had that revealing hour? The most devastating of all his memories swept in upon him. Valerius had had his first furlough in two years and they had spent a week of it together in Verona. The day before Valerius was to leave to meet his transport at Brindisi they had repeated a favorite excursion of their childhood to an excellent farm a little beyond Mantua, to leave the house steward's orders for the season's honey.

What a day it had been, with the spring air which set mind and feet astir, the ride along the rush-fringed banks of the winding Mincio and the unworldly hours in the old farmstead! The cattle-sheds were fragrant with the burning of cedar and of Syrian gum to keep off snakes, and Catullus had felt more strongly than ever that in the general redolence of homely virtues, natural activities and scrupulous standards all the

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noisome life of town and city was kept at bay. The same wooden image of Bacchus hung from a pine tree in the vineyard, and the same weather-worn Ceres stood among the first grain, awaiting the promise of her sheaves. Valerius had been asked by his father's overseer to make inquiries about a yoke of oxen, and Catullus went off to look at the bee-hives in their sheltered corner near a wild olive tree. When he came back he found his brother seated on a stone bench, carving an odd little satyr out of a bit of wood and talking to a fragile looking boy about twelve years old. Valerius's sympathetic gravity always charmed children and Catullus was not surprised to see this boy's brown eyes lifted in eager confidence to the older face.

"So," Valerius was saying, "you don't think we work only to live? I believe you are right. You find the crops so beautiful that you don't mind weeding, and I find Rome so beautiful that I don't mind fighting." "Rome!" The boy's face quivered and his singularly sweet voice sank to a whisper. "Do you fight for Rome? Father doesn't know it, but I pray every day to the Good Goddess in the grainfield that she will let me go to Rome some day. Do you think she will?" Valerius rose and looked down into the child's starry eyes. "Perhaps she will for Rome's own sake," he said. "Every lover counts. What is your name, Companion-in-arms? I should like to know you when you come." "Virgil," the boy answered shyly, colouring and drawing back as he saw Catullus. A farm servant brought up the visitors' horses. "Goodbye, little Virgil," Valerius called out, as he mounted. "A fair harvest to your crops and your dreams."

The brothers rode on for some time without speaking, Valerius rather sombrely, it seemed, absorbed in his own thoughts. When he broke the silence it was to say abruptly: "I wonder if, when he goes to Rome, he will keep the light in those eyes and the music in that young throat." Then he brought his horse close up to his brother's and spoke rapidly as if he must rid himself of the weight of words. "My Lantern Bearer, you are not going to lose your light and your music, are you? The last time I saw Cicero he talked to me about your poetry and your gifts, which you know I cannot judge as he can. He told me that for all your 'Greek learning' and your 'Alexandrian technique' no one could doubt the good red Italian blood in your verses, or even the homely strain of our own little town. I confess I was thankful to hear a literary man and a friend praise you for not being cosmopolitan. I am not afraid now of your going over to the Greeks. But are you in danger of losing Verona in Rome?"

The gathering dusk, the day's pure happiness, the sense of impending separation opened Catullus's heart. "Do you mean Clodia?" he asked straightforwardly. "Did Cicero talk of her too?" "Not only Cicero," Valerius had answered gently, "and not only your other friends. Will you tell me of her yourself?" "What have you heard?" Catullus asked. Valerius paused and then gave a direct and harsh reply: "That she was a Medea to her husband, has been a Juno to her brother's Jupiter and is an easy mistress to many lovers."

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After that, Catullus was thankful now to remember, he himself had talked passionately as the road slipped away under their horses' feet. He had told Valerius how cruel the world had been to Clodia. Metellus had been sick all winter and had died as other men die. He had belittled her by every indignity that a man of rank can put upon his wife, but she had borne with him patiently enough. Because she was no Alcestis need she be called a Medea or a Clytemnestra? And because the unspeakable Clodius had played Jupiter to his youngest sister's Juno need Clodia be considered less than a Diana to his Apollo? As for her lovers—his voice broke upon the word—she loved him, Catullus, strange as that seemed, and him only. Of course, like all women of charm, she could play the harmless coquette with other men. He hated the domestic woman—Lucretius's dun-coloured wife, for instance—on whom no man except her mate would cast an eye.

He wanted men to fall at his Love's feet, he thanked Aphrodite that she had the manner and the subtle fire and the grace to bring them there. Her mind was wonderful, too, aflame, like Sappho's, with the love of beauty. That was why he called her Lesbia. He had used Sappho's great love poem (Valerius probably did not know it, but it was like a purple wing from Eros's shoulder) as his first messenger to her, when his heart had grown hot as AEtna's fire or the springs of Thermopylae. She had finally consented to meet him at Allius's house. Afterwards she had told him that the day was marked for her also by a white stone.

If Valerius could only know how he felt! She was the greatest lady in Rome, accoutred with wealth and prestige and incomparable beauty. And she loved him, and was as good and pure and tender-hearted as any unmarried girl in Verona. He was her lover, but often he felt toward her as a father might feel toward a child. Catullus had trembled as he brought out from his inner sanctuary this shyest treasure. And never should he forget the healing sense of peace that came to him when Valerius rode closer and put his arm around his shoulder. "Diogenes," he said, "your flame is still bright. I could wish you had not fallen in love with another man's wife, and if he were still living I should try to convince you of the folly of it. But I know this hot heart of yours is as pure as the snow we see on the Alps in midsummer. That is all I need to know." And they had ridden on in the darkness toward the lights of home.

The wind rose in a fresh wail: "He is dead, he is dead." The touch of his arm was lost in the unawakening night. His perfect speech was stilled in the everlasting silence. A smile, both bitter and wistful, came upon Catullus's lips as he remembered a letter he had had yesterday from Lucretius, bidding him listen to the voice of Nature who would bring him peace. "What is so bitter," his friend had urged, "if it comes in the end to sleep? The wretched cannot want more of life,

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and the happy men, men like Valerius, go unreluctantly, like well-fed guests from a banquet, to enter upon untroubled rest. Nor is his death outside of law. From all eternity life and death have been at war with each other. No day and no night passes when the first cry of a child tossed up on the shores of light is not mingled with the wailings of mourners. Let me tell you how you may transmute your sorrow. A battle rages in the plain. The earth is shaken with the violent charges of the cavalry and with the tramping feet of men. Cruel weapons gleam in the sun. But to one afar off upon a hill the army is but a bright spot in the valley, adding beauty, it may well be, to a sombre scene. And so, ascending into the serene citadel of Knowledge and looking down upon our noisy griefs, we may find them to be but high lights, ennobling life's monotonous plain. My friend, come to Nature and learn of her. Surely Valerius would have wished you peace."

"Peace, peace!" Catullus groaned aloud. Lucretius seemed as remote as the indifferent gods. Valerius, who knew his feet were shaped for human ways, would have understood that he could not scale the cold steeps of thought. If he suffered in this hour, what comfort was there in the thought of other suffering and other years? If Troy now held Valerius, what peace was there in knowing that its accursed earth once covered Hector and Patroclus also, and would be forever the common grave of Asia and of Europe? What healing had nature or law to give when flesh was torn from flesh and heart estranged from heart beyond recall?

Rising, Catullus looked down upon the unresting river. As he walked homeward, clear-eyed, at last, but unassuaged, he knew that for him also there could never again be peaceful currents. Like the Adige, his tumultuous grief, having its source in the pure springs of childish love, must surge through the years of his manhood, until at last it might lose itself in the vast sea of his own annihilation.

II

In the capital a dull winter was being prophesied. Only one gleam was discoverable in the social twilight. The Progressives had shipped Cato off to Cyprus and society was rid for one season of a man with a tongue, who believed in economy when money was plentiful, in sobriety when pleasure was multiform and in domestic fidelities when escape was easy. But they had done irreparable mischief in disposing more summarily of Cicero. With the Conservative leader exiled to Greece and the Progressive leader himself taking the eagles into Gaul the winter's brilliance was threatened with eclipse. Pompey was left in Rome, but the waning of his political star, it could not be denied, had dimmed his social lustre. Clodius, of course, was in full swing, triumphant in Caesar's friendship and Cicero's defeat, but if society was able to stomach him, he himself had the audacious honesty to foregather in grosser companionship. Even Lucullus, whose

food and wine had come to seem a permanent refuge amid political changes and social shifts, must now be counted out. His mind was failing, and the beautiful Apollo dining room and terraced gardens would probably never be opened again.

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In view of the impending handicaps Clodia was especially anxious that a dinner she was to give immediately on her return from Baiae in mid-October should be a conspicuous success. During her husband's consulship two years ago she had won great repute for inducing men of all parties, officials, artists and writers, to meet in her house. Last year, owing to Metellus's sickness and death, she had not done anything on a large scale. This autumn she had come back determined to reassume her position. She was unaffected by the old-fashioned prejudice against widows entertaining and she had nothing to fear from the social skill of this year's consuls.

Her invitations had been hurried out, and now in her private sitting room, known as the Venus Room from its choicest ornament, a life-sized statue of Venus the Plunderer, she was looking over the answers which had been sorted for her by her secretary. The Greek, waiting for further orders, looked at her with admiring, if disillusioned, eyes. Large and robust, her magnificent figure could display no ungraceful lines as she sat on the low carved chair in front of a curtain of golden Chinese silk. Her dress was of a strange sea-green and emeralds shone in her ears and her heavy, black hair. An orange-coloured cat with gleaming, yellow eyes curved its tail across her feet. Above her right shoulder hung a silver cage containing a little bird which chirped and twittered in silly ignorance of its mistress's mood. Anger disfigured her beautiful mouth and eyes. The list of regrets stretched out to sinister length and included such pillars of society as Brutus and Sempronia, Bibulus and Portia. A cynical smile relieved Clodia's sullen lips. Did these braggarts imagine her blind to the fact that if lively Sempronia and stupid Bibulus could conveniently die, Brutus and Portia, who were wiping her off their visiting lists because her feet had strayed beyond the marriage paddock, would make short work of their mourning?

Aurelia's declination she had expected. Her inordinate pride in being Caesar's mother had not modified her arrogant, old-time severity toward the freedom of modern life. But that Calpurnia should plead her husband's absence as an excuse was ominous. Everyone knew that he dictated her social relations. Terentia had been implacable since that amusing winter when Clodia had spread a net for Cicero. For her own sex Clodia had the hawk's contempt for sparrows, but if Caesar as well as Cicero were to withdraw from her arena, she might as well prepare herself for the inverted thumbs of Rome.

On her list of acceptances, outside of her own sisters, who had won intellectual freedom in the divorce courts, she found the names of only two women—virtuous Hortensia, who was proud of her emancipated ideas, and Marcia, who was enjoying her husband's Cyprian business as much as the rest of the world. Men, on the other hand, bachelors and divorces, abounded. Catullus, luckily, was still in Verona, nursing his

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dull grief for that impossible brother. But she was glad to be assured that his friend, Rufus Caelius, would come. If Terentia and Tullia had tried to poison the mind of Cicero's protege against her, obviously they had not succeeded. He was worth cultivating. His years in Asia Minor had made a man of the world out of a charming Veronese boy and he was already becoming known for brilliant work at the bar. The house he had just bought faced the southern end of her own garden and gave evidence alike of his money and his taste.

And yet, in spite of Caelius's connections, he was still too young to wield social power, and it was with intense chagrin that Clodia realised that his was the most distinguished name upon her dinner list. Indifferent to the opinion of the world as long as she could keep her shapely foot upon its neck, she dreaded more than anything else a loss of the social prestige which enabled her to seek pleasure where she chose. Was this fear at last overtaking her swiftest pace? Her secretary, watching her, prepared himself for one of the violent storms with which all her servants were familiar. But at this moment a house slave came in to ask if she would see Lucretius. "Him and no one else," she answered curtly, and the Greekling slipped thankfully out as the curtains were drawn aside to admit a man, about thirty-five years old, whose face and bearing brought suddenly into the fretful room a consciousness of a larger world, a more difficult arena. Clodia smiled, and her beauty emerged like the argent moon from sullen clouds. An extraordinary friendship existed between this woman who was the bawd of every tongue in Rome, from Palatine to Subura, and this man whose very name was unknown to nine-tenths of his fellow-citizens and who could have passed unrecognised among most of the aristocrats who knew his family or of the literary men who had it from Cicero that he was at work on a *magnum opus*. Cicero was Lucretius's only close friend, and supposed he had also read every page of Clodia's life, but not even he guessed that a chance conversation had originated a friendship which Clodia found unique because it was sexless, and Lucretius because, within its barriers, he dared display some of his vacillations of purpose. The woman who was a prey of moods seemed to understand that when he chose science as his mistress he had strangled a passion for poetry; and that when he had determined to withdraw from the life of his day and generation and to pursue, for humanity's sake, that Truth which alone is immortal beyond the waxing and waning of nations, he had violated a craving to consecrate his time to the immediate service of Rome. And he, in his turn, who could penetrate beyond the flaming ramparts of the world in his search for causes, had somehow discovered beyond this woman's deadly fires a cold retreat of thought, where all things were stripped naked of pretence.

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Their intercourse was fitful and unconventional. Clodia was accustomed to Lucretius's coming at unexpected hours with unexpected demands upon her understanding. He even came, now and then, in those strange moods which Cicero said made him wonder whether the gods had confused neighbouring brews and ladled out madness when they meant to dip from the vat of genius. At such times he might go as abruptly as he came, leaving some wild sentence reechoing behind him. But at all times they were amazingly frank with each other. So now Clodia's eyes met his calmly enough as he said without any preface: "I have come to answer your note. I prefer that my wife should keep out of your circle. You used to have doves about you, who could protect a wren, but they are fluttering away now and your own plumage is appalling." With the phrase his eyes became conscious of her emeralds and her shimmering Cean silks and then travelled to the nude grace of Venus the Plunderer. He faced her violently. "Clodia," he said, slaying a sentence on her lips, "Clodia, do you know that hell is here on this earth and that such as you help to people it? There is no Tityus, his heart eaten out by vultures, save the victim of passion. And what passion is more devouring than that frenzy of the lover which is never satisfied? Venus's garlanded hours are followed by misery. She plunders men of their money, of their liberty, of their character. Duties give way to cups and perfumes and garlands. And yet, amid the very flowers pain dwells. The lover fails to understand and sickness creeps upon him, as men sicken of hidden poison. Tell me," he added brutally, leaning toward her, "for who should know better than you? does not the sweetest hour of love hold a drop of bitter? Why do you not restore your lovers to their reason, to the service of the state, to a knowledge of nature?"

His eyes were hot with pity for the world's pain. Hers grew cold. "Jove," she sneered, "rules the world and kisses Juno between the thunderbolts. Men have been known to conquer the Helvetii with their right hands and bring roses to Venus with their left. Your 'poison' is but the spicy sauce for a strong man's meat, your 'plundering' but the stealing of a napkin from a loaded table. Look for your denizens of hell not among lovers of women, but among lovers of money and of power and of fame. Their dreams are the futile frenzies."

"Dreams!" Lucretius interrupted. Clodia shrank a little from the strange look in his eyes. "Do you, too, dream at night? I worked late last night, struggling to fit into Latin words ideas no Latin mind ever had. Toward morning I fell asleep and then I seemed to be borne over strange seas and rivers and mountains and to be crossing plains on foot and to hear strange noises. These waked me at last and I sprang up and walked out into the Campagna where the dawn was fresh and cool. But all day I have scarcely felt at home. And I may dream again to-night. This time my dead may appear to me. They often do." He walked toward her suddenly and his eyes seemed to bore into hers. "Do you ever dream of your dead?" A horrible fright took possession of her. She fell back against the Venus, her sea-green dress rippling upon the white marble, and covered her eyes with her hands. When she looked again, Lucretius was gone.

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How terrible he had been to-day! Dream of the dead, he had said, the dead! And why had he talked of *a hidden poison of which men might sicken and die*? She felt a silly desire to shriek, to strike her head against the painted wall, to tear the jewels from her ears. The orange cat arched its back and rubbed its head against her. She kicked it fiercely, and its snarl of pain seemed to bring her to her senses. She picked the creature up and stroked it. The bird in the cage broke into a mad little melody. How morbid she was growing! She had been depressed by her ridiculous dinner and Lucretius had been most unpleasant. He was such a fool, too, in his idea of love. The brevity of the heated hours was the flame's best fuel. Venus the Plunderer seemed to smile, and there quickened within her the desire for excitement, for the exercise of power, for the obliterating ecstasies of a fresh amour. She had not had a lover since she accepted Catullus. How the thought of that boy sickened her! He had been so absurd that first day when she went to him at Allius's. After writing her that his heart was an AEtna of imprisoned fire, in the first moment he had reminded her of ice-cold Alps. He had knelt and kissed her foot and then had kissed her lips—*her lips!*—as coolly as a father might kiss a child. The unleashed passion, the lordly love-making which followed had won her. But that first caress and its fellow at later meetings was like crystal water in strong wine—she preferred hers unmixed. Of a poet she had had enough for one while; if she ever wanted him back she need only say so.

In the mean time it would be a relief to play the game with a man who understood it. Youth she enjoyed, if it were not too inexperienced. Caelius's smile, for instance, boyish and inviting, had seemed to her full of promise. He was worth the winning and was close at hand. Catullus had introduced him, which would add piquancy to her letting the din of the Forum succeed the babbling of Heliconian streams. Suddenly she laughed aloud, cruelly, as another thought struck her. How furious and how impotent Cicero would be! If she could play with this disciple of his, and then divest him of every shred of reputation, she might feel that at last she was avenged on the man whom she had meant to marry (after they had sloughed off Metellus and Terentia) and who had escaped her. Calling back her secretary she ordered writing materials and with her own hand wrote the following note:

"Does Caelius know that Clodia's roses are loveliest at dusk, when the first stars alone keep watch?"

III

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About seven o'clock on a clear evening of early November Catullus arrived in Rome. With the passage of the weeks his jealous grief had learned to dwell with other emotions, and a longing to be with Lesbia, once more admitted, had reassumed its habitual sway. Coming first in guise of the need of comfort, it had impelled him to leave Verona, and on the journey it had grown into a lover's exclusive frenzy. To-morrow he might examine the structure of his familiar life which had been beaten upon by the storm of sorrow. To-night his ears rang and his eyes were misty with the desire to see Lesbia. He had written her that he would call the following morning, but he could not wait. Stopping only to dress after his journey, fitting himself, he shyly thought, to take her loveliness into his arms, he started for the Palatine. The full moon illumined the city, but he had no eyes for the marvel wrought upon temples and porticoes. Clodia's house stood at the farther end of the hill, her gardens stretching towards the Tiber and offering to her intimates a pleasanter approach than the usual thoroughfare. To-night he found the entrance gate still open and made his way through the long avenue of cypress trees, hearing his own heart beat in the shadowed silence. The avenue ended in a wide, open space, dominated by a huge fountain. The kindly moonlight lent an unwonted grace to the coarse workmanship of the marble Nymphs which sprawled in the waters of the central basin, their shoulders and breasts drenched in silvered spray. Upon the night air hung the faint scent of late roses. It had been among summer roses under a summer moon that Catullus had once drunk deepest of Lesbia's honeyed cup. This autumn night seemed freighted with the same warmth and sweetness. He was hurrying forward when he caught sight of two figures turning the corner of a tall box hedge. His heart leaped and then stood still. A woman and a man walked to the fountain and sat down upon the carved balustrade. The woman unfastened her white cloak. The man laughed low and bent and kissed her white throat where it rose above soft silken folds. Clodia loosened the folds. Caelius laughed again.

Catullus never remembered clearly what happened to him that night after he had plunged down the cypress avenue, his feet making no sound on the green turf. In the mad hours he found his first way into haunts of the Subura which later became familiar enough to him, and at dawn he came home spent. Standing at his window, he watched the pitiless, grey light break over Rome. The magic city of the moonlit night, the creation of fragile, reflected radiance, had evanished in bricks and mortar. The city of his heart, also, built of gossamer dreams and faiths, lay before him, reduced to the hideous realities of impure love and lying friendship. In the chaos substituted for his accustomed world he recognised only a grave in Troy.

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His servant found him in a delirium and for a week his fever ran high. In it were consumed the illusions of which it had been born. As he gained strength again, he found that his anger against Caelius was more contemptuous than regretful; he discovered a sneering desire for Lesbia's beauty divorced from a regard for her purity. The ashes of his old love for her, the love that Valerius had understood, in the dusk, coming home from Mantua, were hidden away in their burial urn. Should he hold out his cold hands to this new fire? Should he go to her as a suppliant and pay in reiterated torture for Clytemnestra's embrace and for Juno's regilded favours? He was unaccustomed to weighing impulses, to resisting emotions. For the first time in his life slothful reason arose and fought with desire.

The issue of the conflict was still in the balance when, a few days later, a little gold box was brought to him without name or note. Opening it he found a round, white stone. Loosened flame could have leaped no more swiftly to its goal. Lesbia had said a white stone marked in her memory the day she had first given herself to him. She wanted him to come to her. She was holding out to him her white arms. He trembled with a passion which no longer filtered through shyness. The listlessness of his body was gone. His house was not a prison and the Palatine was near. Valerius would never come back from Asia, but Lesbia stood within his hand's sweet reach.

