A Snobbish Story, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

It is difficult for young people to live things down. We will tolerate vice, grand larceny and the quieter forms of murder in our contemporaries, because we are so strong and incorruptible ourselves, but our children's friends must show a blank service record. When young Josephine Perry was “removed” by her father from the Brereton School, where she had accidentally embraced a young man in the chapel, some of the best people in Chicago would have liked to have seen her drawn and quartered. But the Perrys were rich and powerful, so that friends rallied to their daughter's reputation—and Josephine's lovely face with its expression of just having led the children from a burning orphan asylum did the rest.

Certainly there was no consciousness of disgrace in it when she entered the grand stand at Lake Forest on the first day of the tennis tournament. Same old crowd, she seemed to say, turning, without any curiosity, half left, half right—not that I object, but you can't expect me to get excited.

It was a bright day, with the sun glittering on the crowd; the white figures on the courts threw no shadow. Over in Europe the bloody terror of the Somme was just beginning, but the war had become second-page news and the question agitating the crowd was who would win the tournament. Dresses were long and hats were small and tight, and America, shut in on itself, was bored beyond belief.

Josephine, representing in her own person the future, was not bored; she was merely impatient for a change. She gazed about until she found friends; they waved and she joined them. Only as she sat down did she realize that she was also next to a lady whose lips, in continual process of masking buck teeth, gave her a deceptively pleasant expression. Mrs. McRae belonged to the drawing-and-quartering party. She hated young people, and by some perverse instinct was drawn into contact with them, as organizer of the midsummer vaudeville at Lake Forest and of dancing classes in Chicago during the winter. She chose rich, plain girls and brought them along, bullying boys into dancing with them and comparing them to their advantage with the more popular black sheep—the most prominent representative of this flock being Josephine.

But Josephine was stiffened this afternoon by what her father had said the night before: “If Jenny McRae raises a finger against you, heaven help Jim.” This was because of a rumor that Mrs. McRae, as an example for the public weal, was going to omit Josephine's usual dance with Travis de Coppet from the vaudeville that summer.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. McRae had, upon her husband's urgent appeal, reconsidered; she was one large, unconvincing smile. After a short but obvious conference behind her own eyes, she said:

“Do you see that young man on the second court, with the head-band?” And as Josephine gazed apathetically, “That's my nephew from Minneapolis. They say he has a fine chance to win here. I wonder if you'd be a sweet girl and be nice to him and introduce him to the young people.”

Again she hesitated. “And I want to see you about the vaudeville soon. We expect you and Travis to do that marvelous, marvelous maxixe for us.”

Josephine's inner response was the monosyllable “Huh!”

She realized that she didn't want to be in the vaudeville, but only to be invited. And another look at Mrs. McRae's nephew decided her that the price was too high.

“The maxixe is stale now,” she answered, but her attention had already wandered. Someone was staring at her from near by, someone whose eyes burned disturbingly, like an uncharted light.

Turning to speak to Travis de Coppet, she could see the pale lower half of a face two rows behind, and during the burst of clapping at the end of a game she turned and made a cerebral photograph of the entire individual as her eyes wandered casually down the row.

He was a tall, even a high young man, with a rather small head set on enormous round shoulders. His face was pale; his eyes were nearly black, with an intense, passionate light in them; his mouth was sensitive and strongly set. He was poorly dressed—green shine on his suit, a shabby string of a necktie and a bum cap. When she turned he looked at her with rigid hunger, and kept looking at her after she had turned away, as if his eyes could burn loopholes through the thin straw of her hat.

Suddenly Josephine realized what a pleasant scene it was, and, relaxing, she listened to the almost regular pat-smack, smack-pat-pat of the balls, the thud of a jump and the overtone of the umpire's “Fault"; “Out"; “Game and set, 6-2, Mr. Oberwalter.” The sun moved slowly westward off the games and gossip. The day's matches ended.

Rising, Mrs. McRae said to Josephine: “Then shall I bring Donald to you when he's dressed? He doesn't know a soul. I count on you. Where will you be?”

Josephine accepted the burden patiently: “I'll wait right here.”

Already there was music on the outdoor platform beside the club, and there was a sound of clinking waiters as the crowd swayed out of the grand stand. Josephine refused to go and dance, and presently the three young men, each of whom had loved and lost her, moved on to other prospects, and Josephine picked them out presently below a fringe by their well-known feet—Travis de Coppet's deft, dramatic feet; Ed Bement's stern and uncompromising feet; Elsie Kerr's warped ankles; Lillian's new shoes; the high, button shoes of some impossible girl. There were more feet; the stands were almost empty now, and canvas was being spread over the lonely courts. She heard someone coming clumsily down the plank behind her and landing with a plunk upon the board on which she sat, lifting her an abrupt inch into the air.