As he made his way through the Forum two drunken wretches shambled past him, and he caught a coarse laugh and the words, "Our Palatine Medea." Why did his ears ring, suddenly, strangely, with the laughter of bright, blue waves and the cadences of a voice telling a child Medea's story? Did he know that not the unawakening night but this brief, garish day separated him from one who had listened to that story with him in the covert of his mother's arms; that not the salt waves of trackless seas but the easy passage of a city street marked his distance from a soldier's grave? He had blamed death for his separation from Valerius. But what Death had been powerless to accomplish his own choice of evil had brought about. Between him and his brother there now walked the Estranger—Life.

A POET'S TOLL

I

The boy's mother let the book fall, and, walking restlessly to the doorway, flung aside the curtains that separated the library from the larger and open hall. The December afternoon was sharp and cold, and she had courted an hour's forgetfulness within a secluded room, bidding her maid bring a brazier and draw the curtains close, and deliberately selecting from her son's books a volume of Lucretius. But her oblivion had been penetrated by an unexpected line, shot like a poisoned arrow from the sober text: —

Breast of his mother should pierce with a wound sempiternal, unhealing.

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That was her own breast, she said to herself, and there was no hope of escape from the fever of its wound. A curious physical fear took possession of her, parching her throat and robbing her of breath. It was a recoil from the conviction that she must continue to suffer because her son, so young even for his twenty-three years, had openly flouted her for one of the harpies of the city and delivered over his manhood to the gossip-mongers of Rome.

Seeking now the sting of the winter air which she had been avoiding, she pushed the heavy draperies aside and hurried into the atrium. Through an opening in the roof a breath from December blew refreshingly, seeming almost to ruffle the hair of the little marble Pan who played his pipes by the rim of the basin sunk in the centre of the hall to catch the rain-water from above. She had taken pains years ago to bring the quaint, goat-footed figure to Rome from Assisi, because the laughing face, set there within a bright-coloured garden, had seemed to her a happy omen on the day when she came as a bride to her husband's house, and in the sullen hours of her later sorrow had comforted her more than the words of her friends.

As she saw it now, exiled and restrained within a city house, a new longing came upon her for her Umbrian home. Even the imperious winds which sometimes in the winter swept up the wide valley, and leaped over the walls of Assisi and shrieked in the streets, were better than the Roman Aquilo which during these last days had been biting into the very corners of the house. And how often, under the winter sun, the northern valley used to lie quiet and serene, its brown vineyards and expectant olive orchards held close within the shelter of the blue hills which stretched protectingly below the snow-covered peaks of the Apennines. How charming, too, the spring used to be, when the vineyards grew green, and the slow, white oxen brought the produce of the plain up the steep slopes to the town.

She wondered now why, in leaving Assisi when Propertius was a child, she had not foreseen her own regretful loneliness. Her reason for leaving had been the necessity of educating her son, but the choice had been made easy by the bitterness in her own life. Her husband had died when the child was eight years old, and a year later her brother, who had bulwarked her against despair, had been killed in the terrible siege of Perugia.

Her own family and her husband's had never been friendly to Caesar's successor. Her husband's large estates had been confiscated when Octavius came back from Philippi, and her brother had eagerly joined Antony's brother in seizing the old Etruscan stronghold across the valley from Assisi and holding it against the national troops. The fierce assaults, the prolonged and cruel famine, the final destruction of a prosperous city by a fire which alone saved it from the looting of Octavius's soldiers, made a profound impression upon all Umbria. Her own home seemed to be physically darkened by evil memories. Her mind strayed morbidly in the shadows, forever picturing her brother's last hours in some fresh guise of horror. She recovered her self-control only through the shock of discovering that her trouble was eating into her boy's life also.

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He was a sensitive, shrinking child, easily irritated, and given to brooding. One night she awoke from a fitful sleep to find him shivering by her bed, his little pale face and terrified eyes defined by the moonlight that streamed in from the opposite window. "It is my uncle," he whispered; "he came into my room all red with blood; he wants a grave; he is tired of wandering over the hills." As she caught the child in her arms her mind found a new mooring in the determination to seek freedom for him and for herself from the memories of Assisi, where night brought restless spectres and day revealed the blackened walls and ruins of Perugia.

That was fourteen years ago, but to-day she knew that in Rome she herself had never wholly been at home. Her income had sufficed for a very modest establishment in the desirable Esquiline quarter; and her good, if provincial, ancestry had placed her in an agreeable circle of friends. She and her son had no entree among the greater Roman nobles, but they had a claim on the acquaintance of several families connected with the government and through them she had all the introductions she needed. There was, however, much about city life which offended her tastes. Its restlessness annoyed her, its indifference chilled her. Architecture and sculpture failed to make up to her for the presence of mountain and valley. Ornate temples, crowded with fashionable votaries, more often estranged than comforted her. Agrippa's new Pantheon was now the talk of the day, but to her the building seemed cold and formal. And two years ago, when all Rome flocked to the dedication of the new temple of Apollo on the Palatine, her own excitement had given way to tender memories of the dedication of Minerva's temple in her old home. Inside the spacious Roman portico, with its columns of African marble and its wonderful images of beasts and mortals and gods, and in front of the gleaming temple, with its doors of carven ivory and the sun's chariot poised above its gable peak, she had been conscious chiefly of a longing to see once more the homely market-place of Assisi, to climb the high steps to the exquisite temple-porch which faced southward toward the sunbathed valley, and then to seek the cool dimness within, where the Guardian of Woman's Work stood ready to hear her prayers.

To-day as she walked feverishly up and down, fretted by the walls of her Roman house, her homesickness grew into a violent desire for the old life. Perugia was rebuilt, and rehabilitated, in spite of the conquering name of Augustus superimposed upon its most ancient Etruscan portal. Assisi was plying a busy and happy life on the opposite hillside. The intervening valley, once cowering under the flail of war, was given over now to plenty and to peace. Its beauty, as she had seen it last, recurred to her vividly. She had left home in the early morning. The sky still held the flush of dawn, and the white mists were just rising from the valley and floating

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away over the tops of the awakening hills. She had held her child close to her side as the carriage passed out under the gate of the town and began the descent into the plain, and the buoyant freshness of the morning had entered into her heart and given her hope for the boy's future. He was to grow strong and wise, his childish impetuosity was to be disciplined, he was to study and become a lawyer and serve his country as his ancestors had before him. His father's broken youth was to continue in him, and her life was to fructify in his and in his children's, when the time came.

The mother bowed her head upon her clenched hands. How empty, empty her hopes had been! Even his boyhood had disappointed her, in spite of his cleverness at his books. The irritability of his childhood had become moroseness, and he had alienated more often than he had attached his friends. A certain passionate sincerity, however, had never been lacking in his worst moods; and toward her he had been a loyal, if often heedless, son. In this loyalty, as the years passed, she had come to place her last hope that he would be deaf to the siren calls of the great city. Outdoor sports and wholesome friendships he had rejected, even while his solitary nature and high-strung temperament made some defense against temptation imperative.

When he was eighteen he refused to go into law, and declared for a literary life. She had tried hard to conceal her disappointment and timid chagrin. She realised that the literary circle in Rome was quite different from any she knew. It was no more aristocratic than her own, and yet she felt intuitively that its standards were even more fastidious and its judgments more scornful. If Propertius were to grow rich and powerful, as the great Cicero had, and win the friendship of the old senatorial families, she could more easily adjust herself to formal intercourse with them than to meeting on equal terms such men as Tibullus and Ponticus and Bassus, and perhaps even Horace and Virgil. But later her sensitive fear that she could not help her son in his new career had been swallowed up in the anguish of learning that he had entirely surrendered himself to a woman of the town. This woman, she had been told, was much older than Propertius, beautiful and accomplished, and the lure of many rich and distinguished lovers. Why should she seek out a slight, pale boy who had little to give her except a heart too honest for her to understand?

When the knowledge first came to her, she had begged for her son's confidence, until, in one of his morose moods, he had flung away from her, leaving her to the weary alternations of hope and fear. Two weeks ago, however, all uncertainty had ended. The sword had fallen. Propertius had published a series of poems boasting of his love, scorning all the ideals of courage and manhood in which she had tried to nurture him, exhibiting to Rome in unashamed nakedness the spectacle of his defeated youth. Since the day when her slave had brought home the volume from the book-store and she had read it at night in the privacy of her bedroom, she had found no words in which

to speak to him about his poetry. Any hope that she had ever had of again appealing to him died before his cruel lines:—

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Never be dearer to me even love of a mother beloved,
Never an interest in life dear, if of thee I'm bereft.
Thou and thou only to me art my home, to me, Cynthia, only
Father and mother art thou—thou all my moments of joy.

He had, indeed, been affectionate toward her once more, and had made a point of telling her things that he thought would please her. He had even, some days before, seemed boyishly eager for her sympathetic pleasure in an invitation to dine with Maecenas.

"I am made, mother," he said, "if he takes me up."

"*Made!*" she repeated now to herself. Made into what?

A friend had told her that the Forum was ringing with the fame of this new writer, and that from the Palatine to the Subura his poetry was taking like wildfire. She was dumb before such strange comfort. What was this "fame" to which men were willing to sacrifice their citizenship? Nothing in Rome had so shocked her as the laxity of family life, the reluctance of young men to marry, the frequency of divorce. She had felt her first sympathy with Augustus when he had endeavoured to force through a law compelling honourable marriage. Now, all that was best in her, all her loyalty to the traditions of her family, rose in revolt against a popular favour which applauded the rhymes of a ruined boy and admired the shameless revelations of debauchery.

These plain words, spoken to herself, acted upon her mind like a tonic. In facing the facts at their worst, she gained courage to believe that there must still be something she could do, if she could only grow calmer and think more clearly. She stopped her restless walking, and, taking a chair, forced herself to lean back and rest. The afternoon was growing dark, and a servant was beginning to light the lamps. In the glow of the little yellow flames Pan seemed to be piping a jocund melody.

The frenzy of despair left her, and she began to remember her son's youth and the charming, boyish things about him. Perhaps among his new friends some would love him and help him where she and his earlier friends had failed. There was Virgil, for example. He was older, but Propertius's enthusiasm for him seemed unbounded. He had pored over the *Georgics* when they came out, and only the other day he had told her that the poet was at work on an epic that would be greater than the *Iliad*. The boy's likes and dislikes were always violent, and he had said once, in his absurd way, that he would rather eat crumbs from Virgil's table than loaves from Horace's.

She knew that Virgil believed in noble things, and she had heard that he was kind and full of sympathy. As the son of a peasant he did not seem too imposing to her. He had been pointed out to her one day in the street, and the memory of his shy bearing and of

the embarrassed flush on his face as he saw himself the object of interest, now gave her courage to think of appealing to him.

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Her loosened thoughts hurried on more ambitiously still. Of Maecenas's recent kindness Propertius was inordinately proud. Would it not be possible to reach the great man through Tullus, her son's faithful friend, whose government position gave him a claim upon the prime minister's attention? Surely, if the older man realised how fast the boy was throwing his life away he would put out a restraining hand. She had always understood that he set great store by Roman morals. Rising from her chair with fresh energy, she bade a servant bring her writing materials to the library. The swift Roman night had fallen, and the house looked dull and dim except within the short radius of each lamp. But to her it seemed lit by a new and saving hope.

II

Nearly a week later Horace was dining quietly with Maecenas. It was during one of the frequent estrangements between the prime minister and his wife, and Maecenas often sent for Horace when the strain of work had left him with little inclination to collect a larger company. The meal was over, and on the polished citron-wood table stood a silver mixing-bowl, and an hospitable array—after the princely manner of the house—of gold cups, crystal flagons, and tall, slender glasses which looked as if they might have been cut out of deep-hued amethyst. The slaves had withdrawn, as it was one of the first nights of the Saturnalia and their duties were lightened by a considerate master. The unusual cold and the savage winds that had held Rome in their grip for the past few days were forgotten within the beautiful dining-room. A multitude of lamps, hanging from the lacquered ceiling, standing around the room on tall AEginetan candelabra, and resting on low, graceful standards on the table itself, threw a warm radiance over the mosaic floor and over the walls painted with architectural designs, through which, as if through colonnades of real marble, charming landscapes lured and beckoned. One of the choicest Greek wines in the host's famous cellar had been brought in for the friends. There was enough snow on Soracte, Maecenas had said laughingly, to justify the oldest Chian, if Horace could forego his Italian numbers and his home-brewed Sabine for one night.

"I will leave both my metre and my stomach to the gods," Horace had retorted, "if you will turn over to them your worry about Rome, and pluck the blossom of the hour with me. Augustus is safe in Spain, you cannot be summoned to the Palatine, and to-morrow is early enough for the noise of the Forum. By the way," he added somewhat testily and unexpectedly, "I wish I could ever get to your house without being held up for 'news.' A perfect stranger—he pretended to know me—stopped me to-night and asked me if I thought there was anything in the rumour that Augustus has no intention of going to get the standards back from the Parthians, but is thinking only of the Spanish gold-mines. 'Does he think to wing our Roman

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eagles with money or with glory?' he asked, with what I thought was an insolent sneer. I shook him off, but it left a bad taste in my mouth. However," smiling again as he saw a familiar impassiveness settle upon his host's face, "for you to-night there shall be neither Parthians nor budgets. I offer myself as the victim of your thoughts. You may even ask me why I have not published my odes since you last saw me."

Maecenas's eyes brightened with affectionate amusement.

"Well, my friend," he said, "both money and glory would wing your flight. You have the public ear already, and can fix your own royalties with the Sosii. And everybody, from Augustus to the capricious fair, would welcome the published volume. You should think too of my reputation as showman. Messala told me last week that he had persuaded Tibullus to bring out a book of verse immediately, while you and Virgil are dallying between past and future triumphs. I am tempted to drop you both and take up with ambitious youth. Here is Propertius setting the town agog, and yesterday the Sosii told me of another clever boy, the young Ovid, who is already writing verse at seventeen: a veritable rascal, they say, for wit and wickedness, but a born poet."

"If he is that," Horace said, in a tone of irritation very unusual with him, "you had better substitute him for your Propertius. I think his success is little short of scandalous."

"You sound like Tullus," Maecenas said banteringly, "or like the friend of Virgil's father who arrived from Mantua last week and began to look for the good old Tatii and Sabines in Pompey's Portico and the Temple of Isis! Since when have you turned Cato?"

Horace laughed good-humouredly again. "At any rate," he said, "you might have done worse by me than likening me to Tullus. I sometimes wish we were all like him, unplagued by imagination, innocent of Greek, quite sure of the admirableness of admirably administering the government, and of the rightness of everything Roman. What does he think of Propertius's peccadilloes, by the way? He is a friend of the family, is he not?"

"Yes," said Maecenas, "and he is doing his friendly duty with the dogged persistence you would expect. He has haunted me in the Forum lately, and yesterday we had a long talk. His point of view is obvious. A Roman ought to be a soldier, and he ought to marry and beget more soldiers. Propertius boasts of being deaf to the trumpet if a woman weeps, and the woman is one he cannot marry. *Ergo*, Propertius is a disgrace to his country. It is as clear as Euclid. All the friends of the family, it seems, have taken a hand in the matter. Tullus himself has tried to make the boy ambitious to go to Athens, Bassus has tried to discount the lady's charms, Lynceus has urged the pleasures of philosophy, and Ponticus of writing epics. And various grey-beards have done their best to make a love-sick poet pay court to wisdom. I could

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scarcely keep from laughing at the look of perplexity and indignation in Tullus's face when he quoted Propertius's reply. The boy actually asked them if they thought the poor flute ought to be set adrift just because swelled cheeks weren't becoming to Pallas! The long and short of it is that he wants me to interfere, and convince Propertius of his public duty. That public duty may conceivably take the form of writing poetry is beyond his grasp."

Horace laughed. "Now, my difficulty," he said, "is just the reverse. I object to this young man because he is a bad poet."

"Why?" Maecenas asked, rather abruptly.

"Because," Horace answered, "he contorts the Latin language and muddies his thought by Alexandrian debris."

Maecenas reached for the silver ladle and slowly filled his cup once more from the mixing-bowl before replying. Then he said in a more serious tone than he had used hitherto:—

"If you will allow me to say so, Flaccus, that is a cheap criticism to come from the keenest critic in Rome. Is it not possible that you are misled by your personal prejudices? You dislike the young man himself, I know, because he is moody and emotional and uncontrolled, and because he considers his own emotions fit subjects for discussion. A boy, self-centred, melancholy, and in love—what do you want of him?"

"Is that quite fair?" Horace answered. "Tibullus is young and in love, and a very Heracleitus for melancholy, and you know that I not only love him as a friend but also value him as a poet, in spite of my belief that elegiac verse is not a fortunate medium for our language. His Latin is limpid and direct, his metre is finished, and his emotion as a lover is properly subordinated to his work as a poet."

"Ah," said Maecenas quickly, "but just there you betray yourself." He hesitated a moment and then went on as if the words were welling up from reluctant depths in his own experience. "Flaccus, you have never loved a woman, have you?"

Horace smiled whimsically. "Not to the extent of surrendering my standards," he said. "So far Mercury has always rescued me in time from both Mars and Venus."

But Maecenas went on gravely, "You are, then, incapacitated for appreciating the force and fervour of a certain kind of genius. I know that you have never understood Catullus, and I have a feeling that something of his spirit is reappearing in this boy to-day. If Propertius lacks his virility and directness, that may well be because of a heart in which there is a stormier conflict of emotions. Certainly his passion transcends the vivacious

sentiment of poor Gallus. I tell you, my wary critic, I am almost willing to believe that through this silly young dandy we are getting a new voice in our literature. Who knows? who knows? It is un-Roman, yes, incoherent and moody and subversive of law and order, but is it false to human life? A man may choose to dwell apart with his own heart rather than with Lucretius's science or Virgil's nature, or your own practical philosophy. Certain lines that this boy has written haunt me—perhaps they will prove true:—

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Then you will wonder, and often, at me not ignoble a poet;
Then midst the talent of Rome I shall be ranked in the van;
Then will the youths break silence by side of my grave and be saying:
'Dead! Thou of passion our lord! Great one, O poet, laid low!'"

A silence fell between the friends. Two slaves, their faces flushed with unusual wine, came in to replenish the small lamps on the table, and stole quietly out again. Horace watched his friend with grave affection, knowing well where his thoughts had strayed. Presently Maecenas shook himself with a laugh.

"Exit Terentia's husband," he said, "and reenter the galley-slave of the Roman State. I have, indeed, been thinking for some time that this new talent ought to be deflected into other lines. Its energy would put vitality into national themes. A little less Cynthia and a little more Caesar will please us all. I mean to suggest some historical subjects to the boy. Thinking about them may stiffen up this oversoft Muse of his."

"You speak hopefully," Horace said, "but you have our Hostia (I understand the 'Cynthia' is an open secret) to reckon with. She is not going to loosen her hold on a young man who is making her famous, and whose sudden success with you is due to poetry about her. We have to acknowledge that she is almost as wonderful as the young fool thinks she is."

"Certainly," Maecenas answered, "she has insight. Her favour must have been won by his talent, for he hasn't money enough to meet her price."

"And I," scoffed Horace, "think the dice about equal between her favour and his talent. However, I wish you luck, and shall look for a crop of songs on Caesar and Carthage and the Cimbrians."

With a smile of mutual understanding the friends pledged each other in one last draught of Chian, as Horace rose to take his leave.

"How lately have you heard from Virgil?" Maecenas asked while they waited for Davus to be summoned from the festivities in the servants' hall.

"A letter came yesterday," Horace answered, "and it troubled me greatly. He wrote in one of his blackest moods of despair over the *AEneid*. He says he feels as if he were caught in a nightmare, trying madly to march along a road, while his feet drag heavily, and his tongue refuses to form sounds and words. I confess that I am anxious, for I think his mind may prey too far upon his physical strength. Only last week Varius told me that he thinks Virgil himself is obsessed by the idea that he may die before he has finished his work, he has begged him so often to promise to destroy whatever is left uncompleted."

A sudden sadness, like the shadow of familiar pain, fell upon Maecenas’s face.

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“Flaccus, my Flaccus,” he exclaimed, “it is I who shall die, die before Virgil finishes his *AEneid*, or you your *Odes*. My life will have been futile. The Romans do not understand. They want their standards back from the Parthians, they want the mines of Spain and the riches of Arabia. They cast greedy eyes on Britain and make much ado about ruling Gaul and Asia and Greece and Egypt. And they think that I am one of them. But the Etruscan ghosts within me stir strangely at times, and walk abroad through the citadel of my soul. Then I know that the idlest dream of a dreamer may have form when our civilisation shall have crumbled, and that the verse of a poet, even of this boy Propertius, will outlast the toil of my nights. You and Virgil often tell me that you owe your fortunes to me,—your lives, you sometimes say with generous exaggeration. But I tell you that the day is coming when I shall owe my life to you, when, save for you, I shall be a mere name in the rotting archives of a forgotten state. Why, then, do you delay to fulfill my hope? Virgil at least is working. What are you doing, my best of friends?”

Davus had come in, and was laying the soft, thick folds of a long coat over his master’s shoulders, as Maecenas’s almost fretful appeal came to an end.

Horace, accustomed to his friend’s overstrained moods, and understanding the cure for them, turned toward him with a gentle respect which was free from all constraint or apology. His voice lost its frequent note of good-tempered mockery and became warm with feeling, as he answered:—

“My friend, have patience. You will not die, nor shall I, until I have laid before you a work worthy of your friendship. You are indeed the honour and the glory of my life, and your faith in my lyric gift lifts me to the stars. But you must remember that my Muse is wayward and my vein of genius not too rich. No Hercules will reward my travail, so do not expect of me the birth-pangs that are torturing Virgil. I have time to look abroad on life and to correct tears by wine and laughter while my hands are busy with the file and pumice-stone. Before you know it, the billboards of the Sosii will announce the completed work, and the dedication shall show Rome who is responsible for my offending.”

The look of anxious irritability faded from Maecenas’s face, and in restored serenity he walked with Horace from the dining-room, through the spacious, unroofed peristyle, where marble pillars and statues, flower-beds and fountains were blanched by the winter moon to one tone of silver, and through the magnificent atrium, where the images of noble ancestors kept their silent watch over the new generation. At the vestibule door a porter, somewhat befuddled by Saturnalian merry-making, was waiting sleepily. When he had opened the door into the street the two friends stood silent a moment in the outer portico, suddenly conscious, after the seclusion of the great house and their evening’s talk, of the city life beyond,—hilarious, disordered, without subtlety in desire and regret, rich in the common passions of humanity. At this moment a troop of revelers stumbled past with wagging torches in their drunken hands. Among them, conspicuous

in the moonlight, the boy Propertius swayed unsteadily, and pushed back a torn garland from his forehead. Horace turned to Maecenas.

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“Cynthia’s wine,” he said. “Do you expect to extract from the lees an ode to Augustus?”

Maecenas shrugged his shoulders. “Probably,” he said, “he will write me a charming poem to explain why he cannot do what I ask. I know the tricks of your tribe.”

With a final laugh and a clasp of the hands the friends parted company. Maecenas went back to his library to reread dispatches from Spain before seeking his few hours of sleep. Horace, finding that the wind had gone down, and tempted by the moonlight, turned toward the Subura to stroll for another hour among the Saturnalian crowds.

III

Propertius made his way past the slave at his own door, who was surprised only by his young master’s arrival before daybreak, and stumbled to his bedroom, where the night-lamp was burning. The drinking at Cynthia’s—he always thought of her by that name—had been fast and furious. She had been more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Her eyes had shone like stars, and the garlands had hung down over her face and trailed in her cup of yellow wine. And she had told him that he was the only true poet in Rome, and had read his poems aloud in a voice so sweet and clear that he had been nearly crazed with pride and delight. Capriciously she had driven him away early with the other guests, but to-morrow he would see her again, or, perhaps, he could get through her door again to-night—to-night—

His feverish reverie was broken in upon by the frightened and apologetic porter, bringing a letter which his mistress had told him to deliver as soon as the master came home. Propertius dismissed him angrily, and held the letter in an unwilling and shaking hand. Perhaps he would not have read it at all if it had been written on an ordinary wax tablet. But the little parchment roll had an unusual and insistent look about it, and he finally unrolled it and, holding it out as steadily as he could under the small wick of his lamp, read what was written:—

“P. Virgilius Maro to his Propertius, greeting. I hope you will allow me to congratulate you on your recent volume of verse. Your management of the elegiac metre, which my friend Gallus, before his tragic death, taught me to understand, seems to me ennobling and enriching, and in both the fire and the pathos of many of your lines I recognise the true poet. Perhaps you will recognise the rustic in me when I add that I also welcomed a note of love for your Umbrian groves of beeches and pines and for water-meadows which you must have seen, perhaps by the banks of your Clitumnus, filled with white lilies and scarlet poppies. Most of all have I been moved by the candour of your idealism. It is rare indeed in this age to hear any scorn of the golden streams of Pactolus and the jewels of the Red Sea, of pictured tapestries and thresholds of Arabian onyx. The knowledge that things like these are as nothing to you, compared with love, stirs me to gratitude.

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“It was in these ways that I was thinking of you yesterday, when I put my own work aside and walked by the shore of the great bay here, looking toward Capri. And will you let a man who has lived nearly a quarter of a century longer than you have add that I wondered also whether before long you will not seek another mistress for your worship, one whose service shall transcend not only riches but all personal passions?

“Like you, I have lain by the Tiber, and watched the skiffs hurrying by, and the slow barges towed along the yellow waves. And my thoughts also have been of the meanness of wealth and of the glory of love. But it was to Rome herself that I made my vows, and in whose service I enlisted. Was there ever a time when she needed more the loyalty of us all? While she is fashioning that Empire which shall be without limit or end and raise us to the lordship of the earth, she runs the risks of attack from impalpable enemies who shall defile her highways and debauch her sons. Arrogance, luxury, violent ambition, false desires, are more to be dreaded than a Parthian victory. The subtle wickedness of the Orient may conquer us when the spears of Britain are of no avail. Antony and Gallus are not the only Romans from whom Egypt has sucked life and honour.

“Like you, again, I am no soldier. Your friends and my friends go lustily to Ionia and Lydia and Gaul and Spain, co-workers, as you say, in a beloved government. Is not Rome, then, all the more left to our defence? You pleased me once by saying that you ’knew every line’ of my *Georgics*. You know, then, that I have believed that the sickened minds of to-day could be healed, if men would but return to the intimacies of the soil and farm. Our great master, Lucretius, preached salvation through knowledge of the physical world. I have ventured to say that it could be found through the kindly help of the country gods. But now I am beginning to see deeper. In Rome herself lie the seeds of a new birth. When men see her as she is in her ancient greatness and her immortal future, will not greed and lust depart from their hearts? I think it must have been at dawn, when the sea was first reddening under the early sun, that AEneas sailed up to the mouth of the Tiber, and found at last the heart of that Hesperia whose shores had seemed ever to recede as he drew near them. Now that our sky is blazing with the midday sun, shall we betray and make void those early hopes? Shall the sistrum of Isis drown our prayers to the gods of our country, native-born, who guard the Tiber and our Roman Palatine?

“I am seeking to write a poem which shall make men reverence their past and build for their future. Will you not help me to work for Rome’s need? You have sincerity, passion, talent. You have commended a beautiful woman to me. Will you not let me commend my Mistress to you? Farewell.”

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The letter slipped from the boy's fingers to the floor. The wonderful voice of Virgil, which made men forget his slight frame and awkward manners, seemed to echo in his ears. In that voice he had heard stately hexameters read until, shutting his eyes, he could have believed Apollo spoke from cloudy Olympus. And this voice condescended now to plead with him and to offer him a new love. Cynthia's voice or his—or his. He tried to distinguish each in his clouded memory—Virgil's praising Rome, Cynthia's praising himself. His head ached violently, and his ears rang. A blind rage seized him because he could not distinguish either voice clearly. The letter was to blame. He would destroy that, and one voice at least would cease its torment. He gathered up the loose roll, twisted it in his trembling fingers, and held it to the flame of the little lamp.

"To Venus—a hecatomb!" he shouted wildly.

As the parchment caught fire, the blaze of light illumined his flushed cheeks and burning eyes, and the boyish curve of his sullen lips.

* * * * *

It was in the spring, when the little marble Pan looked rosy in the warmer sunlight, and the white oxen must have been climbing the steeps of Assisi, that the boy's mother let go her slight hold on life. In Rome the roses were in bloom, and Soracte was veiled in a soft, blue haze.

Tullus came to Maecenas to excuse Propertius from a dinner, and a slave led him into the famous garden where the prime minister often received his guests. Virgil was with him now, and they both cordially greeted the young official. As he gave his message, his face, moulded into firm, strong lines by his habits of thought, was softened as if by a personal regret. The three men stood in silence for a moment, and then Tullus turned impulsively to Maecenas.

"He chose between his mother and his mistress," he said. "When I talked with you in the winter you said that perhaps his mother would have to face death again to give birth to a poet, as she had already to give birth to a child. I have never understood what you meant."

"Ah, Tullus," Maecenas answered, laying his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of the younger man, "I spoke of a law not inscribed on the Twelve Tables, but cut deep in the bedrock of life—is it not, my Virgil?"

But the poet, toward whom he had quickly turned, did not hear him. He stood withdrawn into his own thoughts. A shaft of sun, piercing through the ilex trees, laid upon his white toga a sudden sheen of gold, and Maecenas heard him say softly to himself, in a voice whose harmonies he felt he had never wholly gauged before,—

Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.

THE PHRASE-MAKER

Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit.—HORACE.

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The sun still hung high over a neat little farm among the Sabine hills, although the midday heat had given way to the soft and comforting warmth of a September afternoon. Delicate shadows from dark-leaved ilexes, from tall pines and white poplars, fell waveringly across a secluded grass-plot which looked green and inviting even after the parching summer. The sound of water bickering down the winding way of a stream gave life and coolness to the warm silence. Thick among the tree-trunks on one side grew cornel bushes and sloes, making a solid mass of underbrush, while on the other side there was an opening through which one might catch sight of a long meadow, and arable fields beyond, and even of blue hills along the horizon.

But the master of this charming outlook evidently had his mind on something else. He was a man about fifty-five years old, short and stout, and with hair even greyer than his age warranted. As he leaned back among his cushions on a stone bench, so skilfully placed under an ilex tree that his face was protected while the sun fell across his body, he looked an unromantic figure enough, no better than any other Roman gentleman past his prime, seeking the sunshine and intent on physical comfort. Indeed, only a gracefully low forehead and eyes at once keen and genial saved his face from commonplaceness, and would have led a spectator to feel any curiosity about his meditations.

He had let fall into his lap a letter which had reached him that morning, and which he had just reread. It had travelled all the way from Gaul, and he had opened it eagerly, curious to know with what new idea his younger friend was coquetting, and hoping to hear some interesting literary gossip about their common acquaintances. But the letter had been chiefly filled with questions as to why he had not yet written, and, above all, why he did not send on some verses. Horace still felt the irritation of the first reading, although he had had his lunch and his nap, and had reached the serenest hour of the day. When they said good-by in Rome he had told Florus that he should not write: he was too lazy in these later years to write very regularly to any one except Maecenas, the other part of his soul, and it was foolish of the younger man not to have accepted the situation. As for the request for verses, Horace felt ashamed of the anger it had aroused in him. One would think that he was twenty years old again, with black curls, lively legs, and a taste for iambs, to get so out of patience with poor Florus. But it certainly was annoying to be pressed for odes when he had long ago determined to spend the rest of his life in studying philosophy. To be sure, he had once made that vow too early and had been forced to tune his lyre again after he had thought to hang it in Apollo’s temple. He had had a pride in the enthusiastic reception of his new odes, and in the proof that his hand had by no means lost its cunning; but Florus ought to understand that he had at that time yielded to the Emperor’s request as equivalent to a command, and that he meant what he said when he declared that he wished to leave the lyric arena.

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He had never been unreasonable in his demands on life, nor slow in the contribution of his share. It seemed only just that he should spend the years that were left to him as he chose. People talked about his tossing off an ode as if he could do it at dessert, and spend the solid part of the day in other pursuits. They little dreamed that the solid part of many days had often gone into one of his lyric trifles, and that Polyhymnia, she who had invented the lyre, and struck it herself in Lesbos, was among the most exacting of the Muses. With the departure of his green youth and play-time had gone the inclination, as well as the courage, to set himself such tasks. He had always been interested in reading the moral philosophers, and, whatever his friends said, he meant to keep to his books, and to write, if he wrote at all, in a comfortable, contemplative style.

Besides (so his irritated thoughts ran on), how could Florus expect a man who lived in Rome to write imaginative poetry? How tiresome the days were there! Whenever he went out, some one wanted his help in a dull business matter or dragged him off to a public reading by some equally dull author. Even if he tried to visit his friends, one lived on the Quirinal and one on the Aventine, and the walk between lay through noisy streets filled with clumsy workmen, huge wagons, funeral processions, mad dogs, dirty pigs, and human bores. No notes from the lyre could make themselves heard amid such confusion.

Suddenly his feeling quickened: how good it was to be away just now in this autumnal season, when Rome laboured under leaden winds fraught with melancholy depression, and when his head always gave him trouble and he especially needed quiet and freedom! The afternoon sun enveloped him in a delicious warmth, the shadows on the grass danced gayly, as a faint breeze stirred the branches above his head, the merry little stream near by seemed to prattle of endless content.

The frown above Horace's eyes disappeared, and with it his inner annoyance. Florus was a dear fellow, after all, and although he intended to write him a piece of his mind, he would do it in hexameters, more for his amusement than for his edification. It would be a pretty task for the morning hours to-morrow. Now he meant to be still, and forget his writing tablets altogether. He was glad that his house was empty of guests, much as he had enjoyed the preceding week when a lively company had come over from Tibur, in whose retreat they were spending September, to hunt him out. They had had charming dinners together, falling easily into conversations that were worth while, and by tacit consent forgetting the inanities of town gossip. But at present he liked the quiet even better. He had been walking about his little place more regularly, laughing at his steward who often grew impatient over the tiny crops, and assuring himself of the comfort of the few slaves who ran the farm. And on more extended walks he had felt once more, as he had so often in these long years, the charm of the village people near him, with their friendly manners, their patient devotion to work, and their childlike enjoyment of country holidays.

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Certainly, as he grew older and his physical energy diminished (he had not been really well since he was a very young man, and now before his time he felt old), he appreciated more and more his good fortune in owning a corner of the earth so situated. He remembered with amusement that in earlier days he sometimes used to feel bored by the solitude of his farm, at the end of his journey from Rome, and wonder why he had left the lively city. But that was when he was young enough to enjoy the bustle of the streets, and, especially in the evenings, to join the crowds of pleasure-seekers and watch the fortune-tellers and their victims. That he could mingle inconspicuously with the populace he had always counted one of the chief rewards of an inconspicuous income. Now, the quiet of the country and the leisure for reading seemed so much more important. He was not even as anxious as he used to be to go to fashionable Tibur or Tarentum or Baiae in search of refreshment. How pleased Virgil would have been with his rustic content!

The sudden thought brought a smile to his eyes and then a shadow. Virgil had been dead more than ten years, but his loss seemed all at once a freshly grievous thing. So much that was valuable in his life was inextricably associated with him. Horace's mind, usually sanely absorbed in present interests, began, because of a trick of memory, to turn more and more toward the past. Virgil had been one of the first to help him out of the bitterness that made him a rather gloomy young man when the Republic was defeated, and his own little property dissipated, and had introduced him to Maecenas, the source of all his material prosperity and of much of his happiness. And indeed he had justified Virgil's faith, Horace said to himself with a certain pride. He had begun as the obscure son of a freedman, and here he was now, after fifty, one of the most successful poets of Rome, a friend of Augustus, a person of importance in important circles, and withal a contented man.

This last achievement he knew to be the most difficult, as it was the most unusual. And there in the clarifying sunshine he said to himself that the rich treasure of his content had been bought by noble coin: by his temperance and good sense in a luxurious society, by his self-respecting independence in a circle of rich patrons, and perhaps, above all, by his austerely honest work among many temptations to debase the gift the Muses had bestowed upon him. He had had no Stoic contempt for the outward things of this world. Indeed, after he had frankly accepted the Empire he came to feel a pride in the glory of Augustus's reign, as he felt a deep, reconciling satisfaction in its peace, its efforts at restoring public morals, its genuine insistence on a renewed purity of national life. The outward tokens of increasing wealth charmed his eyes, and he took the keenest pleasure in the gorgeous marble pillars and porticoes of many of the houses he frequented, in the beautiful statues,

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the bronze figures, the tapestries, the gold and silver vessels owned by many of his friends, and in the rich appointments and the perfect service of their dining-rooms, where he was a familiar guest. But he had never wanted these things for himself, any more than he wished for a pedigree and the images of ancestors to adorn lofty halls. He came away from splendid houses more than willing to fall back into plainer ways. Neither had he ever been apologetic toward his friends. If they wanted to come and dine with him on inexpensive vegetables, he would gladly himself superintend the polishing of his few pieces of silver and the setting of his cheap table. If they did not choose to accept his invitations, why, they knew how much their standards amused him. As for his more august friends, the Emperor himself, Maecenas, and Messala, and Pollio, he had always thought it a mere matter of justice and common courtesy to repay their many kindnesses by a cheerful adaptability when he was with them, and by a dignified gratitude. But not even the Emperor could have compelled him to surrender his inner citadel.

Perhaps, after all, that was why Augustus had forced him back to the lyre, in support of his reforms and in praise of the triumphal campaigns of Tiberius and Drusus. An honest mind betokened honest workmanship, and upon such workmanship, rather than upon a subsidised flattery, the imperial intruder wished to stake his repute.

However lightly Horace may from time to time have taken other things, he never trifled with his literary purpose after it had once matured. Even his first satiric efforts had been honestly made; and when he found his true mission of adapting the perfect Greek poetry to Latin measures, there was no airy grace of phrase, no gossamer-like slightness of theme, which did not rest upon the unseen structure of artistic sincerity. That was why in rare solemn moments he believed that his poetry would live, live beyond his own lifetime and his age, even, perhaps, as long as the Pontifex Maximus and the Vestal Virgin should ascend to the Capitol in public processional. He had said laughingly of his published metrical letters that they might please Rome for a day, travel on to the provinces, and finally become exercise-books for school-boys in remote villages. But his odes were different. They were not prosaic facts and comments put into metre: they were poetry. If he were only a laborious bee compared with the soaring swans of Greek lyric, at least he had distilled pure honey from the Parnassian thyme. Now that he had determined to touch the lyre no more, he felt more than ever sure that his lyre had served Rome well. How much better, indeed, than his sword could have served her, in spite of the military ambitions of his youth. What a fool he had been to believe that the Republic could be saved by blood, or that he could be a soldier!

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All these things Horace was meditating beneath his ilex tree, being moved to evaluate his life by the chance appeal of his memory to that dead friend whose “white soul” had so often, when he was alive, proved a touchstone for those who knew him. He was sure that in the larger issues Virgil would have given him praise on this afternoon; and with that thought came another which was already familiar to him. It was less probing, perhaps, but more regretfully sad. If only his father could have lived to see his success! His mother he had not known at all, except in his halting, childish imagination when, one day in each year, he had been led by his father’s hand to stand before the small, plain urn containing her ashes. But his father had been his perfect friend and comrade for twenty years. He had been able to talk to him about anything. Above all the reserves of maturer life, he could remember the confidence with which as a child he had been used to rush home, bursting with the gossip of the playground, or some childish annoyance, or some fresh delight. He could not remember that he was ever scolded during his little choleric outbursts or untempered enthusiasms, and yet, somehow, after a talk with his father he had so often found himself feeling much calmer or really happier. Anger in some way or other came to seem a foolish thing; and even if he had come in from an ecstasy of play, it was certainly pleasant to have the beating throbs in his head die away and to feel his cheeks grow cool again. In looking back, Horace knew that no philosophy had ever so deeply influenced him to self-control and to mental temperance as had the common, kindly, shrewd man who had once been a slave, and whose freedom had come to him only a few years before the birth of his son.

And how ambitious the freedman had been for the education of his son! Horace could understand now the significance of two days in his life which at their occurrence had merely seemed full of a vivid excitement. One had come when he was ten years old, but no lapse of years could dull its colours. On the day before, he had been wondering how soon he would be allowed to enter the village school, and become one of the big boys whom he watched every morning with round eyes as they went past his house, their bags and tablets hanging from their arms. But on that great day his father had lifted him in his arms—he was a little fellow—and looking at him long and earnestly had said, “My boy, we are going to Rome next week, so that you may go to school. I have made up my mind that you deserve as good an education as the son of any knight or senator.” Horace had cried a little at first in nervous excitement, and in bewilderment at his father’s unwonted gravity. But all that was soon forgotten in the important bustle of preparations for a journey to the Capital. The whole village had made them the centre of critical interest. Once a bald, thick-set centurion had met them on the street, and

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stopped them with an incredulous question. When he was informed that it was true that the boy was to be taken to Rome, he had laughed sneeringly and said, “How proud you will be of his city education when you find that he comes back to your little government position, and can make no more money than you have.” Horace had looked wonderingly into his father’s face, and found it unannoyed and smiling. And even as a child he had noticed the dignity with which he answered the village magnate: “Sir, I wish to educate my son to know what is best to know, and to be a good man. If in outward circumstances he becomes only an honest tax-collector, he will not for that reason have studied amiss, nor shall I be discontented.”

The next day they had started for Rome, and soon the boy was rioting in the inexpressible glories of his first impressions of the great city. Even the ordeal of going to a strange school had its compensations in the two slaves who went behind him to carry his books. The centurions’ sons at home had carried their own, and Horace felt a harmless, boyish pleasure (without in the least understanding the years of economy on his father’s part that made it possible) in the fact that here in Rome he had what his schoolmates had, and appeared at school in the same state. One thing he had that was better than theirs, and he felt very sorry for them. A special servant went about with each of the other boys, to see that he attended his classes, was polite to his teachers, and did his work. But Horace had his own father to look after him, a thousand times better than any carping *paedagogus*. His father had explained to him that the other fathers were busy men, that they were the ones who carried on the great government, and ruled this splendid Rome; they could not spend hours going to school with their little sons. But Horace thought it was a great pity, and was sure that he was the luckiest boy in school.