“D’ I jar you?”

It was the man she had noticed and forgotten. He was still very tall.

“Don't you go in for dancing?” he asked, lingering. “I picked you out for the belle of the ball.”

“You're rather fresh, aren't you?”

“My error,” he said. “I should have known you were too swell to be spoken to.”

“I never saw you before.”

“I never saw you either, but you looked so nice in your hat, and I saw you smiling to your friends, so I thought I'd take a chance.”

“Like you do downstate, hey, Si?” retorted Josephine insolently.

“What's the matter with downstate? I come from Abe Lincoln's town, where the boys are big and brilliant.”

“What are you—a dance-hall masher?”

He was extraordinarily handsome, and she liked his imperviousness to insult.

“Thanks. I'm a reporter—not sports, or society either. I came to do the atmosphere—you know, a fine day with the sun sizzling on high and all the sporting world as well as the fashionable world of Lake Forest out in force.”

“Hadn't you better go along and write it then?”

“Finished; another fellow took it. Can I sit down for a minute, or do you soil easily? A mere breath of wind and poof! Listen, Miss Potterfield-Swiftcormick, or whatever your name is. I come from good people and I'm going to be a great writer some day.” He sat down. “If anybody comes you can say I was interviewing you for the paper. What's your name?”

“Perry.”

“Herbert T. Perry?”

She nodded and he looked at her hard for a moment.

“Well, well,” he sighed, “most attractive girl I've met for months turns out to be Herbert T. Perry's daughter. As a rule, you society nuts aren't much to look at. I mean, you pass more pretty girls in the Loop in one hour than I've seen here this afternoon, and the ones here have the advantage of dressing and all that. What's your first name?

She started to say “Miss,” but suddenly it seemed pointless, and she answered “Josephine.”

“My name's John Boynton Bailey.” He handed her his card with CHICAGO TRIBUNE printed in the corner. “Let me inform you I'm the best reporter in this city. I've written a play that ought to be produced this fall. I'm telling you that to prove I'm not just some bum, as you may judge from my old clothes. I've got some better clothes home, but I didn't think I was going to meet you.”

“I just thought you were sort of fresh to speak to me without being introduced.”

“I take what I can get,” he admitted moodily.

At the sudden droop of his mouth, thoughtful and unhappy, Josephine knew that she liked him. For a moment she did not want Mrs. McRae and her nephew to see her with him; then, abruptly, she did not care.

“It must be wonderful to write.”

“I'm just getting started, but you'll be proud to know me sometime.” He changed the subject. “You've got wonderful features—you know it? You know what features are—the eyes and the mouth together, not separately—the triangle they make. That's how people decide in a flash whether they like other people. A person's nose and shape of the face are just things he's born with and can't change. They don't matter, Miss Gotrocks.”

“Please cut out the Stone Age slang.”

“All right; but you've got nice features. Is your father good-looking?”

“Very,” she answered, appreciating the compliment.

The music started again. Under the trees the wooden floor was red in the sun. Josephine sang softly:

“Lisibeth Ann-n,
I'm wild a-bow-ow-out you, a-bow-ow-out you—”

“Nice here,” he murmured. “Just this time of day and that music under the trees… It's hot in Chicago!”

She was singing to him; the remarked triangle of her eyes and mouth was turned on him, faintly and sadly smiling, her low voice wooed him casually from some impersonal necessity of its own. Realizing it, she broke off, saying: “I've got to go to the city tomorrow. I've been putting it off.”

“I bet you have a lot of men worried about you.”

“Me? I just sit home and twirl my thumbs all day.”

“Yes, you do.”

“Everybody hates me and I return the compliment, so I'm going into a convent or else to be a trained nurse in the war. Will you enlist in the French Army and let me nurse you?”

Her words died away; his eyes, following hers, saw Mrs. McRae and her nephew coming in at the gate. “I'll go now,” he said quickly. “You wouldn't have lunch with me if you come to Chicago tomorrow? I'll take you to a German place with fine food.”

She hesitated; Mrs. McRae's insincerely tickled expression grew larger on the near distance.

“All right.”

He wrote swiftly on a piece of paper and handed it to her. Then, lifting his big body awkwardly, he gallumped down the tier of seats, receiving a quick but inquisitive glance from Mrs. McRae as he lumbered past her.

II

It was easy to arrange. Josephine phoned the aunt with whom she was to lunch, dropped the chauffeur and, not without a certain breathlessness, approached Hoftzer's Rathskeller Garten on North State Street. She wore a blue crepe-de-chine dress sprinkled with soft brown leaves that were the color of her eyes.

John Boynton Bailey was waiting in front of the restaurant, looking distracted, yet protective, and Josephine's uneasiness departed.