How good it had been to have his father learn directly from the grim Orbilius of his first success, to see him with a quick flush on his face take from the teacher’s hands the wax tablet on which his son had written “the best exercise in the class.” His father had not spoken directly of the matter, but in some way Horace had felt that the extra sweet-meats they had had that night at supper were a mark of his special pleasure. And many years afterwards, when he was looking through a chest that had always been locked in his father’s lifetime, he had found the little wax tablet still showing the imprint of his childish stylus.

For ten years Horace’s school life had continued, and then the second great day had come. He was familiar with early Latin literature and with Homer. He had studied philosophy and rhetoric with eager industry. The end was near, and he had begun to wonder what lay before him. Some of his friends hoped to get into political life at once, and perhaps obtain positions in the provinces. Others had

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literary ambitions. A few—the most enviable—were planning to go to Greece for further study in the great philosophical schools. Horace wondered whether his father would want to go back to his old home in the country, and whether outside of Rome he himself could find the stimulus to make something out of such abilities as he had. And then the miracle happened. His father came to his room one night and said, in a voice which was not as steady as he tried to make it, “My boy,”—the old familiar preface to all the best gifts of his early life—“My boy, would you like to go to Athens?”

That sudden question had changed the course of Horace’s life. But his father had not lived to see the fruits of his sacrifice. The last time Horace saw him had been on the beach at Brindisi, just as his vessel cast off from its moorings, and the wind began to fill the widespread sails. Horace had always realised that the most poignant emotion of a life which had been singularly free from despotic passions had come to him on that day when wind and tide seemed to be hurrying him relentlessly away from the Italian shore, and on its edge, at the last, he saw a figure grown suddenly old and tired.

The journey itself across the Ionian Sea had not helped to increase his cheerfulness. There had been a heavy storm, and then long days of leaden sky and sea, and a cold mist through which one could descry only at rare intervals ghostly sails of other ships, to remind one that here was the beaten track of commerce from the Orient. Even as they approached the Piraeus, and beat slowly and carefully up the bay, the desolate mist continued, settling down over the long anticipated coast-line, and putting an end to all the colour and light of Greece. But afterwards Horace realised that the unpropitious arrival had but served as a background for the later revelation. The sungod did grant him a glorious epiphany on that first day, springing, as it were, full panoplied out of a gulf of darkness. His friend Pompeius, who had gone to Athens a month earlier, had by some fortunate chance chosen the afternoon of his arrival to make one of his frequent visits to the shops and taverns of the harbour town. Drawn to the dock by the news that a ship from Italy was approaching, he met Horace with open arms, and afterwards accompanied him to the city along the Phaleron road.

During the hour’s walk the mist had gradually lifted, and the sky grew more luminous. By the time they reached the ancient but still unfinished temple to Zeus, some of whose Corinthian columns they had often seen in Rome, built into their own Capitoline temple, the setting sun had burst through all obstructions, and was irradiating the surrounding landscape. The hills turned violet and amethyst, the sea lighted into a splendid, shining waterway, the sky near the horizon cleared into a deep greenish-blue, and flared into a vast expanse of gold above. The Corinthian pillars near them changed into burnished gold. Purple shadows fell on the brown rock of the Acropolis, while, above, the temple of Athena was outlined against the golden sky, and the Sun tipped as with gleaming fire the spear and the helmet of his sister goddess, the bronze Athena herself, as she stood a little beyond her temple, austere guardian of her city.

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On this soft autumn afternoon among the Italian hills Horace could still remember his startled amazement when he first saw the radiance of Greek colouring. He had not realised that the physical aspect of mountains and sky would be so different from the landscape about Rome, and he had never lost his delight in the fresh transparency of the Athenian air. One of his earliest experiments in translation had been with Euripides's choral description of the "blest children of Erechtheus going on their way, daintily enfolded in the bright, bright air."

His student life in the old home of learning had also proved to be more charming than he could have anticipated. There had been the dual claims of literature and philosophy to stir his mind, and memories of the ancient masters of Greece to make honoured and venerable the gardens and the gymnasiums where he listened to his modern lectures, to enhance the beauty of the incomparable marble temples, to throw a glamour even over the streets of Athens, and so to minimise his Roman contempt for the weakness of her public life. And then there were the pleasures of youth, the breaks in the long days, when he and his comrades would toss lecture notes, and even the poets, to the winds, buy sweet-smelling ointments for their hair in some Oriental shop in the lively market-place, pick out a better wine than usual, and let Dionysus and Aphrodite control the fleeting hours. On the morrow Apollo and Athena would once more hold their proper place.

Of Roman affairs they knew little and thought less, in their charmingly egotistic absorption in student life. But a violent shock was finally to shatter this serene oblivion. Horace could remember the smallest details about that day. It was in the spring. The March sun had risen brightly over Hymettus, and the sky was cloudless. Marcus, meeting him at a morning lecture of Cratippus, had surprised him by asking him to take his afternoon walk with him. "My father," he explained, "has written me about a walk that he and my uncle Quintus took to the Academy when they were students. They felt that Plato was still alive there, and in passing the hill of Colonus they thought of Sophocles. He wants me to take the same walk, and I wish you would come along, too, and tell me some Sophocles and Plato to spout back; my father will be sure to expect a rhapsody." Horace had joyfully assented, for Marcus was always an entertaining fellow, and might he not write to Cicero about his new acquaintance, and might that not lead to his some day meeting the great man, and hearing him talk about Greek philosophy and poetry?

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In the cool of the late afternoon the two young men had found the lovely grove of the Academy almost deserted, and even Marcus had grown silent under the spell of its memories. As they turned homeward the violet mantle had once more been let fall by the setting sun over Athens and the western hills. Only the sound of their own footsteps could be heard along the quiet road. But at the Dipylon Gate an end was put to their converse with the past. The whole Roman colony of students was there to meet them, and it was evident that the crowd was mastered by some unprecedented emotion. Marcus darted forward, and it was he who turned to Horace with whitened face, and said in a curiously dull voice, “Julius Caesar was assassinated on the Ides.” The news had come directly from the governor, Sulpicius, one of whose staff had happened to meet a student an hour after the arrival of the official packet from Rome. Marcus hurried off to the governor’s house, thinking that so good a friend of his father would be willing to see him and tell him details. Horace could see that the boy was sick with fear for his father’s safety.

For several weeks the students could think or talk of nothing else, their discussions taking a fresh impetus from any letters that arrived from Rome. Gradually, however, they settled back again into their studies and pleasures, feeling remote and irresponsible. But with the advent of the autumn a new force entered into their lives. Brutus came to Athens, and, while he was awaiting the development of political events at home, began to attend the lectures of the philosophers.

Horace was among the first of the young Romans to yield to the extraordinary spell exercised by this grave, thin-faced, scholarly man, whose profound integrity of character was as obvious to his enemies as to his friends, and as commanding among the populace as among his peers. Before he came Horace had been moderately glad that the Republic had struck at tyranny and meted out to the dictator his deserts. Now he was conscious of an intense partisanship, of a personal loyalty, of a passionate wish to spend his life, too, in fighting for Roman freedom. And so, when this wonderful man asked him, who was merely a boy with a taste for moral philosophy, and a knack at translating Alcaeus and Sappho, to become one of his tribunes, and to go with him to meet the forces of Caesar’s arrogant young nephew in one final conflict, it was no wonder he turned his back upon the schools and the Muses, and with fierce pride followed his commander. He could remember how stirred he had been that last morning when, on riding out of the city, he had passed the famous old statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. In immortal youth they stood there to prove that in Athens a tyrant had been slain by her sons. The ancient popular song that he had so often heard sung by modern Greek students over their cups seemed to be beaten out by his horse’s hoofs as, in the pale dawn, they clattered out of the city gate:—

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In a wreath of myrtle I'll wear my glaive,
Like Harmodius and Aristogeiton brave,
Who, striking the tyrant down,
Made Athens a freeman's town.

Harmodius, our darling, thou art not dead!
Thou liv'st in the isles of the blest, 'tis said,
With Achilles, first in speed,
And Tydides Diomede.

In a wreath of myrtle I'll wear my glaive,
Like Harmodius and Aristogeiton brave,
When the twain on Athena's day
Did the tyrant Hipparchus slay.[1]

[Footnote 1: Translated by John Conington.]

Even now, more than thirty years later, the breeze in the Sabine ilex seemed to be playing a wraith of the same tune. And suddenly there began to follow, creeping out of long closed fastnesses, a spectral troop of loftier reminders. Horace stirred a little uneasily. Was it only hot youth and Brutus that had carried him off on that foolhardy expedition? Was it possible that Athens herself had driven him forth, furnishing him as wings superb impulses born of the glory of her past? For many years now he had been accustomed to feel that he owed to Greece a quickening and a sane training of his artistic abilities; a salvation from Alexandrian pedantry, through a detailed knowledge of the original and masterly epochs of Greek literature; a wholesome fear of Roman grandiosity in any form, engendered by a sojourn among perfect exemplars of architecture and sculpture. For many years, too, he had been in the habit of regarding Brutus as nobly mistaken; of realising that Julius Caesar might have developed a more rational freedom in Rome than one enshrined merely in republican institutions. Even great men like Brutus and Cicero, although they were above the private meanness and jealousy that in so many cases adulterated the pure love of liberty, had not seen far enough. What could a theory of freedom give the country better than the peace and the prosperity brought about by the magnanimous Emperor? Horace's part in the battle of Philippi had long since become to him a laughable episode of youth. He had even made a merry verse about it, casting the unashamed story of his flight in the words of Archilochus and Alcaeus, as if the chief result for him had been a bit of literary experiment.

But now, like the phantom in Brutus's tent at Philippi, a grim question stole upon him out of the shadows of his memory. Was it possible that his fight on that field of defeat had been, not a folly, but the golden moment of his life? Had Athens taught him something even profounder than the art which had made him Rome's best lyric poet? He had forgotten much of her humiliation, and of his own Roman pride in her subjection during

those days when he had lived, in youthful hero-worship, with the spirits of her great past. Had she, after all, not only taught the sons of her masters philosophy and the arts, but taken them captive, as well, by the imperious ideals of her own youth, by her love of freedom and of truth?

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Horace remembered a day when he and Messala had hired at the Piraeus a boat rigged with bright canvas, and sped before the wind to Salamis, their readiness for any holiday guided by a recent reading of Herodotus and AEschylus, and by a desire to see the actual waters and shores where brute force had been compelled to put its neck beneath wisdom and courage. The day had been a radiant one, the sky fresh and blue, although flecked here and there by clouds, and the sea and the hills and the islands rich in brilliant colour. They had worked their way through the shipping of the harbour, and then sailed straight for the shore of Salamis. When they passed the island of Psyttaleia, where the "dance-loving Pan had once walked up and down," they had been able to see very plainly how the Persian and Greek fleets lay of old, to imagine the narrow strait once more choked with upturned keels, and fighting or flying triremes, to picture Greeks leaping into the sea in full armour to swim to Psyttaleia and grapple with the Persians who paced the beach in insolent assurance. The wind whistled in their ears, freighted, as it seemed to them, with the full-throated shout which, according to the AEschylean story, rang through the battle:—

> Sons of the Hellenes! On! Set free your native land!
> Your children free, your wives, ancestral shrines of gods,
> And tombs of fathers' fathers! Now for all we strive!

A thunder-storm had arisen before they left Salamis, and their homeward sail had satisfied their love for adventure. Clouds and sun had battled vehemently, and as they finally walked back to the city from the harbour, they had seen the Parthenon rising in grave splendour against the warring sky, a living symbol of an ancient victory.

At another time, the same group of friends had chosen a hot day of midsummer to ride on mules along the stretch of Attic road to Marathon. The magnificent hills girdling the horizon had freshly impressed them as more sculpturesque in outline than the familiar ones about their own Rome, and the very shape of the olive trees in a large orchard by the roadside had seemed un-Italian and strange. They had already become attuned to a Greek mood when the blue sea opened before them and they reached the large plain, stretching from the foot-hills of Pentelicon to the water's edge. The heat had stilled all life in the neighbourhood, and Marathon seemed hushed, after all these five hundred years, in reverence before the spirit of liberty. Their ride home had been taken in the cool of the day, so that the hills which rose from the sea had assumed a covering of deep purple or more luminous amethyst. From the shore of the sea they had passed into a wooded road, with a golden sky shining through the black branches. Later the stars had come out in great clusters, and Messala, who now and then betrayed a knowledge of poetry and a gravity of thought that surprised his friends, had recited Pindar's lines:—

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... Aye, undismayed
And deep the mood inspired,
A light for man to trust, a star
Of guidance sure, that shines afar.
If he that hath it can the sequel know,
How from the guilty here, forthwith below
A quittance is required.

But in sunlight undimmed by night and by day
Toil-free is the life of the good—for they
Nor vex earth's soil with the labour of hand,
Nor the waters of Ocean in that far land—
Nay, whoever in keeping of oaths were fearless
With the honoured of gods share life that is tearless.

That night-ride had come back to Horace several years ago when he was writing his ode on Pindar, but to-day's memory seemed strangely different. Then he had remembered what a revelation Pindar's lyric art had been to him amid the severe and lofty beauty of Greek scenery. Now he caught a haunting echo also of how, when he was twenty-one, these lines of the artist had seemed to him a fitting explanation of the mound of earth heaped over the dead at Marathon. He had long ago learned to laugh at the fervour of youth's first grappling with ideas, and had come to see that the part of a sensible man was to select judiciously here and there, from all the schools, enough reasonable tenets to enable him to preserve a straight course of personal conduct. As for understanding first causes, the human race never had and never could; and as for a belief in heavenly revelations or in divine influences, all such tendencies ended in philosophic absurdity. Why, then, at this late day, should he remember that night, on the road from Marathon to Athens, when the ancient struggle for liberty had stirred in his own heart "a mood deep and undismayed," and when an impalpable ideal, under the power of a rushing torrent of melody, had come to seem a "light for man to trust?"

Was it, indeed, days like these that had made Brutus's work so easy when he began to collect his young company about him? And what if Brutus had been "mistaken?" Was there not a higher wisdom than that which could fashion nations? Horace had seen his dead face at Philippi. Had he done right ever afterwards, however reverently, to attribute a blunder to that mighty spirit which had left upon the lifeless body such an imprint of majesty and repose? Surely common sense, temperance, honest work, honourableness, fidelity, were good fruits of human life and of useful citizenship. But was there a vaster significance in a noble death? Was there even a truer citizenship in the prodigal and voluntary pouring out of life, on a field of defeat, amid alien and awful desolation?

The sun was hurrying toward the west, and Horace realised, with a quick chill, that he was entirely in the shadow. Beyond the meadow he could see a team of oxen turn

wearily, with a heavily loaded wagon, toward their little stable. The driver walked with a weary limp. Even the little boy by his side forgot to play and scamper, and rather listlessly put the last touches to a wreath of autumn flowers which he meant to hang about the neck of the marble Faunus at the edge of the garden.

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Where could Davus be? Ah, there he came, half-running already as if he knew his master wanted him.

“Davus,” he called out, “make haste. I have had a visit from the shades, and it has been as unpleasant as those cold baths the doctor makes me take.” Then, as he saw the look of fright on the wrinkled face of the old slave who had been with his father when he died, he broke into a laugh and put his hand on his shoulder. “Calm yourself, my good fellow,” he said, “we shall all be shades some day, and to-day I feel nearer than usual to that charming state. But in the meantime there is a chance for Bacchus and the Muses. Tell them to get out a jar of Falernian to-night, and do you unroll Menander. The counsels of the divine Plato are too eternal for my little mind. And, Davus,” he added thoughtfully, as he rose and leaned on the slave’s willing arm, “as soon as we get to the house, write down, ’Greece took her captors captive.’ That has the making of a good phrase in it—a good phrase. I shall polish it up and use it some day.”

A ROMAN CITIZEN

I

“Look at him—a subject for his own verses—a grandfather metamorphosed into an infant Bacchus! Will he be a Mercury in swaddling clothes by next year? O, father, father, the gods certainly laid their own youth in your cradle fifty-two years ago!”

The speaker, a young matron, smiled into her father’s eyes, which were as brilliant and tender as her own. Ovid and his daughter were singularly alike in a certain blitheness of demeanour, and in Fabia’s eyes they made a charming picture now, both of them in festal white against the March green of the slender poplars. Perilla’s little boy had climbed into his grandfather’s lap and laid carefully upon his hair, still thick and black, a wreath of grape leaves picked from early vines in a sunny corner. Fabia and Perilla’s husband, Fidus Cornelius, smiled at each other in mutual appreciation of a youth shared equally, it seemed to them, by the other three with the new-born spring.

It was Ovid’s birthday and they were celebrating it in their country place at the juncture of the Flaminian and Clodian roads. The poet had a special liking for his gardens here, and he had preferred to hold his fete away from the city, in family seclusion, because Fidus was about to take Perilla off to Africa, where he was to be proconsul. The shadow of the parting had thrown into high relief the happiness of the day. Perilla had always said that it was worth while to pay attention to her father’s birthday, because he could accept family incense without strutting like a god and was never so charming as when he was being spoiled. To-day they had spared no pains, and his manner in return had fused with the tenderness kept for them alone the gallantry, at once that of worldling and of poet, which made him the most popular man in Roman society. Now, as the

afternoon grew older and his grandson curled comfortably into his arms, the conversation turned naturally to personal things. Perilla's jest led her father to talk of his years, and to wonder whether he was to have as long a life as his father, who had died only two or three years before at ninety.

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“At least, having no sons,” he went on, “I shall be spared some of his disappointments. It was cruel that my brother, who could have satisfied him by going into public life, should have died. Father had no use for literature. He used to point out to me that not even Homer made money, so what could I expect? But I believe that even he saw that my student speeches sounded like metreless verse, and later on he accepted the bad bargain with some grace. He had sniffed at what I considered my youthful successes. I was immensely proud over seeing Virgil once in the same room as myself, and when I came to know Horace and Propertius fairly intimately I felt myself quite a figure in Rome. But father had little or no respect for them—except when Horace turned preacher—and no patience at all with what I wrote. Before he died, however, when these greater men had passed off the stage and he saw young men look up to me as I had looked up to them, and found I could sell my wares, he began to grant that I had, after all, done something with my time.”

“I never can realise,” Perilla exclaimed, “that you are old enough to have seen Virgil! Why, I wasn’t even born when he died! I suppose those times, when Augustus was young, were very fiery and inspiring, but I am so glad I live in this very year. I would rather have you the chief poet of Rome than a hundred solemn Virgils, and surely life can never have been as lovely as it is now. Isn’t Rome much finer and more finished?”

Fidus smiled. “You are your father’s own child,” he said. “We certainly are getting the rustic accent out of our mouths and the rustic scruples out of our morals. In the meantime”—he added lightly—“some of us have to plod along with our old habits, or where would the Empire be? I don’t expect to improve much on the proconsulship of my father.”

Ovid’s eyes rested whimsically on the young man, and after a pause he said: “Art is one thing and conduct is another. I trust Perilla to you but with no firmer assurance of her happiness than I have of Fabia’s entrusted to me. Soldiering and proconsuling have their place, but so has the service of the Muses. While you are looking after taxes in Africa, we will make Rome a place to come back to from the ends of the earth. After all, to live is the object of life, and where can you live more richly, more exquisitely than here? You will find you cannot stay away long. Rome is the breath we breathe. I like to believe that will prove true of you. I cannot give up Perilla long, even with this young Roman as a hostage.” The child had fallen asleep, and with a light kiss on his tousled curls the grandfather turned him over to his mother’s arms. “Let us leave these connoisseurs to discuss his dimples,” he said to his son-in-law, “drag our other boy out of his bee-hives and have one more game of ball before I get too old.”

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Perilla watched the two men as they walked off toward the apiary, and when she turned to her stepmother her eyes were wet with sudden tears. “Fidus was almost impertinent to father, wasn’t he? And father was so perfect to him! That is what I tell Fidus, when he talks like grandfather and says we are all going to the dogs—I tell him that at least we are keeping our manners as we go, which is more than can be said of the reformers. I am always nervous when he and father get on to social questions, they feel so differently. Fidus was quite angry with me the other day because I said I was thankful that we had learned to have some appreciation of taste and good form and elegance and that we should never go back to being boors and prudes. He insisted that if by boors and prudes I meant men and women who cared more for courage and virtue than for ‘hypocrisy’ and ‘license,’ I should see them become the fashion again in Rome, before I knew it. Augustus was not blindfolded, if he was old. But, although Fidus doesn’t understand father, he does love him. He said about coming here that he would rather spend his last day with father than with any other man in Rome. And what a happy day it has been!”

Perilla rose impulsively and, tucking her sleeping child in among the cushions of a neighbouring bench, threw herself on the grass by the older woman. Her forty-five years sat lightly upon Fabia, leaving her still lovely in the sensitive eyes of her husband and stepdaughter. A temperamental equableness and a disciplined character gave to her finely modelled face an inward tranquillity which was a refuge to their ardent natures. She only smiled now, as Perilla’s lively tongue began again: “How happy you make father all the time! It keeps me from feeling too dreadfully about going off to Africa. Do you know, when you first came to us, I had an idea you wouldn’t understand him! I was just old enough to realise that all your traditions were very austere ones, that your family belonged to the old order and had done wonderful things that weren’t poetry and the joy of living at all. But I was far too young to understand that just because you did belong to people like that, when you married a man you would sink your life in his. That seems to me now to be the strongest thing about you. I have a feeling that inside you somewhere your character stands like a rock upon which father’s ideas could beat forever without changing it. But you never let that character make you into a force separate from him. You have made his home perfect in every detail, but outside of it you are just his wife. Tell me, does that really satisfy you?”