He said, “We don't want to eat in this place. It seemed all right when I thought about it, but I just looked inside, and you might get sawdust in your shoes. We better go to some hotel.”

Agreeably she turned in the direction of a hotel sacred to tea dancing, but he shook his head.

“You'd meet a lot of your friends. Let's go to the old La Grange.”

The old La Grange Hotel, once the pride of the Middle West, was now a rendezvous of

small-town transients and a forum for traveling salesmen. The women in the lobby were either hard-eyed types from the Loop or powderless, transpiring mothers from the Mississippi Valley. There were spittoons in patient activity and a busy desk where men mouthed cigars grotesquely and waited for telephone calls.

In the big dining room, John Bailey and Josephine ordered grapefruit, club sandwiches and julienne potatoes. Josephine put her elbows on the table and regarded him as if to say: “Well, now I'm temporarily yours; make the most of your time.”

“You're the best-looking girl I ever met,” he began. “Of course you're tangled up in all this bogus society hokum, but you can't help that. You think that's sour grapes, but I'll tell you; when I hear people bragging about their social position and who they are, and all that, I just sit back and laugh. Because I happen to be descended directly from Charlemagne. What do you think of that?”

Josephine blushed for him, and he grew a little ashamed of his statement and qualified it:

“But I believe in men, not their ancestors. I want to be the best writer in the world, that's all.”

“I love good books,” Josephine offered.

“It's the theater that interests me. I've got a play now that I think would go big if the managers would bother to read it. I've got all the stuff—sometimes I walk along the streets so full of it that I feel I could just sail out over the city like a balloon.” His mouth drooped suddenly. “It's because I haven't got anything to show yet that I talk like that.”

“Mr. Bailey, the great playwright. You'll send me tickets to your plays, won't you?”

“Sure,” he said abstractedly, “but by that time you'll be married to some boy from Yale or Harvard with a couple of hundred neckties and a good-looking car, and you'll get to be dumbbell like the rest.”

“I guess I am already—but I simply love poetry. Did you ever read ‘The Passing of Arthur’?”

“There's more good poetry being written now right in Chi than during the whole last century. There's a man named Carl Sandburg that's as great as Shakspere.”

She was not listening; she was watching him. His sensitive face was glowing with the same strange light as when she had first seen him.

“I like poetry and music better than anything in the world,” she said. “They're wonderful.”

He believed her, knowing that she spoke of her liking for him. She felt that he was distinguished, and by this she meant something definite and real; the possession of some particular and special passion for life. She knew that she herself was superior in something to the girls who criticized her—though she often confused her superiority with the homage it inspired—and she was apathetic to the judgments of the crowd. The distinction that at fifteen she had found in Travis de Coppet's ballroom romantics she discovered now in John Bailey, in spite of his assertiveness and his snobbishness. She wanted to look at life through his glasses, since he found it so absorbing and exciting. Josephine had developed early and lived hard—if that can be said of one whose face was cousin to a fresh, damp rose—and she had

begun to find men less than satisfactory. The strong ones were dull, the clever ones were shy, and all too soon they were responding to Josephine with a fatal sameness, a lack of temperament that blurred their personalities.

The club sandwiches arrived and absorbed them; there was activity from an orchestra placed up near the ceiling in the fashion of twenty years before. Josephine, chewing modestly, looked around the room; just across from them a man and woman were getting up from table, and she started and made one big swallow. The woman was what was called a peroxide blonde, with doll's eyes boldly drawn on a baby-pink face. The sugary perfume that exuded from her garish clothes was almost visible as she preceded her escort to the door. Her escort was Josephine's father.

“Don't you want your potatoes?” John Bailey asked after a minute.

“I think they're very good,” she said in a strained voice.

Her father, the cherished ideal of her life—handsome, charming Herbert Perry. Her mother's lover—through so many summer evenings had Josephine seen them in the swinging settee of the veranda, with his head on her lap, smoothing his hair. It was the promise of happiness in her parents' marriage that brought a certain purposefulness into all Josephine's wayward seeking.

Now to see him lunching safely out of the zone of his friends with such a woman! It was different with boys—she rather admired their loud tales of conquest in the nether world, but for her father, a grown man, to be like that. She was trembling; a tear fell and glistened on a fried potato.

“Yes, I'd like very much to go there,” she heard herself saying.

“Of course, they are all very serious people,” he explained defensively. “I think they've decided to produce my play in their little theater. If they haven't I'll give one or two of them a good sock on the jaw, so that next time they strike any literature they'll recognize it.”

In the taxi Josephine tried to put out of her mind what she had seen at the hotel. Her home, the placid haven from which she had made her forays, seemed literally in ruins, and she dreaded her return. Awful, awful, awful!