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Fabia's smile grew into a laugh. "I seem very old-fashioned to you, do I not, dear child? It is not because of my age, either, for plenty of middle-aged women agree with you. It is quite in the air, isn't it, the independence of women, their right to choose their own paths? I was invited to a reading of the *Lysistrata* the other day, and actually one woman said afterwards that she believed Aristophanes was only foreseeing a time when women would take part in the government! She was laughed down for that, but most of the others agreed that the whole progress of society since Aristophanes's time lay in the emancipation of women from the confines of the home and from intellectual servility. I, too, believe in mental freedom, but you all insist a great deal upon the rights involved in being individuals. I have never been able to see what you gain by that. My husband is a citizen of Rome. To be called his wife is my proudest title. It makes no difference to the state what I am or do of myself. I live to the state only through him."

The younger woman had begun to speak almost before Fabia had finished, but the conversation was interrupted by the nurse coming for the child. Perilla went back to the house with them, confessing, with a laugh, that an hour with her boy at bed-time was more important than trying to change her perfect mother. It was not yet time to dress for the birthday dinner, which was to crown the day, and Fabia lingered on in the garden to watch the gathering rose in the late afternoon sky above the tree-tops. An enchanted sense of happiness came to her in the silence of the hour. She did not agree with her husband that happiness was the main object of life, but she was very grateful to the gods who had allowed her to be happy ever since she was a little girl, left to the care of a devoted uncle by parents she was too young to mourn. The latter half of her life these gods had crowned with a love which made her youth immortal. She had been married when she was a mere girl to a young soldier who had not lived long enough to obtrude upon her life more than a gentle memory of his bravery. The bearing of a child had been the vital part of that marriage, and the child had come into her new home with her, leaving it only for a happy one of her own. Her husband's child had been like a second daughter to her, and throughout the twenty years of her life with Ovid joy had consistently outweighed all difficulties. Insolent tongues had been busy with his faithlessness to her. But after the first fears she had come to understand that, although other women often touched the poet and artist in him, none save herself knew the essential fidelity and the chivalrous tenderness of the husband. She had accepted with pride his shining place in public regard. It was no wonder that he loved Rome, for Rome loved him.

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A nightingale broke into song among the rose bushes. Her face was like a girl's as she thought of Ovid, with the grape leaves above his vivid face, young as the gods are young, seeking her eyes with his. A faint smell, as of homely things, rose from the familiar earth. Lights began to appear in the windows of the villa. She had come to this home when she and Ovid were married, and this morning she had again offered her tranquil prayers to the Penates so long her own. The happy years broke in upon her. Ah, yes, she and her husband had the divine essence of youth within them. But they had something finer too, something that comes only to middle age—the sense of security and peace, the assurance that, except for death, no violent changes lay ahead of them. She had only to nurture, as they faced old age together, a happiness already in full measure theirs.

As she turned toward the house she met her husband, come himself to seek her. In the recurrent springs of her after life the faint smell of the burgeoning earth filled her with an unappeasable desire.

II

The next week Fidus and Perilla started for Libya, leaving the two children with their grandfather rather than expose them to the dangers of the African climate. Ovid and Fabia spent the summer as usual in the cool Apennines at the old family homestead at Sulmo. They lingered on into the autumn for the sake of the vintage, a favourite season with them, and did not return to their beautiful town house at the foot of the Capitoline hill until late in October. While Fabia was busy with the household readjustments entailed by the presence of the children with their attendants and tutors, and before social engagements should become too numerous, Ovid spent several hours each day over his *Metamorphoses*, to which he was giving the final polish. Patient work of this kind was always distasteful to him and he welcomed any chance to escape from it. At the end of November Fabia's cousin, Fabius Maximus, went to the island of Elba to look after some family mines, and Ovid made his wife's business interests a pretext for a short trip up the Tuscan coast in his company. He was to be back for a dinner at Macer's, his fellow poet's, on the Ides of December, to meet some friends of both from Athens.

On the morning of the eighth day before the Ides a message came to Fabia from the Palace asking where Ovid was. The inquiry seemed flattering and Fabia wondered what pleasant attention was in store for her husband. As it happened, she saw no one outside of her own household either that day or the next, being kept indoors by the necessity of installing new servants sent down from the estate at Sulmo. She was, therefore, entirely unprepared for the appalling public news which her uncle, Rufus, brought to her in the early evening of the seventh day before the Ides. There was something almost terrifying in

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the wrenching of her mind from the placid details of linen chests and store-rooms to the disasters in Caesar's household. Augustus, without warning, at the opening of what promised to be a brilliant social season, had risen in terrible wrath; and Julia, his granddaughter, her lover, Decimus Junius Silanus, and, it was rumoured, several other prominent men had been given the choice of accepting banishment or submitting to a public prosecution. There was really no choice for them. The courts would condemn relentlessly, and the only way to save even life was to leave Rome.

"But the brutal suddenness of it!" Fabia exclaimed. "It seems more tragic, somehow, than her mother's punishment. Isn't everybody aghast? And do you think she has deserved it?" Rufus looked grave and troubled. "It is not easy to know what one does think," he said. "There has been a great deal of boasting about our prosperity, our victories abroad and our lustre at home. But some of us who have been watching closely have wondered how long this would last. The Empire has been created at a great cost and cannot be preserved at a lesser price. Insurrections have to be put down in the provinces, harmony and efficiency have to be maintained in the capital. It takes harsh courage, inflexible morals to do all that. Julia and with her Roman society have defied Caesar's desires, just as her mother and her set defied them ten years ago. Imagine the grief and despair of our old Emperor! He must do something savage, drastic, irrevocable, to save his state. My heart breaks for him, and yet I cannot help pitying our imperial lady. With her light grace, her audacious humour, among our stern old standards, she has often made me think of a Dryad moving with rosy feet and gleaming shoulders in a black forest. All our family, Fabia, have been like the trees. But perhaps Rome needs the Dryads too. What is moral truth?" Fabia smiled suddenly. "Ovid would say it is beauty," she said. "That is an old dispute between us." Her face fell again. "He will be deeply distressed by this calamity. Julia has been very gracious to him and he admires her even more than he did her mother."

"When is he coming home?" Rufus asked. "I didn't expect him until the day before the Ides," Fabia answered, "but I think now he may come earlier. Caesar sent this morning to inquire where he was, and perhaps some honour is going to be offered that will bring him back immediately—a reading at the Palace, perhaps, or—but, uncle," she exclaimed, "what is the matter? You have turned so white. You are sick." She came near him with tender, anxious hands, and he gathered them into his thin, old ones and drew her to him. "No, dear heart," he said. "I am not sick. For a moment fear outwitted me, a Fabian. You must promise me not to be afraid, whatever happens. Is it cruel to warn you of what may never come to you? But our days are troubled. Jove's thunderstorm has broken upon us. Your husband is among the lofty. It is only the obscure who are sure of escaping the lightning. Send for me, if you need me. Remember whose blood is in you. I must go—there may yet be time." He kissed her forehead hurriedly and was gone.

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Fabia never knew accurately what happened before the sun rose a second time after this night. Afterwards she recognised the linked hours as the bridge upon which she passed, without return, from joy to pain, from youth to age, from ignorance to knowledge. But the manner of the crossing never became clear in her memory. Details stood out mercilessly. Their relationship, their significance were at the time as phantasmagoric as if she had been lost in the torturing unrealities of a nightmare. Just after her uncle left she was called to the room of Perilla's youngest child who had awakened with a sore throat and fever. Against the protests of the nurse, she sat up with him herself because through the shadows that darkened her mind she groped after some service to her husband. When she was an old woman she could have told what was carved on the cover of the little box from which she gave the medicine every hour until the fever broke, and the colour of the nurse's dress as she hurried in at dawn. Practical matters claimed her attention after she had bathed and dressed. The doctor was sent for to confirm her own belief that the child had nothing more than a cold. The older boy's tutor consulted her about a change in the hours of exercise. A Greek artist came to talk over new decorations for the walls of the dining room.

The forenoon passed. The cold wind, which had been blowing all night, an early herald of winter, died down. A portentous silence seemed to isolate her from the rest of the city. At noon Ovid came home. She felt no surprise. They clung to each other in silence and when he did speak he seemed to be saying what she had known already. The words made little impression. She only thought how white he was, and how old, as old as she was herself. His voice seemed to reach her ears from a great distance. He was to go away from her to the world's end, to a place called Tomi on the terrible Black Sea. The formal decree had stated as the cause the immorality of his *Art of Love*—yes, the volume had been published ten years ago and he had enjoyed the imperial favour as much since then as before. The real reason, so the confidential messenger had explained to him, was something quite different. It was not safe to tell her. Her ignorance was better for them both. He had made a terrible blunder, the Emperor called it a crime, but he was innocent of evil intent. No, there was no use in making any plea. He had talked the matter over with Maximus, although he had not told him what the "crime" was. Maximus had been sure that nothing could be done, that denial would lead only to a public trial, the verdict of which would be still more disastrous. The Emperor was clement, his anger might cool, patience for a year or two might bring a remission of the sentence. The only hope lay in obedience. Maximus had not been allowed to return with him in the hurried journey by government post. The officers had held out little hope to him. A change had come over Caesar.

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Banishment was banishment. “An *exile*?”—no, he was not that! He was still a citizen of Rome, he still had his property and his rights—she was no exile’s wife! Yes, she must stay in Rome. It was futile for her to argue. Caesar was inexorable. She asked him when he must go. He said before another sunrise, to-morrow must not see him within the city limits. The words held no new meaning for her. What were hours and minutes to the dead? They talked in broken sentences. She promised to comfort Perilla. He was glad his father and mother were dead. He hoped her daughter could come to her at once from Verona.

They were interrupted by the stormy arrival of a few faithful friends—how few they were she did not realise until later. Rufus was the first to come and she thought it strange that he should break down and sob while Ovid’s eyes were dry and hard. Knowing the servants, he undertook to tell them what had happened to their master. Their noisy grief throughout the house brought a dreary sense of disorder. Sextus Pompeius arrived and characteristically out of the chaos of grief plucked the need of practical preparation for the long journey. He brought out maps and went over each stage of the way. Only the sea journey from Brindisi to Corinth would be familiar to Ovid, but Pompeius had seen many years of military service in various northern stations, from the Hellespont to the Danube, and knew what to recommend. Although Tomi was a seaport, he advised making the last part of the journey by land through Thrace. He knew what dangers to fear from the natives, what precautions to take against sickness, and what private supplies a traveller might advantageously carry with him. They made a list of necessary things and Pompeius sent some of Ovid’s servants out to procure what they could before night. The rest could be sent on to Brindisi before the ship sailed. He would see to that, Fabia need have no care. It was a great disadvantage that they could not control the choice of the travelling companions, but he would go at once and see if he could exercise any influence.

The packing consumed several hours. This unemotional activity would have strengthened Fabia, had it not had a completely unnerving effect on Ovid. The preparations for a wild and dangerous country seemed to bring him face to face with despair. He rushed to the fire and threw upon it the thick manuscript of his *Metamorphoses*. Looking sullenly at the smouldering parchment he began to talk wildly, protesting first that no one should see any of his work unfinished and then passing to a paroxysm of rage against all his poetry, to which he attributed his ruin. He began to walk up and down the room, pushed his wife aside, and declared that he was going to end his life. In the long nightmare Fabia found this hour the most terrifying. She could never express her gratitude to Celsus who had come after Pompeius left and who now alone proved able to influence Ovid. By a patient reasonableness he made headway against his hysterical mood, bringing him back, step by step, to saner thoughts.

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The servants, stimulated to their duties by Rufus, brought in food. Fabia made Ovid eat some bread and fruit. The evening wore on. The December moon was mounting the sky. Voices and footsteps of passers-by were vaguely heard. In the distance a dog barked incessantly. Lights were lit, but the usual decorum of the house was broken. The fire died dully upon the hearth. The children were brought into the room, looking pale and worn with the unwonted hour. Midnight came and went. All sounds of the city died away. Even the dog ceased his howling. They were alone with disaster. Ovid went to the window and drew aside the heavy curtain. The moon rode high over the Capitol. Suddenly he stretched out his arms and they heard him praying to the great gods of his country. In this moment Fabia's self-control, like a dam too long under pressure, gave way. Except on ceremonial occasions she had never heard her husband pray. Now, he who had had the heart of a child for Rome and for her was cast out by Rome and was beyond her help. From her breast he must turn to the indifferent gods in heaven. She broke into hard, terrible sobs and threw herself down before the hearth, kissing the grey ashes. Unregardful of those about her, she prayed wildly to the lesser gods of home, her gods. From the temple on the Capitoline, from the Penates came no answer.

His friends began to urge Ovid to start. His carriage was ready, he must run no risk of not clearing Rome by daylight. Why should he go, he asked with a flicker of his old vivacity, when to go meant leaving Rome and turning toward Scythia? He called the children to him and talked low to them of their mother. Again his friends urged him. Three times he started for the door and three times he came back. At the end Fabia clung to him and beat upon his shoulders and declared she must go with him. What was Augustus's command to her? Love was her Caesar. Rufus came and drew her away. The door opened. The cold night air swept the atrium. She caught sight of Ovid's face, haggard and white against the black mass of his dishevelled hair. His shoulders sagged. He stumbled as he went out. She was conscious of falling, and knew nothing more.

III

Ovid's second birthday in exile had passed. The hope of an early release, harboured at first by his family and friends, had died away. None of them knew what the "blunder" or "crime" was which had aroused the anger of Augustus, and every effort to bring into high relief the innocence of Ovid's personal life and his loyalty to the imperial family simply made them more cognisant of a mystery they could not fathom. Access to Caesar was easy to some of them, and through Marcia, Maximus's wife, they had hoped to reach Livia. But these high personages remained inscrutable and relentless. At times it seemed as if even Tiberius, although long absent from the city, might be playing a sinister

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role in the drama. All that was clear was that some storm-wind from the fastnesses of the imperial will had swept through the gaiety of Rome and quenched, like a candle, the bright life of her favourite poet. It was easy to say that an astonishing amount of freedom was still Ovid's. His books had been removed from the public libraries, but the individual's liberty to own or read them was in no way diminished. Nor was the publication of new work frowned upon. In the autumn before his banishment Ovid had given out one or two preliminary copies of his *Metamorphoses*, and his friends now insisted that a work so full of charm, so characteristic of his best powers, so innocent of questionable material should be published, even if it had not undergone a final revision. The author sent back from Tomi some lines of apology and explanation which he wished prefixed. He also arranged with the Sosii for the bringing out of his work on the Roman Calendar when he should have completed it. And he was at liberty not only to keep up whatever private correspondence he chose, but to have published a new set of elegiac poems in the form of frank letters about his present life to his wife and friends. A third volume of these poems, which he called *Tristia*, had just appeared and more were likely to follow. He had an extraordinary instinct for self-revelation.

But in spite of this freedom to raise his voice in Rome, it was obvious that all that made life dear to Ovid had been taken away. The lover of sovereign Rome, of her streets and porticoes and theatres, her temples and forums and gardens, must live at the farthest limit of the Empire, in a little walled town from whose highest towers a constant watch was kept against the incursions of untamed barbarians. The poet to whom war had meant the brilliance of triumphal pageants in the Sacred Way must now see the rude farmers of a Roman colony borne off as captives or sacrificing to the enemy their oxen and carts and little rustic treasures. The man of fifty who had spent his youth in writing love poetry and who through all his life had had an eye for Venus in the temple of Mars must wear a sword and helmet, and dream at night of poisoned arrows and of fetters upon his wrists. The son of the Italian soil, bred in warmth, his eye accustomed to flowers and brooks and fertile meadows, must shiver most of the year under bitter north winds sweeping over the fields of snow which melted under neither sun nor rain; and in spring could only watch for the breaking up of the ice in the Danube, the restoration of the gloomy plains to their crop of wormwood, and the rare arrival of some brave ship from Italy or Greece. The acknowledged master of the Latin tongue, the courted talker in brilliant circles in Rome must learn to write and speak a barbarous jargon if he wished to have any intercourse with his neighbours. The husband with the heart of a child, whose little caprices and moods, whose appetite and health had been the concern of tender eyes, must learn to be sick without proper food or medicine or nursing, must before his time grow old and grey and thin and weak, dragged from the covert of a woman's love.

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It was spring again and the late afternoon air, which came through the open window by which Fabia was sitting, was sweet with the year's new hope, even though borne over city roofs. Fabia had dwelt with sorrow day and night until there was no one of its Protean shapes which she did not intimately know. She had even attained to a certain tolerance of her own hysteria that first night when her uncle and her servants had had to care for her till morning. It was the last service she had required of others. Her daughter had hurried to her and spent weeks with her in watchful companionship. Perilla had come back in the summer and gone with her to Sulmo. But neither the love of the one child nor the grief of the other passed into the citadel where her will stood at bay before the beleaguering troops of pain. They were newer to her than they usually are to a woman of her age. The death of her child's father had brought regret rather than sorrow. Her will had been disciplined only by the habitual performance of simple duties which had given her happiness. But untaught, unaided, it slew her enemies and left her victor. Her daughters had long since given over worrying about her, had, indeed, begun to draw again upon her generous stores. Only her uncle, who knew the cost of warfare better, still silently watched her eyes. He knew that her victory had to be won afresh every night as soon as the aegis of the day was lifted. For a long time this had meant nights of dry-eyed anguish, which threatened her sanity, or nights of weakening tears. Through these months her uncle had come to see her every day. He had not doubted the strength of her will, but he had feared that the strength of her body might be sacrificed to its triumph. Her long days of self-control, however, repaired the ravages of the night hours, and little by little her strong mind, from which she had resolutely withheld all narcotics, reasserted its sway over her nerves. She recovered her power to think. To her a clear understanding of principles by which she was to decide the details of conduct had always been essential.

To-day, in this favourite hour of hers, when the mask laid by a busy day over the realities of life began to be gently withdrawn, she had set herself the task of analysing certain thoughts which had been with her hazily for over a week. On Ovid's birthday she had sent little presents to the grandchildren and written to her stepdaughter a letter which she hoped would make her feel that she was still the daughter of her father's house. In doing this she had been poignantly reminded of the birthday fete two years ago, of Perilla's sweetness to her, and of their conversation, so light-hearted at the time, about woman's place in the state. Since then she had been wondering whether she could still say that it was enough for her to be a wife. She was perfectly sure that she did not miss the outer satisfactions of being Ovid's wife. Except

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as they indicated his downfall, she did not regret the loss of her former place in society or the desertion of many of their so-called friends. Indeed, she had welcomed as her only comfort whatever share she could have in his losses. But was it true that her life as a whole had no meaning or value apart from his? Had the hard, solitary fight to be brave meant nothing except that she could write her husband stimulating letters and help his child to take up again the joys of youth? She had found and tested powers in herself that were not Ovid's. What meaning was there in her phrase—"The wife of a Roman citizen?" She began to think over Ovid's idea of citizenship. Suddenly she realised, in one of those flashes that illuminate a series of facts long taken for granted, that the time he had shown most emotion over being a citizen was on the night he had left home, when he had insisted that he still retained his property and his rights. Before that indeed, on the annual occasions when the Emperor reviewed the equestrian order and he rode on his beautiful horse in the procession, he had always come home in a glow of enthusiasm. But she had often felt vaguely, even then, that the citizen's pride was largely made up of the courtier's devotion to a ruler, the artist's delight in a pageant and the favourite's pleasure in applause in which he had a personal share. That he loved Rome she had never doubted. He loved the external city because it was fair to the eye. He loved Roman life because it was free from all that was rustic, because it gave the prizes to wit and imagination and refinement. The culture of Athens had at last become domiciled in the capital of a world-empire. Ovid's idea of citizenship, Fabia said to herself, was to live, amid the beauties of this capital and in the warmth of imperial and popular favour, freely, easily, joyfully.

And what was her own idea? Fabia's mind fled back to the days when she was a little girl in Falerii and her uncle used to come to the nursery after his dinner and take her on his lap and tell her stories until she was borne off to bed. The stories had always been about brave people, and her nurse used to scold, while she undressed her, about her flushed cheeks and shining eyes. The procession of these brave ones walked before her now, as a child's eyes had seen them—Horatius, Virginia, Lucretia, Decius, Regulus, Cato—men and women who had loved the honour and virtue demanded by Rome, or Rome's safety better than their lives. The best story of all had been the one about her own ancestors, the three hundred and six Fabii who, to establish their country's power, fought by the River Cremera until every man was dead.

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She had grown old enough to read her own stories, to marry, and to tell stories to a child and to grandchildren, but the time had never come when her heart had not beat quicker at the thought of men sacrificing their life or their children, their will or their well-being to their country's need. She had become a widely read woman in both Latin and Greek. Her reason told her that appreciation of beauty in nature and art, grace and elegance in manners, intellectual freedom and a zest for individual development were essential factors in the progress of civilisation. She knew that if her husband had not believed in these things he could not have been the poet he was, and she knew his poetry had done something for Roman letters that Virgil's had not done. She had not only loved, with all the pure passion of her maturity, his charm and his blitheness and his gifted sensitiveness, but she had been proud of his achievements. His citizenship had satisfied her. But always, within the barriers of her own individuality, that faith which is deeper, warmer, more masterly than reason, had kept her the reverent lover of duty, the passionate guardian of character, for whose sake she would deny not only ease and joy, but, even, if the dire need came, beauty itself. Art the Romans had had to borrow. Their character they had hewn for themselves, with a chisel unknown to the Greeks, out of the brute mass of their instincts. Its constancy, its dignity, its magnanimity, probity and fidelity Cicero had described in words befitting their massive splendour. To possess this character was to be a Roman citizen, in the Forum and on the battlefield, in the study and the studio, in exile and in prison, in life and in death. Ovid's citizenship, save for the empty title, had been ended by an imperial decree. In losing Rome he had ceased to be a Roman. His voice came back only in cries in which there was no dignity and no fortitude. He was tiring out his friends. Perilla no longer let Fidus see his letters. Even in her own heart the sharpest sorrow was not his exile but his defeat. Her love had outlived her pride.

The dreaded night was coming on. Would he moan in his sleep again, without her quieting hand upon his face, or wake from dreams of her to loneliness? She rose impetuously and looked up through the narrow window. The sky was filled with the brightness of the April sunset. Of pain she was no longer afraid. But she was afraid to go on fighting with nothing to justify the cost of her successive battles or to glorify their result. Against the sunset sky rose the Capitol. Burnished gold had been laid upon its austere contours. Strength was aflame with glory. She never knew how or why, but suddenly an answering flame leaped within her. In that majestic temple dwelt the omnipotent gods of her country. Why should all her prayers be said to the Penates on her hearth? What did her country need, save, in manifold forms, which obliterated

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the barriers of sex, the sacrifice of self, the performance of duty, the choice of courage? The feverish talk of women about their independence had failed to hold her attention. Now a mightier voice, borne from the graves of the dead, trumpeted from the lives of the living, called to her, above the warring of her will with sorrow, to be a Roman citizen. She had neither arms nor counsels to give to her country. She could not even give sons born of her body, taught of her spirit. She was a woman alone, she was growing old, she was ungifted. She would be nothing but a private in the ranks, an obscure workman among master builders. But she could offer her victory over herself, and ask her country to take back and use a character hewn and shaped in accordance with its traditions. Her husband's citizenship had become a legal fable. She would take it and weld it with her own, and, content never to know the outcome, lay them both together upon the altar of Rome's immortal Spirit.

The new moon hung in the still radiant west. On a moonlit night she had fallen by the ashes of her hearth and prayed in futile agony to the gods of her home. Now she stood erect and looked out upon the city and with a solemn faith prayed to the greater gods. Later she slept peacefully, for the first time in fifteen months, as one whose taskmaster has turned comrade.

In the morning her uncle, who had been in Falerii for a few weeks, came to see her. He looked keenly into her eyes as she hastened across the wide room to greet him. Then his own eyes flashed and with a sudden glad movement he bent and kissed her hands. "Heart of my heart," he said, "in an exile's house I salute a Roman."

FORTUNE'S LEDGER

I

His Lady of Gifts smiled at him and held out her hand with something shut tight inside of it. The white fingers were just about to open into his palm, when he felt his mother's hand on his and heard her say: "Come, Marcus, come, the sun will get ahead of you this morning." He knew that she had kissed his eyes and hurried away again before he could open them upon the faint, grey light in his tiny room. A piercing thought put an end to sleepiness and brought him swiftly from his bed. This was the day of his Lady's festival! His mother seemed to have forgotten it, but he could say a prayer for her as well as for himself at the shrine by the Spring. He must make haste now, however, for before the June sun should fairly have come up over the tops of the hills he must get his sheep and goats to their pasture on the lower slopes.

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When he had slipped into his blue cotton tunic, which reached just to his knees, leaving bare his stout brown legs, he went into his mother's room and plunged his head into a copper basin of water standing ready for his use. Shaking the drops from his black curls, he hastened on to the kitchen for his porridge. His grandfather was already there, sitting in his large chair, mumbling half-heard words to himself, while his daughter-in-law dipped out his breakfast from a pot hung over a small fire laid frugally in the middle of the wide, stone hearth. Marcus went up to him and kissed his forehead before he threw his arms around the neck of the big white sheep-dog which had leaped forward as he entered. His mother smiled out of her tired eyes as she gave him his morning portion, and then began to wrap up in a spotless napkin the dry bread and few olives which were to be his lunch in the pasture. When the last bit of hot porridge and the cup of goat's milk had been finished, he kissed her hand, gave the signal to the impatient dog, and ran across the courtyard to the fold where his meagre flock awaited their release. The sky was turning pink and gold, the sweet air of dawn filled his nostrils and, in spite of his mother's forgetfulness, he knew that on this day of all days in the year Good Fortune might be met by mortals face to face. As he and his dog marshalled the sheep and goats out of the gate, he turned happily toward the long, hard road which to him was but a pathway to his upland pasture and his Lady's shrine.

His mother came to the gate and watched the springing step with which he met the day. Her most passionate desire was that he might, throughout his life, be spared the sorrow, the disillusionment and the exhaustion which were her daily portion. But what chance was there of such a desire being fulfilled? A cry from the house, half frightened, half peevish, called her back from dreams to duties.

Marcus was the last child of a long line of independent farmers. When he was born his father was sharing with his grandfather the management of a prosperous estate. But before Marcus could talk plainly the crash had come. It seemed incredible that the Emperor in Rome should have known anything about the owners of a farm in Como. But Domitian's evil nature lay like a blight over the whole empire, and his cruelty, mean-spirited as well as irrational, was as likely to touch the low as the high. Angered by some officer's careless story of an insolent soldier's interview with Marcus's grandfather, he used a spare moment to order the confiscation of the rich acres and the slaves of the farm, and the imprisonment of their owner. The imprisonment had been short, as no one was concerned to continue it after Domitian's death. But it had been long enough to break the victim's spirit and hasten his dotage. By this time he knew almost nothing of what went on around him. He did not know that Domitian had been killed and that at last

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men breathed freely under the good Trajan. He was still full of old fears, pathetically unable to grasp the joy of this tranquillity, which, like recreative sunshine, penetrated to every corner of the exhausted empire. Nor, in fretting over the absence of his son, did he remember the brave fight that he had made for a livelihood as a muleteer in the Alps just above Como, nor the manner, almost heroic, of his death.

The burden fell upon Marcus's young mother. It was no wonder that her eyes were always tired, her hands rough and red, and her shoulders no longer straight. The actual farmstead had been left to them, but its former comfort now imposed only a heavy load. Once the servants had been almost as numerous as in the great villas along the lake. There had been stables for oxen and horses and sheep, lofts full of hay and corn, spacious tool-rooms, store-rooms for olive oil and fruits and wine, hen-yards and pigsties, and generous quarters for the workmen. Most of this was now falling into decay, year by year. Only a few bedrooms were used—the smallest and warmest—and the great kitchen was the only living room. It had been large enough for all the farm-servants to eat in and for the spinning and weaving of the women. Now the family of three gathered lonesomely close to the hearth when a rare fire was indulged in on stormy winter nights. The only source of income were the few sheep and goats and hens. In the old days great flocks of sheep on the farm had sent fleeces to Milan. Now there were only enough to furnish lambs on feast days and occasional fleeces to more prosperous neighbors. The few goats provided the family with milk. Far oftener than anyone knew, in the winters, they were in actual distress, lacking food and fuel.

But it was not her own hunger that burdened the nights of Marcus's mother. In letting her old father-in-law be hungry she felt that she was false to a trust. And her boy must be saved to a happier life than his father's had been. He was eleven years old and must soon, if ever, turn to something better than tending sheep in a lonely pasture from sunrise till sunset. She did not let him know it, thinking that he was too young to look beyond the passing days in which he seemed able to find happiness, but she had laid aside every year, heedless of the sacrifice, some little part of the scanty money that came from the eggs and chickens. What she could do with it she did not know. It grew so slowly. But there was always the hope that some day Marcus would find it a full-grown treasure to face the world with. When, seven years ago, the great Pliny had given to Como a fund to educate freeborn orphans, she had thought bitterly that her baby would be better off without her. Sometimes, since then, she had been mad enough to think of trying to see Pliny when he came to the villa which was nearest to her farm. He was there now. Stories of his magnificent kindnesses were rife. His tenants were the most

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contented in the country-side and his slaves were better treated than many Roman citizens. He had given his old nurse a little farm to live on and sent one of his freedmen to Egypt when he was threatened with consumption. But she had never found the courage—she could not find it now—to believe that he would care what happened to a child in no way connected with him. His wealth, by no means the largest known in his own circle, to her seemed appalling. The Emperor could not have been more distant from her than this magnate, who, although he had been born in Como and was said to love his Como villas better than any of his other houses, yet had about him the awful remoteness of Rome. Of course she could never be admitted to his presence. She could only store up a few more coins each year and trust to the gods.

With a start she realised that to-day was the festival of Fors Fortuna. In the hurried morning she had forgotten to remind Marcus of his prayers. In the days when the farm had been sure of the largest harvest in the neighbourhood this summer festival had been brilliantly celebrated, and as long as Marcus's father had lived the family had still cherished the quaint rites and the merrymaking of a holiday especially dear to the common people of both city and country. But in these later years there had been neither time nor money for any fetes. Piety, however, was still left, and it was characteristic of the scrupulousness persisting in Marcus's mother through all the demoralising experiences of poverty that, after she had finished the heavier tasks, she should set to work to mark the religious day by a freshly washed cloth upon the table, with a bowl of red roses picked from the bush that grew by the doorway, and a gala supper of new-laid eggs, lentil soup and goat's milk cheese.

In the meantime Marcus had been having adventures. His pasture was on a grassy plateau of a mountain slope, edged by heavy green cypresses and dotted with holm-oaks. In the woods above him chestnut and walnut trees showed vividly against the silver olives. Below stretched the shining waters of the Larian Lake. Here, while the sheep browsed happily, he was wont to feed his little soul on dreams. Sitting to-day where he could look out to a distant horizon, his blue tunic seeming to insert into the varied greens about him a bit of colour from sky or lake, he dug his toes into the soft grass and for the hundredth time tried to think out how he could attain his heart's desire. He knew exactly what that was. He wanted to go to school! If anyone had tried to find out why, he would have discovered in the boy's mind a tangled mass of hopes—-hopes of helping his mother and owning once more their big fields and vineyards, of going to Rome and coming home again, rich and famous. But to any glorious future school was the portal, of that he was sure. The nearest boys' school was in Milan, and to Milan he must go. The golden fleece on the borders of strange

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seas, the golden apples in unknown gardens, never seemed to lords of high adventure more remote or more desirable than a provincial school-room thirty miles away seemed to this little shepherd. He dreamed of it by day and by night. Last night, when the Lady of the Spring held out her hand to him he had been sure that what it held would help him to go to Milan. He knew he must have money, and that was why he had never told his mother what he wanted. She would be unhappy, he knew, that she could not give it to him. He wanted her to think that he asked for nothing better than to mind the sheep all day. Sometimes his heart would be so hot with desire that only tears could cool it, and all alone in the pasture he would bury his face in the grass and sob until his dog came and licked his neck. At other times it was his pan's-pipe that brought ease. His father had taught him to play on it when he was a mere baby, and sometimes he would forget his burden in making high, clear notes come out of the slender reeds. To-day, especially, tears seemed far away, and he piped and piped until his heart was at rest, and the sun, now nearly in mid-heaven, made him warm and drowsy.

An hour later he woke with a start into a strange noonday silence. Every blade, and twig, and flower, was hushed. A soft white light dimmed the brilliant colours of the day. No sound was heard from bird or insect, and the only movement was among his white sheep, which noiselessly, like a distant stream of foamy water, seemed to flow down a winding path. The goats were standing quite still. Suddenly they flung up their heads, as if at an imperious call, and in wild abandon rushed toward the shadowy woods above. The dog, as if roused from a trance, gave chase, shattering the silence with yelping barks. The boy, his heart beating violently, followed. It took all the afternoon to collect and quiet the flock, and when Marcus started home he had himself not lost the awed sense of a Presence in his pasture. The nearness seemed less familiar than that of his Lady of Gifts, and yet she must have been concerned in it, for the thrill that remained with him was a happy one.

It was late, but to-day more than ever he must stop at her shrine. Near his regular path, below a narrow gorge, there was a marvellous spring. It rose in the mountains, ran down among the rocks, and was received in an artificial chamber. After a short halt there, it fell into the lake below. The extraordinary thing about it was that three times in each day it increased and decreased with regular rise and fall. One could lie beside it and watch its measured movements. Everybody from far and near came to see it, even the grand people from the villas. But Marcus, coming in the early morning or evening, had almost never met anyone there and had grown to feel that the spot was his own. In the dusk or at dawn it often seemed to him as if a lovely lady, with eyes such as his mother might have had, came up out of the spring and laid smooth,

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cool hands on his face. Because the Goddess of Gifts had become associated in his mind with the first day he could remember in his early childhood—a radiant and merry day—he had come to identify with her this Lady of the Spring, who alone gave romance to the harsher, soberer years that followed his father's death. To-day Marcus could have sworn she smiled at him before she disappeared, as the water receded after the gushing flow which he had come just in time to watch. He was rising from his knees when his eye fell upon a strange, green gleam upon the wet rock. For a moment he thought it was the gleam of a lizard's back, but as he took the little object into his hand he realised that it was hard, and inert, and transparent. Even in the dusk he could see the light in it. It almost burned in his hand. He felt sure that it was a gift from his Lady, but he did not stop to think what he could do with it. He was filled with happiness just in looking at it. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and he could take it to his mother and it would make her smile. Full of joy, he hurried homeward. Even on ordinary occasions he loved the end of summer days. His grandfather would go to sleep and cease saying strange things, and, after he and his mother had finished the evening tasks in house and court-yard and sheepfold, they would sit for a while together in the warm doorway, and she would tell him stories of his father and of many other people and things. Sometimes when he leaned against her and her voice grew sweet and low he forgot he was a man and a shepherd.

To-night this did not happen, although the air was sweet with roses, and the stars were large and bright. Marcus had shown his mother the green marvel and told her how the Lady of the Spring had brought it out to him from her secret recesses. She had caught her breath and turned it over and over, and then she had put her arms close round him and explained to him that this beautiful thing was a jewel, an emerald, and must have belonged in a great lady's ring. Her father had been a goldsmith and she had often seen such jewels in their setting. They were bought with great sums of money, and to lose one was like losing money. And that was true, too, of finding one. Money must be returned and so must this.

Money—money—his head swam. Could he have bought his heart's desire with the little green gleam? He put his head on his mother's knee and, for all his efforts, a sob sounded in his throat. She lifted him up against her warm, soft breast, and her hands were smoother and cooler than his Lady's, and he told her all that was in his heart, and she told him all that was in hers, for him.

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Later they talked like comrades and partners about the emerald, and decided that it must belong to someone in Pliny's villa, either to Calpurnia herself or to one of her guests. They agreed that they could not sleep until it was returned. The mother had to stay near the sleeping old man, but the villa was only two miles away, the neighbourhood was safe, with a dog as companion, and Marcus was a fast walker on his strong bare feet. At the villa he could ask for Lucius, who came to the farm twice a week for eggs and chickens. "He is an old servant," she said, "loyal to his master and friendly toward us. He is sure to be kind to you. I will do the jewel up in a little package and put father's seal on it, and you can trust it to him. Be sure to give it to no one else."

So Marcus, with his dog, long past his usual bed-time, trudged forth into the night whose cavernous shadows deepened the shadows in his little heart. The worst of the adventure was walking up through the grounds of the villa and facing the porter at the servants' door and asking for Lucius. When he came, the boy thrust the package into his hand, stammered out an explanation, and ran away before the bewildered old man knew what had happened. On the way home the dog seemed to share his master's discouragement and left unchallenged the evening music of the bull-frogs. When Marcus stretched his tired legs out in bed he thought of to-morrow with the sheep again, and wondered dully why his Lady and her mysterious comrade in the pasture had cheated him. His mother, going into the kitchen to see that the wood was ready for the morning, snatched the red roses from the table spread for Fors Fortuna and threw them fiercely on the ashes.

II

The day at the villa had been the most trying one of a trying week for Pliny and Calpurnia. A restful house-party of their dearest friends had been spoiled by the arrival of Quadratilla, heralded by one of her incredible letters dated at Baiae:

"I lost at the dice last night," she had written. "The dancers from Cadiz had thick ankles. The oysters were not above suspicion and the sows'-bellies were unseasoned. We have exhausted the love affairs and debts of our neighbours, and made each other's wills. (I am to leave my money—I rely on you to tell Quadratus—to a curled darling here who hums Alexandrian dance tunes divinely). And we have discussed *ad nauseam* the rainfall in Upper Egypt, the number of legions on the Rhine and the ships in from Africa. That clever Spanish friend of yours—what was his name?—Martial—was quite right about our conversations. It is a pity he had to pay out his obol for the longer journey before he could get back to Rome.

"My digestion demands fresh eggs and lettuce to the rhythm of hexameters. Or is it sapphics to which we eat this year? I must know what the next crop of the stylus is to be. I cannot sleep at night for wondering who is to teach in your new school. Will he be

as merry a guide as your Quintilian was? And will the Como boys become sparkling little Plinies?

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“I must see the grown-up Pliny’s noble brow and my Calpurnia’s eyes—and the Tartarean frown of Tacitus, who, I hear, is with you. Quadratus says you are at the smallest of your Como villas. The mood suits me. At Tusculum or Tibur or Praeneste or Laurentum you might have longed for me in vain. In your Arcadian retreat expect me on the tenth day.”

The hale old woman took a terrible advantage of her years and her tongue to do as she chose among her acquaintances. And Pliny was more or less at her mercy, because his mother and she had been friends in their girlhood, and because her grandson, Quadratus, was among the closest of his own younger friends. Unluckily, too, she had taken a violent fancy to Calpurnia. She spared her none of her flings, but evidently in some strange way the exquisite breeding and candid goodness of the younger woman appealed to her antipodal nature. She had lived riotously through seven imperial reigns, gambling, owning and exhibiting pantomimes, nourishing all manner of luxurious whims, whether the state lay gasping under a Nero or Domitian, or breathed once more in the smile of Trajan. Her liking for Calpurnia was of a piece, her acquaintances thought, with her bringing up of her grandson. No boy in Rome had had an austerer training. He was never allowed to mingle with her coarser companions, and when the dice were brought in she always sent him out of the room—“back to his books.” No breath of scandal had ever touched his good name, and his tastes could not have been more prudent, his grandmother used to say, with uplifted eyebrows, had he had the “inestimable advantage of being brought up by Pliny’s uncle.”

After a winter and spring of varied activities the friends gathered at Pliny’s villa had eagerly looked forward to a brief peace. Pliny’s law business had been unusually exacting. He had worked early and late, and made a series of crucial speeches, and when spring came on he had allowed neither work nor social demands to interfere with his attendance at the almost numberless literary readings. His “conscientious and undiscriminating concern for dead matter,” Quadratilla once said, “rivalled Charon’s.” Calpurnia, never strong, but always supplementing at every turn her husband’s work, had felt especially this year the strain of Roman life. Tacitus, already a figure in the literary world through his *Agricola* and *Germania*, had made a beginning on his more elaborate *Histories* and been enslaved to his genius. Pompeius Saturninus and his clever wife, Cornelia, were hoping for a little rustic idleness before beginning the summer entertaining at their place in Tuscany. The group under Pliny’s roof was completed by Calpurnia’s lovely aunt, Hispulla, and Fannia, whose famous ancestry was accentuated in her own distinguished character. Pliny’s old schoolfellow, Caninus Rufus, had come to his adjacent villa, bringing with him their common friend, Voconius Romanus. These friends had entered upon one of the holiday seasons rarely granted to people of importance. Their debts to the worlds of business or society or literature held in abeyance, they were lightly devoting their days to fishing and hunting, sailing and riding, while the keenness of their intellectual interests—they belonged to a very different set from Quadratilla’s—was restfully tempered and the sincerity of them deepened by a thorough-going intimacy.

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Upon the second fortnight of this life Quadratilla broke like a thunder-squall. Whatever feelings had prompted her to leave her fashionable resort, her mood after she arrived was characteristically Bacchanal. She had a genius for making the tenderest feeling or the deepest conviction seem absurd. Rufus did not know whether to be more angry at her open hint to Pliny that his childlessness was like that of so many millionaires of the day, a voluntary lure for the attention of legacy hunters, or at her sardonic inquiries after Tacitus's dyspepsia. His best friends knew that his gloom issued from the travail of a mind which had sickened mortally under Domitian and could not find in the present tranquillity more than a brief interruption to the madness of men and the wrath of gods. It was not that Quadratilla failed to perceive the massive intellectual force of Tacitus. On the contrary, she enraged Rufus and the others still further by a covert irony about Pliny's classing himself as a man of letters with the historian, an innocent vanity which endeared him only the more to those whose experience of his loyal and generous heart left no room for critical appraisement of his mental calibre.