In a panic she moved close to John Bailey, with the necessity of being near something strong. The car stopped before a new building of yellow stucco from which a blue-jowled, fiery-eyed young man came out.

“Well, what happened?” John demanded.

“The trap dropped at 11:30.”

“Yes?”

“I wrote out his farewell speech like he asked me to, but he took too long and they wouldn't let him finish it.”

“What a dirty trick on you.”

“Wasn't it?… Who's your friend?” The man indicated Josephine.

“Lake Forest stuff,” said John, grinning. “Miss Perry, Mr. Blacht.”

“Here for the triumph of the Springfield Shakspere? But I hear they may do Uncle Tom's Cabin instead.” He winked at Josephine. “So long.”

“What did he mean?” she demanded as they went on.

“Why, he's on the Tribune and he had to cover a hanging this morning. What's more, he and I caught the fellow ourselves… Do you think these cops ever catch anybody?”

“This isn't a jail, is it?”

“Lord, no; this is the theater workshop.”

“What did he mean about a speech?”

“He wrote the man a dying speech to sort of make up for having caught him.”

“How perfectly hectic!” cried Josephine, awed.

They were in a long, dimly lit hall with a stage at one end; upon it, standing about in the murkiness of a few footlights, were a dozen people. Almost at once Josephine realized that everybody there except herself was crazy. She knew it incontrovertibly, although the only person of outward eccentricity was a robust woman in a frock coat and gray morning trousers. And in spite of the fact that of those present seven were later to attain notoriety, and four, actual distinction, Josephine was, for the moment, right. It was their intolerable inadjustability to their surroundings that had plucked them from lonely normal schools, from the frame rows of Midwestern towns and the respectability of shoddy suburbs, and brought them to Chicago in 1916—ignorant, wild with energy, doggedly sensitive and helplessly romantic, wanderers like their pioneer ancestors upon the face of the land.

“This is Miss——,” said John Bailey, “and Mrs.—— and Caroline —— and Mr.—— and ——”

Their frightened eyes lifted to the young girl's elegant clothes, her confident, beautiful face, and they turned from her rudely in self-protection. Then gradually they came toward her, hinting of their artistic or economic ideals, naive as freshmen, unreticent as Rotarians. All but one, a handsome girl with a dirty neck and furtive eyes— eyes which, from the moment of Josephine's entrance, never left her face. Josephine listened to a flow of talk, rapt of expression, but only half comprehending and thinking often with sharp pain of her father. Her mind wandered to Lake Forest as if it were a place she had left long ago, and she heard the crack-pat-crack of the tennis balls in the still afternoon. Presently the people sat down on kitchen chairs and a gray-haired poet took the floor.

“The meeting of the committee this morning was to decide on our first production. There was some debate. Miss Hammerton's drama”—he bowed in the direction of the trousered lady—“received serious consideration, but since one of our benefactors is opposed to representations of the class war, we have postponed consideration of Miss Hammerton's powerful play until later.”

At this point Josephine was startled to hear Miss Hammerton say “Boo!” in a large, angry voice, give a series of groans, varied as if to express the groans of many people—then clap on a soft gray hat and stride angrily from the room.

“Elsie takes it hard,” said the chairman. “Unhappily, the benefactor I spoke of, whose identity you have doubtless guessed, is adamant on the subject—a thorough reactionary. So your committee have unanimously voted that our production shall be ‘Race Riot’, by John Boynton Bailey.”

Josephine gasped congratulations. In the applause the girl with the furtive eyes brought her chair over and sat down beside Josephine.

“You live at Lake Forest,” she said challengingly.

“In the summer.”

“Do you know Emily Kohl?”

“No, I don't.”

“I thought you were from Lake Forest.”

“I live at Lake Forest,” said Josephine, still pleasantly, “but I don't know Emily Kohl.”

Rebuffed only for a moment, the girl continued, “I don't suppose all this means much to you.”

“It's a sort of dramatic club, isn't it?” said Josephine.

“Dramatic club! Oh, gosh!” cried the girl. “Did you hear that? She thinks it's a dramatic club, like Miss Pinkerton's school.” In a moment her uninfectious laughter died away, and she turned to the playwright. “How about it? Have you picked your cast?”

“Not yet,” he said shortly, annoyed at the baiting of Josephine.

“I suppose you'll have Mrs. Fiske coming on from New York,” the girl continued. “Come on, we're all on pins and needles. Who's going to be in it?”

“I'll tell you one thing, Evelyn. You're not.”

She grew red with astonishment and anger. “Oho! When did you decide that?”

“Some time ago.”

“Oho! How about all the lines I gave you for Clare?”