The day in question had been full of small annoyances. Calpurnia, wishing, on the Feast of Fors Fortuna, to excuse the dining-room servants from a noonday attendance, had had a luncheon served in the grotto of the tidal spring. Unluckily, while they were testing the ebb and flow by putting rings and other small objects on a dry spot and watching the water cover them, Quadratilla lost out of one of her rings a very valuable emerald. From that moment until the stone was returned by Marcus everybody's patience had been strained to the breaking point by the old lady's peevish temper. After dinner, when they were sitting in the loggia overlooking the lake, which lay dark and still beneath the June stars, they all united in a tacit effort to divert her attention. Pliny told a story of some neighbours to illustrate that the same kind of courage existed in the middle class as in the aristocracy. A wife, finding that her husband was wasting away with an incurable disease, not only urged him to end his life, but joined him in the brave adventure, fastening his weakened body to hers and then leaping with him from a window overlooking the lake.

Fannia agreed enthusiastically that the deed was as brave as the one by which her famous grandmother had shown her husband the way to meet an emperor's command to die; and she went on to say that she and Pliny had decided once that some of the unknown hours of Arria's life were as courageous as the final one of death. "Mother has told me all kinds of things about her," she said. "Once her husband and son were both desperately ill, and the son died. It wasn't safe to tell grandfather, and grandmother went through it all, even the funeral, without his knowing it. She would go into his room and answer questions about the boy, saying he had slept well and eaten more. When she couldn't bear it any longer she would go to her own room and give way, and come back again, calm and serene, to nurse her husband."

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“I wonder,” said Cornelia, “if blood counted more in that apparently simpler thing. Do you think a middle-class woman could have controlled herself so finely?” Voconius broke in with a quick answer: “It is nothing against Arria, whose memory we all reverence, if I say I think she might. It seems to me that the kind of thing that only an aristocrat could do was done by Corellius Rufus. It isn’t a matter of courage but of humour. Tell the story, Pliny. I haven’t heard it since the year he died—let me see, seven years ago, that was. It’s time we heard it again.”

Tacitus leaned forward to listen as Pliny willingly complied: “Corellius was, you know, a Stoic of the Stoics, believing in suicide. When the doctors had assured him that he could never be cured of a most dreadful disease, all his reasons for living, his wealth and position and fame, his wife and daughter and grandchildren and sisters and friends, became secondary to his reasons for dying. He had held the disease in check, while he was younger, by the most temperate living. But in old age it gained on him; he was bedridden and had only weakening torments to face. I went to see him one day while Domitian was still living. His wife went out of the room, for, although she had his full confidence, she was tactful enough to leave him alone with his friends. He turned his eyes to me and said: ’Why do you think I have endured this pain so long? It is because I want to survive our Hangman at least one day.’ As soon as we were rid of Domitian he began to starve himself to death. I agree with Voconius that only an aristocrat could have thought of outwitting a tyrant by outliving him.”

“It is a pity, is it not,” said Cornelia, “that Juvenal could not have known men like Corellius and your uncle, Pliny, and all the rest of you? He might be less savage in his attacks on our order.” “And equally a pity,” Pliny gallantly responded, “that he could not modify his views on your sex by knowing such ladies as are in this room.” Tacitus bowed gravely to Quadratilla as their host said this. A retort trembled on the wicked old lips, but Calpurnia, seeing it, made haste to ask if any of them had ever talked with Juvenal. “I asked Martial once,” she said, “to bring him to see us, but he never came. I cannot help feeling that, if he could know us better, his arraignment would be less harsh.” “Dear Lady,” said Tacitus, “you forget that people like you are cut jewels, very different from the rough rock of our order as well as from the shifting sands of the populace.” “Dear Cynic,” laughed Calpurnia, “do we know any more about the populace than Juvenal knows about us?”

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But in Tacitus's unfortunate figure Quadratilla saw her chance to annoy him by belittling the conversation. To everyone's despair, she intruded maliciously: "To my thinking, the finding of my emerald would show to advantage the cut of our aristocratic wits." Cornelia had just whispered to Rufus, "I wish we could lose her as adequately out of our setting," when Lucius came into the loggia with the sealed package for Pliny. A question from his master gave him a chance to tell Marcus's story, which lost nothing in the friendly, rustic narration. A chorus of praise for the boy rose from the eager listeners. Even Quadratilla remarked that he was a decent little clod-hopper, as she demanded a lamp by which to examine her jewel. Pliny and Calpurnia's eyes met in swift response to each other's thoughts. They examined the farmer's seal and questioned Lucius more closely. Calpurnia's eyes filled with tears at his account of the old grandfather—-"ruined," she exclaimed to the others, "in the very month that Pliny's name, as we afterwards discovered, was put on the prescription list. We were so anxious at the time—that must explain our never following the family up. I will go early to-morrow," she added, turning to her husband, "and see the mother. We must make up for lost time." "Find out," said Pliny, "whether the boy wants to go to school."

A cackle of laughter came from Quadratilla's chair back of the group that had gathered around the servant. "How like my Pliny!" she remarked genially. "A dirty little rascal restores my property in the hope of picking up a reward. His heart's desire is doubtless a strip of bacon for his stomach on a holiday. And Pliny offers him an education!"

III

Marcus had been in his pasture for many an hour when Calpurnia came to the farm. His mother was on her knees washing up the stone floor of the kitchen. A sweet voice sounded in her ears, and she looked up to see a goddess—as she thought in the first blinding moment—a goddess dressed in silvery white with a gleam of gold at her throat. Neither woman ever told all that passed between them in their long talk in the sunlit courtyard, where they sought solitude, but when Marcus's mother kissed her visitor's hands at parting, Calpurnia's eyes shone with tears and her own were bright as with a vision.

When she went back into the kitchen, she found on the stone table a great hamper, from which a bottle of wine generously protruded. Her father-in-law from his chair in the window began an excited and incoherent story. She ran to him and knelt by his side and begged him to understand while she told him of a miracle. The dull old eyes looked only troubled. So she choked back her tears and stroked his hands gently and said over and over, until his face brightened, "You are never going to be cold or hungry again—never cold or hungry."

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Even with her many tasks the summer day seemed unending to her. Finally, as the shadows lengthened, she could no longer endure to wait and started out to meet Marcus. Across a green meadow she saw him coming, walking soberly and wearily in front of his herded flock. As he saw her, his listlessness fell from him and he ran forward anxiously. But when he reached her and saw her eyes, his heart almost stopped beating in glad amazement. And she held out her hands, while the dog jumped up on them both in an ecstasy, and said to him, “My son, Fors Fortuna, your Lady of the Spring, has blessed us. You are to go to school.”

Later in the evening, when the wonderful supper from the hamper had been eaten and cleared away, and the grandfather had fallen peacefully asleep, and the sheep and goats and hens had been tended for the night, Marcus and his mother sat in the doorway beside the red rosebush and dreamed dreams together of a time when house and courtyard, renewed, should once more exercise a happy sovereignty over fruitful acres. The world seemed Marcus’s because he was to go to school, this very year, in their own Como. They had not known before that Pliny had offered to share with the citizens the expense of a school of their own, so that boys need not go as far as Milan. Marcus was awed into speechlessness when his mother told him that the great man was personally to see to his registration and fees and clothes and books. The evening wore on, and the boy’s head, heavy with visions, fell sleepily against his mother’s breast. As she held him to her, her thoughts wandered from him to the radiant lady who had brought such light into their darkness. Could Fors Fortuna herself, she wondered, be any happier, laden with beauty and riches and power, and making of them a saving gift for mortals?

At the villa dinner had passed off successfully, Quadratilla having been entertaining oftener than outrageous and the others having been in a compliant mood because she was to leave the next day. After dinner, in the cool atrium, Calpurnia had sung some of her husband’s verses, which she had herself charmingly adapted to the lyre. Later Quadratilla challenged the younger people to the dice, while Hispulla retired to the library. Calpurnia slipped into the garden. There Pliny, never contented when she was out of his sight, found her leaning against a marble balustrade among the ghostly flowerbeds, where in the night deep pink azaleas and crimson and amber roses became one with tall white lilies. Nightingales were singing and the darkness was sparkling with fireflies. Her fragile face shone out upon him like a flower. If about Pliny the public official there was anything a little amusing, a little pompous, it was not to be found in Pliny the married lover. Immemorial tendernesses were in his voice as he spoke to his wife: “My sweet, what are you thinking of, withdrawn so far from me?” Calpurnia smiled bravely into his face, as she answered: “Of the mothers who have little sons to send to school.”

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A ROAD TO ROME

An ardour not of Eros' lips.—WILLIAM WATSON.

I

The spring had come promptly this year and with it the usual invoice of young Romans to Athens. Some of them were planning to stay only a month or two to see the country and hear the more famous professors lecture. Others were settling down for a long period of serious study in rhetoric and philosophy. Scarcely to be classed among any of these was the young poet Julius Paulus,[2] who, as he put it to himself with the frank grandiosity of youth, was in search of the flame of life—*studiosus ardoris vivendi*. He had brought a letter to Aulus Gellius, and Gellius, dutifully responsive to all social claims, invited him on a day in early March to join him and a few friends for a country walk and an outdoor lunch in one of their favourite meeting places.

[Footnote 2: A poet Julius Paulus is mentioned once by Aulus Gellius in the *Attic Nights*, in terms which seem to suggest both his worldly prosperity and his cultivated tastes. But the suggestion for his character in this imaginary sketch has come, in reality, from generous and ardent young students of to-day, turning reluctantly from their life in Athens to patient achievement in the countries whose sons they are.]

This place, an unfrequented precinct of Aphrodite, about two hours distant from the marketplace, lay below the rocky summit of Hymettus within the hollow of the foot hills. The walk was an easy one, but the forenoon sun was warm and the young pedestrians upon their arrival paused in grateful relief by a spring under a large plane tree which still bore its leaves of wintry gold. The clear water, a boon in arid Attica, completed their temperate lunch of bread and eggs, dried figs and native wine. After eating they climbed farther up the hillside and stretched themselves out in the soft grass that lurked among boulders in the shade of a beech tree. Aulus, with the air of performing an habitual action, produced a book. To-day it proved to be a choice old volume of Ovid, which he had secured at a bargain on the quay at Brindisi, convinced that it had belonged, fully one hundred and fifty years ago, to the poet himself. It had gone far, he said, toward consoling him for the loss of an original Second Book of the *AEneid* snatched up by a friend in the Image Market at Rome. The Ovid was for Paulus's edification. Aulus unrolled his treasure and read aloud "an accurate description of this very spot:"

Violet crests of Hymettus a-flower
Neighbour a fountain consecrate.
Yielding and green is the turf. In a bower
Trees low-growing meet and mate;

Arbutus shadeth the green grass kirtle,
  Sweet the scent of rosemary;
Fragrant the bay and the bloom of the myrtle;
  Nay, nor fail thee here to see
Tamarisks delicate, box-wood masses,
  Lordly pine and clover low.
Legions of leaves and the top of the grasses
  Stir with healing zephyrs slow.

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The reader's indifference to what confronted his eyes, added to his dull regard for the verbal accuracy of ancient verses, shrivelled the modern poet's ardent humour. Was this an example of the intellectual enlightenment awaiting him, he had so fondly hoped, in Athens? With apprehension he remembered what his father's friend, a rich dilettante, one of the best liked men in Rome, had written him when he sent him the letter of introduction:

"You will find Gellius the best fellow in the world but not a fagot to kindle the fires of pleasure. I hear that he has called his book, a particoloured digest of information, *Attic Nights*, because he has spent his nights in Athens writing it—nights, mark you, when even in her own city Athena closes her grey eyes within her virgin shrine and leaves Pan to guard from his cave below the roysterings of youth. It is easy to let an allusion to my friend Lucian slip off the end of my stylus when I think of Athens. He and Gellius are scarcely the 'like pleasing like' of the proverb! Lucian, in fact, disposed of Gellius once by calling him an 'Infant Ignorance on the arm of Fashion.' This was after he had watched a peasant making holiday among the statues and temples on the Acropolis, carrying in his arms a three months old child who dozed in a colonnade of the Parthenon and sucked his thumb in front of Athena Promachus. The blinking baby, he said, made him think of Aulus, futilely carried about by the trend of the age among ideas and achievements beyond his understanding. But in fairness I must add that when this was repeated to Marcus Aurelius he retorted: 'Better a child than an iconoclast in the presence of beauty. I should call Gellius an honest errand boy in Athena's temple.' So there you have two ways of looking at your future host. If Lucian is the most enlightened wit of the day, Aurelius is the most Roman of us all and likely to rule over us when Antoninus rejoins the gods.

"On Gellius's return next year he is to be made a judge. He will study law painstakingly and apply it exactly. And Rome will never for him be one whit juster. However, your father will be delighted to have you make such a friend—a man of thirty whose idea of a debauch is to make a syllogism, who is a favourite student of great teachers and can introduce you to Herodes Atticus and to all the best life of Athens. Nor, indeed, do I marvel at Aurelius for trusting him. As a scholar or a jurist he will always be negligible, but as a man he is naively sincere and candid and with all the strength of his Roman will he is determined that both his work and his pleasures shall be such as befit a gentleman of honour and refinement. He may bore you, but, if I do not misread you, the pleasures that are within his gift will have a finer edge for you than those of the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus."

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As Gellius droned on about some of the niceties of Ovid's language, fragmentary sentences of this letter recurred to Paulus and he wondered what his father's friend would think of him could he accurately read his desires for pleasure. Certainly the shows of the Amphitheatre seemed remote enough here under the cool, grey branches, tipped with early green, of the Attic beech tree, but scarcely, after all, more remote than they often seemed in Rome itself to a youth who found virile recreation by the sea at Ostia or in following the Anio over the hills of Tibur. No, he had not flung away from Rome to escape in the back waters of a smaller town the noisy vulgarities of the metropolis. Nor was he one of those who confused the contests of the Circus with the creative struggles of the Forum. His abstinence from political life was due to temperament rather than conviction, nature having shaped him for active citizenship in a world dissociated from public insignia. It was in this world that he found himself at twenty-five ill at ease. Without genius, his slender vein of talent was yet of pure gold. There was no danger of his overrating his own poetry. He saw it as it was, of the day and hour, wearing no immortal grace of thought or language. But in it he was at his best, more honest and more whole-hearted than he could be in any public service. This seemed to him, quite simply, to constitute a reason for being such a poet as he was.

He belonged to an ancient family, which had furnished a consul in the first Punic War, had left distinguished dead on the field of Cannae and had borne on its roll the conqueror of Macedonia. AEmilius Paulus Macedonicus had rendered Rome the further and signal service of a public life as spotless as it was brilliant, and something of this statesman's scrupulous integrity had passed to the youngest son of the house, leading him to discriminate in his world also between shadows and realities. To Paulus the happiest age in the world's history was the age of Pericles, when the wedlock of life and learning issued in universal power. In Rome he would have been glad to have lived in the last years of the Republic, or under Augustus, when Lucretius and Catullus, Virgil and Horace, by submitting themselves in pupilage to the Greeks, became masters of new thoughts and new emotions among the masters of the world. How different was their discipleship from the imitative methods of modern literati! While it was the fashion to boast of refinement and learning, while libraries jostled each other and rhetoricians and philosophers swarmed in the city, Paulus was chiefly conscious that in the place of creative imagination a soulless erudition walked abroad. In the vestibule of the Palatine temple, waiting for the morning appearance of the Emperor, rhetoricians discussed the meaning of an adverb. In the baths they tested each other's knowledge of Sallust. Grammarians gathered in secondhand bookshops around rare copies of Varro's satires and Fabius's chronicles and hunted for copyist's errors. If one were tired of the streets and went to walk in Agrippa's park, he ran into men quarrelling over a vocative. Even on a holiday at Ostia he could not escape discussions between Stoics and Peripatetics. With all this activity, philosophy and literature grew only more anaemic.

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Paulus, too limited to be himself a formative influence, was also too truth-loving to be satisfied in Rome with the only life he was fitted to lead. Indifferent to the persuasions of Aphrodite, he yet harboured in his temperament a certain warmth which made him eager to live with passion and abandon, to scorch his hands in the fires of the world rather than drearily to warm them at burnt out ashes. Hopeless in Rome, he determined to seek his fortune elsewhere. An intellectual life real enough to claim his spendthrift allegiance, this, concretely, was the prize for which he had set sail from Brindisi two months before.

The act gave him an outward resemblance to the horde of young bloods who were always swinging out on the high seas in search of sport and adventure. The most restless made for Britain and the shores of the Euxine or the Baltic, or for the interior of Syria and Persia. The larger number followed the beaten and luxurious paths to Egypt, where they plunged into the gaieties of Alexandria and, cursorily enough, saw the sights of Memphis and Thebes. Paulus also went to Egypt. But in spite of his introductions and his opportunities to experiment with modern life under the absolving witchery of Oriental conditions, he gave himself over to the subtler influences of the past. Pilgrim rather than tourist, he visited eagerly the pyramids and the Sphinx, the temples of Karnak and Thebes, the tombs of the Theban kings, the colossi of the desert. In the frightful course of the centuries, as they unrolled before him, he seized upon the guidance of Herodotus, to whom the monuments of Egypt had seemed as incalculably old as they did to him. The choice, however, had proved unfortunate for his sympathetic reading of Egyptian history. Dwelling on the radiant progress towards truth and beauty of a free race, bondsmen only to law and reason, younger brothers of bright gods, he became querulously critical of a race whose Pharaohs strangled life in the thought of death and eternity, prostrated themselves before gods in monstrous shapes, and produced art at the expense of human well-being.

The landscape of Egypt also seemed to Paulus as sinister as it was exquisite. Its beauty, whether of silver Nile or lilac mountains or tawny desert, enervated by its appeal to the love of easy delight, and bred mad, vagrant thoughts, precursors of moral disaster. He had slept in the desert one night. The enamelled turquoise of the daylight sky, the clear, red gold of the sunset, the ghostly amber of the afterglow gave way to moonlight. As he lay and watched the silver bloom spread over the sand dunes, he felt suddenly a great terror. The golden apples of his western labour, the hard-won fruits of his stern young virtue, were slipping out of his grasp. The white desert lay upon his spirit like mist upon the sea, obliterating the promised course. Desires, unknown before, crept in upon him over the waves of the sand. All that he had rejected claimed him. All that he had thought holy mocked him. The next day he hurried to Alexandria and, recoiling from the library he had planned to visit, took the first ship to Greece.

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He had landed a week ago. To-day's excursion, offering a pleasant comradeship with those of his own race in a strange land, came almost opportunely, he fancied, to break an exalted mood. He had found himself roused to the uttermost by his first impressions of Athens. Put to flight by the seduction of river and desert, it was the influence of the landscape rather than of art and history to which he was here first made sensitive. Sea, mountains and plain were informed with a beauty which purged his memory of the evil loveliness of Egypt and restored gravity and dignity to his conception of human life. He was struck by what Plato would have called the Doric strain in the harmonies of outline and colour. Idyllic scenes he had already run across in his walks out from the city, scenes formed and reformed by the lovely occupations of farm and vineyard and pasture. But the lyric note so familiar to him in Italy seemed always overborne by a deeper. Whether it was because of the noble modelling of the fleshless mountains or because of an inner restraint in the minor elements of the landscape, the mood generated by the beauty of the Attic plain was always a grave one, delight swelling into reverence.

Now also, as his thoughts ceased whirling and he became conscious again of what lay around him, his irritation died. All that was trifling must be discarded when his eye could travel beyond wild hyacinth and myrtle, past pines and olive groves and cypresses, past the rosy soil of upturned fields, to the long, firm lines of Parnes's purple ridge and to the snowy summit, a midday beacon, high-uplifted, of distant Helicon.

To his relief, Paulus found that Gellius's monologue had given way to general conversation. As he listened his heart grew hot within him. These young men, of whom only Gellius and Servilianus had passed out of their twenties, had lived in Athens for a year or longer, and now, conscious of their approaching departure, they had fallen to talking of the past months. A strange power Athens seemed to have of exacting from aliens the intimate loyalty of sons. Here, Paulus felt, was no miserly counting up of gains, but an inner concern with art and history. Not as gluttonous travellers, but as those facing a long exile, they talked of a city richer than Rome or Alexandria or Antioch, richer than all the cities of the Empire taken together, in masterpieces of architect and sculptor and painter; of a country-side alive with memories of poets and thinkers and soldiers. Taking with a catholic enthusiasm the hot winds and driving white dust of summer, the deforming rains of winter, and the bright splendour of sky and earth at the advent of spring, they had tramped hither and yon, light-hearted in the vigour of youth, reverent in the impulse of pilgrimage. Mountain fastnesses where the clarion winds still trumpeted the victory of freedom and of Thrasybulus; upland caves where Plato had been taken as a child to worship Pan; long,

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white roads leading to the village homes of Euripides and Demosthenes; the wind in the pine trees on Pentelicon, reminding them of the wind in the groves of Tusculum; the autumn leaves on the plane trees by the Ilissus; the silver moon seen from the water's edge at Phaleron, swinging into the eastern void above the amethyst-dyed rocks of Hymettus; a sail on a summer star-lit night from AEgina to Piraeus—all these things crept one by one into their conversation. Here, Paulus recognised, was a group of young men on fire with a real emotion, cleansed in the presence of beauty and of great memories, witnesses afresh to a procreative Hellas. When the party broke up he thanked his host for the happiest day he had spent in many months.