“I'll cut them tonight; there were only three. I'd rather not produce the thing than have you play Clare.”

The others were listening now.

“Far be it from me,” the girl began, her voice trembling a little, “far be it from me——”

Josephine saw that John Bailey's face was even whiter than usual. His mouth was hard and cold. Suddenly the girl got up, cried out, “You fool!” and hurried from the room.

With this second temperamental departure a certain depression settled on those remaining; presently the meeting broke up, convoked for next day.

“Let's take a walk,” John said to Josephine as they came out into a different afternoon; the heat had lifted with the first breeze from Lake Michigan.

“Let's take a walk,” John suggested. “That made me sort of sick— her talking to you like that.”

“I didn't like her, but now I'm sorry for her. Who is she?”

“She's a newspaper woman,” he answered vaguely. “Listen. How would you like to be in this play?”

“Oh, I couldn't—I've got to be in a play out at the Lake.”

“Society stuff,” he said, scornfully mimicking: “ ‘Here come the jolly, jolly golfing girls. Maybe they'll sing us a song.’ If you want to be in this thing of mine you can have the lead.”

“But how do you know I could act?”

“Come on! With that voice of yours? Listen. The girl in the play is like you. This race riot is caused by two men, one black and one white. The black man is fed up with his black wife and in love with a high-yellow girl, and that makes him bitter, see? And the white man married too young and he's in the same situation. When they both get their domestic affairs straightened the race riot dies down, too, see?”

“It's very original,” said Josephine breathlessly. “Which would I be?”

“You'd be the girl the married man was in love with.”

“Is that the part that girl was going to play?”

“Yes.” He frowned, and then added, “She's my wife.”

“Oh—you're married?”

“I married young—like the man in my play. In one way it isn't so bad, because neither of us believed in the old-fashioned bourgeois marriage, living in the same apartment and all. She kept her own name. But we got to hate each other anyhow.”

After the first shock was over, it did not seem so strange to Josephine that he was married; there had been a day two years before when only the conscientiousness of a rural justice had prevented Josephine from becoming Mrs. Travis de Coppet.

“We all get what's coming to us,” he remarked.

They turned up the boulevard, passing the Blackstone, where faint dance music clung about the windows.

On the street the plate glass of a hundred cars, bound for the country or the North Shore, took the burning sunset, but the city would make shift without them, and Josephine's imagination rested here instead of following the cars; she thought of electric fans in little restaurants with lobsters on ice in the windows, and of pearly signs glittering and revolving against the obscure, urban sky, the hot, dark sky. And pervading everything, a terribly strange, brooding mystery of roof tops and empty apartments, of white dresses in the paths of parks, and fingers for stars and faces instead of moons, and people with strange people scarcely knowing one another's names.

A sensuous shiver went over Josephine, and she knew that the fact that John Bailey was married simply added to his attraction for her. Life broke up a little; barred and forbidden doors swung open, unmasking enchanted corridors. Was it that which drew her father, some call to adventure that she had from him?

“I wish there was some place we could go and be alone together,” John Bailey said, and suddenly, “I wish I had a car.”

But they were already alone, she thought. She had spun him out a background now

that was all his—the summer streets of the city. They were alone here; when he kissed her, finally, they would be less alone. That would be his time; this was hers. Their mutually clinging arms pulled her close to his tall side.

A little later, sitting in the back of a movie with the yellow clock in the corner creeping fatally toward six, she leaned into the hollow of his rounded shoulder and his cool white cheek bent down to hers.

“I'm letting myself in for a lot of suffering,” he whispered. She saw his black eyes thinking in the darkness and met them reassuringly with hers.

“I take things pretty hard,” he went on. “And what in hell could we ever be to each other?”

She didn't answer. Instead she let the familiar lift and float and flow of love close around them, pulling him back from his far-away uniqueness with the pressure of her hand.

“What will your wife think if I take that part in your play?” she whispered.

At the same moment Josephine's wayward parent was being met by her mother at the Lake Forest Station.

“It's deathly hot in town,” he said. “What a day!”

“Did you see her?”

“Yes, and after one look I took her to the La Grange for lunch. I wanted to preserve a few shreds of my reputation.”

“Is it settled?”

“Yes. She's agreed to leave Will alone and stop using his name for three hundred a month for life. I wired your highly discriminating brother in Hawaii that he can come home.”

“Poor Will,” sighed Mrs. Perry.

III

Three days later, in the cool of the evening, Josephine spoke to her father as he came out on the veranda.

“Daddy, do you want to back a play?”

“I never thought about it. I'd always thought I'd like to write one. Is Jenny McRae's vaudeville on the rocks?”

Josephine ticked impatiently with her tongue. “I'm not even going to be in the vaudeville. I'm talking about an attempt to do something fine. What I want to ask is: What would be your possible objections to backing it?”

“My objections?”

“What would they be?”

“You haven't given me time to drum up any.”

“I should think you'd want to do something decent with your money.”

“What's the play?” He sat down beside her, and she moved just slightly away from him.

“Mother knows some of the patronesses and it's absolutely all right. But the man who was going to be the backer is very narrow and wants to make a lot of changes that would ruin the whole thing; so they want to find another backer.”

“What's it about?”

“Oh, the play's all right, don't you worry,” she assured him. “The man that wrote it is still alive, but the play is a part of English literature.”

He considered. “Well, if you're going to be in it, and your mother thinks it all right, I'd put up a couple of hundred.”

“A couple of hundred!” she exclaimed. “A man who goes around throwing away his money like you do! They need at least a thousand.”

“Throwing away my money?” he repeated. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“You know what I'm talking about.” It seemed to her that he winced slightly, that his voice was uncertain as he said:

“If you mean the way we live, it doesn't seem quite tactful to reproach me about that.”

“I don't mean that.” Josephine hesitated; then without premeditation took a sudden plunge into blackmail: “I should think you'd rather not have me soil my hands by discussing——”

Mrs. Perry's footsteps sounded in the hall, and Josephine rose quickly. The car rolled up the drive.

“I hope you'll go to bed early,” her mother said.

“Lillian and some kids are coming over.”

Josephine and her father exchanged a short, hostile glance before the machine drove off.

It was a harvest night, bright enough to read by. Josephine sat on the veranda steps listening to the tossing of sleepless birds, the rattle of a last dish in the kitchen, the sad siren of the Chicago-Milwaukee train. Composed and tranquil, she sat waiting for the telephone; he could not see her there, so she saw herself for him—it was almost the same.

She considered the immediate future in all its gorgeous possibilities—the first night, with the audience whispering: “Do you realize that's the Perry girl?” With the final curtain, tumultuous applause and herself, with arms full of flowers, leading forth a tall, shy man who would say: “I owe it all to her.” And Mrs. McRae's furious face in the audience, and the remorseful face of Miss Brereton, of the Brereton School, who happened to be in town. “Had I but known her genius, I wouldn't have acted as I did.” Comments jubilant and uproarious from every side: “The greatest young actress on the American stage!”

Then the move to a larger theater; great, staring, electric letters, JOSEPHINE PERRY IN RACE RIOT. “No, father, I'm not going back to school. This is my education

and my debut." And her father's answer:

"Well, little girl, I'll have to admit it was a lucky speculation for me to put up that money."

If the figure of John Bailey became a little dim during the latter part of this reverie, it was because the reverie itself opened out to vaguer and vaguer horizons, to return always to that opening night from which it started once more.

Lillian, Travis and Ed came, but she was hardly aware of them, listening for the telephone. They sat, as they had so often, in a row on the steps, surrounded, engulfed, drowned in summer. But they were growing up and the pattern was breaking; they were absorbed in secret destinies of their own, no matter how friendly their voices or how familiar their laughter in the silence. Josephine's boredom with a discussion of the tournament turned to irascibility; she told Travis de Coppet that he smelled of onions.

"I won't eat any onions when we rehearse for the vaudeville," he said.

"You won't be rehearsing with me, because I'm not being in it. I've got a little tired of 'Here come the jolly golfing girls. Hurray!'"

The phone rang and she excused herself.

"Are you alone?"

"There're some people here—that I've known all my life."

"Don't kiss anybody. I don't mean that—go kiss anybody you want to."

"I don't want to." She felt her own lips' warmth in the mouthpiece of the phone.

"I'm out in a pay station. She came up to my room in a crazy humor and I got out."

Josephine didn't answer; something went out of her when he spoke of his wife.

When she went back on the porch her guests, sensing her abstraction, were on their feet.

"No. We want to go. You bore us too."

Her parents' car pursued Ed's around the circular drive. Her father motioned that he wanted to see her alone.

"I didn't quite understand about my spending my money. Is this a Socialist bunch?"

"I told you that mother knew some of the——"

"But who is it you know? The fellow who wrote the play?"

"Yes."

"Where did you meet him?"

"Just around."

"He asked you to raise the money?"

"No."

“I'd certainly like to have a talk with him before you go into this any further. Invite him out to luncheon Saturday?”

“All right,” she agreed unwillingly. “If you don't taunt him about his poverty and his ragged clothes.”

“What a thing to accuse me of!”

It was with a deep uneasiness that, next Saturday, Josephine drove her roadster to the station. She was relieved to see that he had had a haircut, and he looked very big and powerful and distinguished among the tennis crowd as he got off the train. But finding him nervous, she drove around Lake Forest for half an hour.