On the way home, after rounding the last foot hill, they saw the Acropolis across the plain. The sun fell on the red in the natural rock and intensified the white of the marbles. Against the sombre mountains the isolated citadel glowed inly, like a milk-white opal shot with rose. Paulus caught his breath. Was it here, his flame of life?

II

In the following weeks Paulus remembered some things in the conversation of this day, which at the time had made but slight impression on him. The stories of professors and teachers had meant little until he knew at first hand the lentil suppers and brilliant talking at the house of Taurus, the ethical discussions with Peregrinus in his hovel on the outskirts of the city, and, most of all, the generous and ennobling hospitality, in his city house and villas, of the millionaire rhetorician, Herodes Atticus. About Peregrinus Paulus could never make up his mind. Was he the helpful teacher Gellius thought him, or the blatant charlatan of Lucian's frequent attacks? At any rate, the stories that were abroad about his wild youth, his connection with the strange sect known as Christians, his excommunication by them for profaning one of their rites, his expulsion from Rome by the Prefect of the City for his anarchistic harangues made a picturesque background for his cynic garb and ascetic preaching. To Taurus and Atticus, on the other hand, Paulus could give himself with unreserved loyalty. His hardy will responded to the severe standards of thought and conduct set by the Platonic philosopher, while the wilder heart within him seemed to seek and understand the rhetorician's emotional nature and extravagant affections.

Indeed, as the spring passed into summer, all the elements in Paulus's life seemed to confirm the glory of that day on the slopes of Hymettus when he had first felt sure of the significance Greece held for him. The cumulative effect of his association with older men, his young friendships, his work toward his chosen goal, his grave but piercing pleasures, was to make him at home in Athens as he had never been at home in Rome. He rested in the charm of the smaller, simpler city, where among all classes

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and all ways of life mental refinement took precedence of crass display. Here, he felt, he could live and work, unknown to fame indeed, but with all that was best in him dedicated in freedom and integrity to the life of the spirit. The memory of Egypt, where all effort lost itself in the mockery of the desert, and the thought of Rome, where in these later years all fruitful effort was military, political, commercial, became almost equally abhorrent to him. Greece, set within her stainless seas, was like a holy temple set apart, a place of refuge from shams and error and confusion.

This worshipful attitude towards Athens was crystallized in the young poet at the time of the Panathenaic festival, in July. The festival was still a brilliant one, a brief radiance falling upon city and citizens. Unlike a holiday season at Rome, here were no shows of gladiators or beasts, no procession of captors and captives, no array of Arabian gold or Chinese silk or Indian embroideries. The Athenians, seeking novelty, found it in their own renewed appreciation of the physical skill of athletes, of music and drama, of observances still hallowed by religion and patriotism. On the Acropolis Paulus watched the arrival of the procession bringing this year's peplos to Athena. After centuries of shame in the political life of her city the gold-ivory statue of the Guardian Goddess shone undefiled in a temple whose beauty was a denial of time. The pageant also, once more paying tribute to Wisdom, was noble and beautiful as in the days of Phidias. The gifts of Greece were beyond the reach of conqueror or destroyer. Paulus entered the inner shrine and looked up at the winged Victory borne upon the hand of the goddess. To dwell in Athens seemed a sacred purpose. Involuntarily, in self-dedication, he found himself using the familiar prayer of the theatre:

O majestical Victory, shelter my life
Neath thy covert of wings,
Aye, cease not to grant me thy crowning.

III

The answer to this prayer, the grant of victory, came, as it happened, in strange guise. The sensitive Roman youth, still in the potter's hands, had reckoned without the final Greek experience which lay ahead of him, the issue of one night in the early autumn. During the season of the full moon in September all lectures were suspended and most of the Roman students joined the crowd of travellers to Elis to see the Olympic games. Paulus had had a touch of malaria and his physician had urged him not to expose himself to the dangers of outdoor camping in a low country. He consented lightly, thinking to himself that since he was to live in Greece he could afford to postpone for a few years the arduous pleasures of the great festival. Herodes Atticus had gone this year, and upon his return brought with him for a visit a group of very distinguished men, including Lucian and Apuleius and the Alexandrian astronomer, Ptolemy. Paulus was

astonished and proud to receive, with Gellius, an invitation to a dinner in their honour given at Cephisia.

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The weather was still extremely hot and the dinner hour was set late. Even when Paulus and Gellius left the city the air was heavy and exhausting and never had the villa seemed to them more beautiful. The great groves of cypresses and pines, of poplars and plane trees, were dark with the shadow of the moonless night. In the broad pools the stars were reflected. The birds were hushed, but the sound of cool, running water rang sweet in urban ears. Within the dining-room an unhampered taste had done all that was possible to obliterate the memory of the scorching day. A certain restraint in all the appointments perfected the sense of well-being. As Paulus yielded to it and looked at his fellow guests, he drew a long breath of contentment. How exquisite, he thought, was Greek life, how vivid the inspiration of this hour!

Conversation naturally turned at first to episodes of the Games and the successes of the victors; then by easy stages drifted to the discussion of the nature of success of any kind.

Alpheus of Mytilene, hailing, by how long an interval, from the city and the craft of the Lesbian Muse, turned to the host. “Atticus,” he said, “here is an easy question for you. Tell us how to succeed.” All the guests paused expectantly, knowing that a chance question would sometimes lead Atticus into one of the vivid displays of extemporaneous oratory for which he was famous. Nor were they disappointed now. He looked at the company before him, men, for the most part, younger than himself. A strange glow, as if from smouldering fires freshly stirred, brightened in his dark eyes, and he began to speak, impetuously. His voice, low in its first haste, rose shrill with the tide of emotion, as he passed headlong over the barriers of logic and of form.

“You ask me about success because you think I have succeeded. Do you know what the characteristic moment of my life was? It was when, almost forty years ago, I failed in my first speech before divine Hadrian and sickened with chagrin. Most of you are young and will not wonder, as I might now wonder at myself, that I stood by the Danube that night and nearly threw myself into the oblivious water. Concrete failure is as palpable a thing as concrete success. The one is like a golden cup which you turn in your hands and lift in the sunlight before you test at your lips the wine it holds. The other is wormwood forced into your mouth. Like wormwood, it may be cleansing. My ‘success’ in my chosen profession, the fact that I have made great speeches, held high positions, acquired fame, is due to the inner sickness that night by the river. You will find that the name of many a man of my age is in men’s mouths because at the outset Defeat became his trophy, the Gorgon’s head, despoiled by his first sword of hiss and venom. So there, my friends, you have the rule you ask for—fail once so ignominiously that you wish to die, and you may wrest from fate a brief name and the cloak of success.

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“But beneath the cloak what is there? What, I mean, has there been for me? If it is true that success is to be measured by the fulfilment of desires, then through all these years I have but stood by the bank of the Danube. You know that I am an exemplar, fit for a schoolboy’s rhetorical exercise, of the old lesson of life, that wealth and power do not bring fruition in the intimate affections and hopes. My son, my daughter, have died.[3] The only son left to me is a daily torture to my pride. The disciples I took into their places have died. The statues of them which I set up at Marathon no longer comfort me. Like Menelaus, I have learned to hate the empty hollows of their eyes where ‘Love lies dead.’

[Footnote 3: It was after the date assumed for this dinner that Regilla, the Roman wife of Herodes Atticus, died under peculiarly tragic circumstances. In commemoration of her he built his famous Odeum on the south slope of the Acropolis.]

“All these things you have been taught by history to discount. Barrenness in the personal life is the price many a man has paid for public honours. Fortune must preserve an equilibrium among us. No man is blessed in everything. That you know from the Horace of your own school days. But, seldom hearing men speak the truth, you may not know that to some of us, at least, there is no return for the price we pay. When we give up juggling with facts for the sake of performing the work of the world, we know that, instead of achievement,

Mournful phantoms of dreams are there,
Fancies as vain as the joys they bear,
Vain—for think we that good has neared,
It slips through the hand or e’er ’t has appeared,
And the vision has vanished on wings that keep
Company on the paths of sleep.

“I can make you see this in my own life by an illustration which may surprise you. Some of you have envied me my power to enrich and beautify Greece. You imagine that I myself find some satisfaction in the white marble over the Stadion in Athens, in the water works in Olympia, where we no longer drink in fevers, in the embellishments at Delphi, in the theatre at Corinth. You think it a great thing that I can, by turning to my money, create memorials to myself in the greater comfort of cities of Asia Minor and of Italy. But I tell you that all these things are nothing to me because the only thing I want to do for my country is to connect the two seas at Corinth by a canal cut through the solid earth. What is all the rest? A playing with perishable materials, an erecting of ‘memorials’ which you and I find beautiful and serviceable, which in another hundred years may serve but to mark the transitoriness of our civilisation, and of which in five hundred years only traces will remain to be pointed out as Mycenae was pointed out to you, Alpheus, by a goatherd, driving his flocks where once was a city of gold. My ‘success’ is of the moment. My desire is for the conquest of nature herself, to bind

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her for all time to the service of man. The idea of a canal teased Julius Caesar, and Nero, with purple pomp, began to cut the rock; and yet the land still stands between the eastern and the western seas, limiting commerce, exhausting energies. When Panathenaic games are no longer held in the Stadion, when Apollo speaks clearest from other oracles than Delphi, Greeks will be building ships; Asia Minor, Egypt and India will be sending their treasures to Italy; the passage from east to west will be utilised. I should have done a thing for all time, not for ourselves."

The speaker paused as his hot eyes swept over his guests. Then he rushed on again:

"But I can see from your faces that this illustration does not convince you. To you the canal is even less important than a new facade for the well-house of Corinthian Peirene. Let me try again. I have heard people say what a satisfaction it must be to me to play a conspicuous part in the life of our own generation. But what is the life of our generation—the life, I mean, in which I have any individual share? My contribution is in art and literature, not in politics or war. And in art and literature what are we doing, save recalling in vague echoes the greater voices of a dead past? Even Lucian here, who is the only original of us all in letters, even Ptolemy, who is a master in science, will agree with me. Our greatness is of the past.

"Look at the statues in the theatre! AEschylus, Sophocles and Euripides surrounded by what a horde of little moderns! Menander standing cheek by jowl with a poetaster! The Emperors have dallied with us, wanting the gifts we bear to the Empire. The Roman Republic saw to it that we should bring no new gifts. The trees in Aristotle's Lyceum were cut down by Sulla to make his engines of war. When he turned these engines on the Acropolis, Athena's golden lamp went out.

"I was consul once at Rome, but few will remember it of me, for it was not the real I that did that work. But I was doing, I sometimes think, a more real thing than when I try to clothe Athens again with the glory of Pericles's age or seek in long lost quarries for my prose style. I envied divine Hadrian his faith in a restoration. His pride in Rome seemed really equalled by his passionate sentiment for Athens and his determination to make her once more the nurse of the arts. Commerce and wealth have swept by us to Egypt. Ships put in at Piraeus merely for repairs, and no longer, as in the great past, pay a part of their cargoes to Athens, a fee of harbourage. Learning, too, has swept eastward. Librarians and learned men dwell at Alexandria. Hadrian asked me to help him reawaken in Athens Apollo and his Muses. The restorer's buildings are round about you, his library and temples, in their new splendour typical of his hope. But wherein, after all, lies the greatness of the greatest of them? The Temple of Zeus imposes chiefly, I think, by its

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display of the world-wide power of Hadrian. You see the statues of himself in and about it, raised by Rome and Carthage, by Corinth and Byzantium, by Miletus and Laodicea, by every city of the Empire, paying homage to an emperor who by some divine grace happened to prefer to be honoured by marble in Athens rather than to have gold sent to him in Rome. How different is the Parthenon, still, after six hundred years, the embodiment of a common impulse of a free people! Try as Hadrian would, he could not restore the art of the past."

Atticus looked at the Romans among the company and his voice became golden and persuasive as he continued:

"I have come to feel, my friends, that the restoration of an art that is not the outcome of a genuine national life is a futile thing. Rome cannot restore the glory of old Athens. She can only learn from Greece how to create a glory of her own. She must so govern her life, so train her sons, that out of their own impulses a new poetry, a new art will grow. Divine influences from the past, yes, they exist. In your own most creative times Cicero and Lucretius, Virgil and Horace, did more than restore. Seeking aliment from Greece, they nurtured their own genius. But you, what are you and your friends doing? Why are you over here? Tell me that. Are you here to learn to be better Romans, carrying on your own national life, creating at last out of the forces of your own time an architecture and sculpture, a painting and poetry commensurate with your powers? Sometimes I fear you make a cult of Athens, lose yourselves in remembering her as she once was. You seem to spend your lives, as I have sometimes spent wakeful nights at Marathon, my birthplace, listening for the feet of heroes and the neighing of horses on the field where a great battle was once fought. That may do for the night seasons, but with the sun are there not new conquests, and new shields?

"You scorn your own Romans who come over here and put up their names on old statues of Themistocles and Miltiades. You admire Cicero who, although he loved Athens and wished that he might leave here some gift from himself, scorned to pervert an ancient statue. And yet, I tell you, Cicero was a Roman first, a lover of Greek culture second. All that he learned here he dedicated to the Republic. He studied Isocrates and Demosthenes in order that by his voice he might free Rome from traitors and persuade Justice to 'walk down her broad highways as Warder.' He read Plato that philosophy might soften the harsher temper of his own people. He partook of our refinement that the vigour of Rome might be used in the service of humanity.

"Take warning by me. Do not, indeed, forget our past. Stay here as long as you will. Touch lingeringly the hem of Athena's peplos. But when your minds are strengthened, when your powers are matured, go back to your own people and make them also, because you have dwelt for a time in the home of Plato, look 'to the pattern that is laid up in heaven for him who wills to see, and, seeing, so to plant his dwelling.' Work for

Rome. Let the memory of Athens be no cup of eastern magic. Listen, rather, for her voice as worshippers at the salt well on the Acropolis listen, when the south wind blows, for the sound of the waves of the purging sea."

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The rich, emotional voice ceased suddenly like the flood tide of Northern seas. Paulus was not prepared for the swift transformation of ardent speaker into observant host as Atticus turned with a whispered order to the slave who stood behind him. He was shocked, too, failing to perceive its note of defiant bitterness, by a laugh from Lucian and his careless, “My felicitations, Atticus, on your welding of dirge and exhortation into one epideictic oration! Aulus,” he added, looking across the table, “don’t forget to make a note of the prepositions the master used in burying Greece.”

The sneer fortunately was almost on the instant covered up by Ptolemy, who, as if awakened from a revery, turned toward his host. “Atticus,” he said, “you have convinced me that I am right. Pedigree, wealth and art, nations and civilisations and the destiny of men bring you no happiness. I find myself at peace in the heavens. While you were speaking I rivalled Alpheus here and beat out an epigram:

That I am mortal and a day my span
I know and own,
Yet when the circling ebb and flow I scan
Of stars thick-strewn,
No longer brush the earth my feet,
And I abide,
While God’s own food ambrosial doth replete,
By Zeus’s side.”

Like a gust of wind, the unexpected poet might have swept the conversation into his own ether, if at this juncture the doors had not opened to admit a group of well known actors. There was a general exclamation of surprise, special entertainments being almost unknown at Atticus’s dinners. The host turned smiling to his guests. “My friends,” he said, “I know you share my pride in the rare event of Apuleius’s presence. He is not as accustomed as we are to the grey monotone of our own thoughts. Shall he go back to Carthage or Rome to laugh at our village banquets? Ptolemy, you know Menander shared your regard for—

these majestic sights—the common sun,
Water and clouds, the stars and fire.

Let him take you off now among our country folk out here near Parnes. We still have the human comedy, played out under sun and stars. Love and deceit, troubles and rewards are as ageless as the heavens. Gentlemen, this distinguished company has consented to give us to-night a presentation of *The Arbitrants* equal to the famous one of the last Dionysia.”

Apuleius’s handsome face lit up with gaiety and good will. “I thank you, O wise host,” he called out.

To-day's my joy and sorrow,
Who knows what comes to-morrow?

Let us spend the moment we have in the merry company of a wise poet."

The play began. Moods of tragedy were forgotten. Only Paulus found himself unable to listen. His host's appeal, made apparently with such ready emotion, and so easily forgotten by the other men—he was the youngest of the company—had shaken his soul as a young tree on a mountain is shaken by the night wind. The comedy went on, punctuated by applause. In his mind met and struggled high desires. When Atticus had talked of Athens and of Rome he had remembered Virgil's great defence of his own people, the weapon of all patriots after him:

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Others, I well believe, shall mould the bronze to breathe in softer form, from marble shall unveil the living countenance, shall plead with greater eloquence, and heaven's paths map out with rod in hand and tell the rising of the stars. Upon the tablets of thy memory, O Roman, it is laid to hold the peoples in thy sway. These are thy arts and shall be: To impose the ways of peace; to spare the vanquished and subject the proud.

Now there leaped into life within him a realisation of Rome's incommunicable greatness. He perceived at last the nature of the *pax romana*, that peace, compounded of power, which welded the continents together, made the seas into serviceable highways and held all men secure within the barriers of law and justice. Was it possible that a nation which had given birth to a force like this could also bring forth in due season a love of beauty, a thirst for truth? Could tameless genius and conquering will, could a passion for ideas and a passion for deeds dwell together until side by side men of one blood should add to the glory of worldly power the glory of spiritual conquest, should superimpose upon the beauty of just laws the beauty of wrought bronze and woven language?

And if this could be, what was the duty of each Roman whose pure desires lay with Poetry and her sisters? Paulus shuddered as he felt the question tearing its way through the peaceful plans he had been making for his life. He remembered the story of Menander refusing to leave the intellectual life of Athens for the luxuries of Ptolemy's court. Must he, on the contrary, for the sake of an idea, renounce this life, with its cherished poverty and philosophy, its peace and learned leisure, its freedom and candour and regard for beauty, to go back to Rome where, in terrifying coalition, power and pleasure, wealth and display, passion and brutality were forever crowding in upon the city's honour? The irresponsibility of the insignificant assailed him. A Virgil, he supposed, might know that his presence would affect his country for good or evil. But what could he, Paulus, do? In Rome, in Athens, he was one of the little men. Was he not, then, justified in living his own life in the best possible way, atoning for the meagreness of his talent by the honourableness of his quest?

But even as he said this to himself he remembered why Athens had achieved perfection. In the age of Pericles, geniuses, like flawless jewels cut out of a proper matrix, had been fashioned out of a large body of men, themselves not gifted, but able to understand and safeguard those who were. He had left Rome because she was no matrix for poets and artists and thinkers. Ought he now to return to her and live and work and die unknown, serving only as one more citizen ready to welcome the poets to be?

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His panting desires put up one last defence. Was he not narrowing art within the borders of nationality? In the service of beauty was there either Greek or Roman? Alas! Atticus had beaten that down already. Art was no fungus, growing on a rotten stump of national life. Greeks had been artists only when they had been conquerors, soldiers, traders, rulers. The Romans now held the world. In them, the eagle's brood, lay the hope of a new birth of the spirit. With a certain noble unreason, he dismissed the idea that by living in Athens he might fight the battle for Rome. If he was to fight at all, it was to be where the enemy was fiercest and the hope of victory least. Upon any easier choice his ancestors within him laid their iron grasp. His ears caught the words of one of the actors:

> "Well, do not then the gods look out for us?" you'll say.
> To each of us they have allotted Character
> As garrison commander.

Gathering his forces in obedience to his garrison commander Paulus tried to decide to go back to Rome. Greece called to him insistently. Confused and exhausted, he joined perfunctorily in the loud applause that closed the comedy, and in the speeches of gratitude and farewell to the host.

The play had been long, and the autumn night, he found to his surprise, had passed. Emerging from the house, he breasted the dawn. With curious suddenness the sense of conflict left him. The beauty of the Attic plain, born, unlike the beauty of the Roman Campagna, of light rather than of unshed tears, had often seemed to him to quicken the perception of truth. Certainly the dullest eyes must see at this hour, when, at the behest of the approaching sun, outlines were cleared of all that was shadowy and fanciful, and colours were touched to buoyant life. Greece called to him, but with what a message! Imaginings, vain desires, regrets, were swept away from his mind, even as the receding shadows left bare the contours of the mountains. He saw that his concern was with the battle, not with its issue. In this enlightening hour he understood that Rome would never become mother of the arts, until, in some unimagined future, through transforming national experiences, she should be made pregnant with ideas beyond the ken of his generation. Poets might again be born of her, but he and his like would long since have been lying among her forgotten children. And yet, the life of the future, however distant, would not be unaffected by the obscure work and faith of the present age. He himself would never see victory, but the struggle was his inalienable heritage. Revealed in light and joy he knew his purpose. Down from the crags of Parnes, great wings strong with the morning, swept an eagle—as if homeward—toward the western sea. With it, like an arrow to its goal, alert with the vigour of dawn, aflame with the ardour of life, sped the heart of the young Roman.