“Whose house is that?” he kept asking. “Who are these two people you just spoke to?”

“Oh, I don't know; just somebody. There'll be nobody at lunch, but the family and a boy named Howard Page I've known for years.”

“These boys you've known for years,” he sighed. “Why wasn't I one?”

“But you don't want to be that. You want to be the best writer in the world.”

In the Perrys' living room John Bailey stared at a photograph of bridesmaids at her sister's wedding the previous summer. Then Howard Page, a junior at New Haven, arrived and they talked of the tennis: Mrs. McRae's nephew had done brilliantly and was conceded a chance in the finals this afternoon. When Mrs. Perry came downstairs, just before luncheon, John Bailey could not help turning his back on her suddenly and walking up and down to pretend he was at home. He knew in his heart he was better than these people, and he couldn't bear that they should not know it.

The maid called him to the telephone, and Josephine overheard him say, “I can't help it. You have no right to call me here.” It was because of the existence of his wife that she had not let him kiss her, but had fitted him, instead, into her platonic reverie, which should endure until Providence set him free.

At luncheon she was relieved to see John Bailey and her father take a liking to each other. John was expert and illuminating about the race riots, and she saw how thin and meager Howard Page was beside him.

Again John Bailey was summoned to the phone; this time he left the room with an exclamation, said three words into the mouthpiece and hung up with a sharp click.

Back at table, he whispered to Josephine: “Will you tell the maid to say I'm gone if she calls again?”

Josephine was in argument with her mother: “I don't see the use of coming out if I could be an actress instead.”

“Why should she come out?” her father agreed. “Hasn't she done enough rushing around?”

“But certainly she's to finish school. There's a course in dramatic art and every year they give a play.”

“What do they give?” demanded Josephine scornfully. “Shakspere or something like that! Do you realize there are at least a dozen poets right here in Chicago that

are better than Shakspere?”

John Bailey demurred with a laugh. “Oh, no. One maybe.”

“I think a dozen,” insisted the eager convert.

“In Billy Phelps' course at Yale——” began Howard Page, but Josephine said vehemently:

“Anyhow, I don't think you ought to wait till people are dead before you recognize them. Like mother does.”

“I do no such thing,” objected Mrs. Perry. “Did I say that, Howard?”

“In Billy Phelps' course at Yale——” began Howard again, but this time Mr. Perry interrupted:

“We're getting off the point. This young man wants my daughter in his play. If there's nothing disgraceful in the play I don't object.”

“In Billy——”

“But I don't want Josephine in anything sordid.”

“Sordid!” Josephine glared at him. “Don't you think there are plenty of sordid things right here in Lake Forest, for instance?”

“But they don't touch you,” her father said.

“Don't they, though?”

“No,” he said firmly. “Nothing sordid touches you. If it does, then it's your own fault.” He turned to John Bailey. “I understand you need money.”

John flushed. “We do. But don't think——”

“That's all right. We've stood behind the opera here for many years and I'm not afraid of things simply because they're new. We know some women on your committee and I don't suppose they'd stand for any nonsense. How much do you need?”

“About two thousand dollars.”

“Well, you raise half and I'll raise half—on two conditions: First, my name kept entirely out of it and my daughter's name not played up in any way; second, you assure me personally that she doesn't play any questionable part or have any speeches to make that might offend her mother.”

John Bailey considered. “That last is a large order,” he said. “I don't know what would offend her mother. There wouldn't be any cursing to do, for instance. There's not a bit in the whole damn play.”

He flushed slowly at their laughter.

“Nothing sordid is going to touch Josephine unless she steps into it herself,” said Mr. Perry.

“I see your point,” John Bailey said.

Lunch was over. For some moments Mrs. Perry had been glancing toward the hall,

where some loud argument was taking place.

“Shall we——”

They had scarcely crossed the threshold of the living room when the maid appeared, followed by a local personage in a vague uniform of executive blue.

“Hello, Mr. Kelly. You going to take us into custody?”

Kelly hesitated awkwardly. “Is there a Mr. Bailey?”

John, who had wandered off, swung about sharply. “What?”

“There's an important message for you. They've been trying to get you here, but they couldn't, so they telephoned the constable—that's me.” He beckoned him, and then, talking to him, tried at the same time to urge him, with nods of his head, toward the privacy of outdoors; his voice, though lowered, was perfectly audible to everybody in the room.

“The St. Anthony's Hospital—your wife slashed both her wrists and turned the gas on—they want you as soon as you can get there.” The voice pitched higher as they went through the door: “They don't know yet—— If there's no train, you can get a car——” They were both outside now, walking fast down the path. Josephine saw John trip and grasp clumsily at the edge that bordered the gate, and then go on with great strides toward the constable's flivver. The constable was running to keep up with him.

IV

After a few minutes, when John Bailey's trouble had died away in the distance, they all stopped being stunned and behaved like people again. Mr. and Mrs. Perry were panicky as to how far Josephine was involved; then they became angry at John Bailey for coming there with disaster hanging over him.

Mr. Perry demanded: “Did you know he was married?”

Josephine was crying; her mouth was drawn; he looked away from her.

“They lived separately,” she whispered.

“She seemed to know he was out here.”

“Of course he's a newspaperman,” said her mother, “so he can probably keep it out of the papers. Or do you think you ought to do something, Herbert?”

“I was just wondering.”

Howard Page got up awkwardly, not wanting to say he was now going to the tennis finals. Mr. Perry went to the door and talked earnestly for a few minutes, and Howard nodded.

Half an hour passed. Several callers drifted by in cars, but received word that no one was at home. Josephine felt something throbbing on the heat of the summer afternoon; and at first she thought it was pity and then remorse, but finally she knew what the throbbing was. “I must push this thing away from me,” it said; “this thing must not touch me. I hardly met his wife. He told me——”

And now John Bailey began slipping away. Who was he but a chance encounter, someone who had spoken to her a week before about a play he had written? He had nothing to

do with her.

At four o'clock Mr. Perry went to the phone and called St. Anthony's Hospital; only when he asked for an official whom he knew did he get the information: In the actual face of death, Mrs. Bailey had phoned for the police, and it now seemed that they had reached her in time. She had lost blood, but barring complications——

Now, in the relief, the parents grew angry with Josephine as with a child who has toddled under galloping horses.

“What I can't understand is why you should have to know people like that. Is it necessary to go into the back streets of Chicago?”

“That young man had no business here,” her father thundered grimly, “and he knew it.”

“But who was he?” wailed Mrs. Perry.

“He told me he was a descendant of Charlemagne,” said Josephine.

Mr. Perry grunted. “Well, we want no more of Charlemagne's descendants here. Young people had better stay with their own kind until they can distinguish one from another. You let married men alone.”

But now Josephine was herself again. She stood up, her eyes hardening.

“Oh, you make me sick,” she cried—“a married man! As if there weren't a lot of married men who met other women besides their wives.”

Unable to bear another scene, Mrs. Perry withdrew. Once she was out of hearing, Josephine came out into the open at last: “You're a fine one to talk to me.”

“Now look here; you said that the other night, and I don't like it now any better than I did then. What do you mean?”

“I suppose you've never been to lunch with anybody at the La Grange Hotel.”

“The La Grange——” The truth broke over him slowly. “Why—” He began laughing. Then he swore suddenly, and going quickly to the foot of the stairs, called his wife.

“You sit down,” he said to Josephine. “I'm going to tell you a story.”

Half an hour later Miss Josephine Perry left her house and set off for the tennis tournament. She wore one of the new autumn gowns with the straight line, but having a looped effect at the sides of the skirt, and fluffy white cuffs. Some people she met just outside the stands told her that Mrs. McRae's nephew was weakening to the veteran, and this started her thinking of Mrs. McRae and of her decision about the vaudeville with a certain regret. People would think it odd if she wasn't in it.

There was a sudden burst of wild clapping as she went in; the tournament was over. The crowd was swarming around victor and vanquished in the central court, and gravitating with it, she was swept by an eddy to the very front of it, until she was face to face with Mrs. McRae's nephew himself. But she was equal to the occasion. With her most sad and melting smile, as if she had hoped for him from day to day, she held out her hand and spoke to him in her clear, vibrant voice:

“We are all awfully sorry.”

For a moment, even in the midst of the excited crowd, a hushed silence fell.

Modestly, conscious of her personality, Josephine backed away, aware that he was staring after her, his mouth stupidly open, aware of a burst of laughter around her. Travis de Coppet appeared beside her.

“Well, of all the nuts!” he cried.

“What's the matter? What——”

“Sorry! Why, he won! It was the greatest come-back I ever saw.”

So, at the vaudeville, Josephine sat with her family after all. Looking around during the show, she saw John Bailey standing in the rear. He looked very sad, and she felt very sorry, realizing that he had come in hopes of a glimpse of her. He would see, at least, that she was not up there on the stage debasing herself with such inanities.

Then she caught her breath as the lights changed, the music quickened and at the head of the steps, Travis de Coppet in white-satin football suit swung into the spotlight a shimmering blonde in a dress of autumn leaves. It was Madelaine Danby, and it was the role Josephine would have played. With the warm rain of intimate applause, Josephine decided something: That any value she might have was in the immediate, shimmering present—and thus thinking, she threw in her lot with the rich and powerful of this world forever.