

Emotional Bankruptcy, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

"There's that nut with the spyglass again," remarked Josephine. Lillian Hammel unhooked a lace sofa cushion from her waist and came to the window. "He's standing back so we can't see him. He's looking at the room above."

The peeper was working from a house on the other side of narrow Sixty-eighth street, all unconscious that his activities were a matter of knowledge and, lately, of indifference to the pupils of Miss Truby's finishing school. They had even identified him as the undistinguished but quite proper young man who issued from the house with a briefcase at eight every morning, apparently oblivious of the school across the street.

"What a horrible person," said Lillian.

"They're all the same," Josephine said. "I'll bet almost every man we know would do the same thing, if he had a telescope and nothing to do in the afternoon. I'll bet Louie Randall would, anyhow."

"Josephine, is he actually following you to Princeton?" Lillian asked.

"Yes, dearie."

"Doesn't he think he's got his nerve?"

"He'll get away with it," Josephine assured her.

"Won't Paul be wild?"

"I can't worry about that. I only know half a dozen boys at Princeton, and with Louie I know I'll have at least one good dancer to depend on. Paul's too short for me, and he's a bum dancer anyhow."

Not that Josephine was very tall; she was an exquisite size for seventeen and of a beauty that was flowering marvelously day by day into something richer and warmer. People gasped nowadays, whereas a year ago they would merely have stared, and scarcely glanced at her a year before that. She was manifestly to be the spectacular debutante of Chicago next year, in spite of the fact that she was an egotist who played not for popularity but for individual men. While Josephine always recovered, the men frequently didn't—her mail from Chicago, from New Haven, from the Yale Battery on the border, averaged a dozen letters a day.

This was in the fall of 1916, with the thunder of far-off guns already growing louder on the air. When the two girls started for the Princeton prom two days later, they carried with them the Poems of Alan Seeger, supplemented by copies of Smart Set and Snappy Stories, bought surreptitiously at the station news stand. When compared to a seventeen-year-old girl of today, Lillian Hammel was an innocent; Josephine Perry, however, belonged to the ages.

They read nothing en route save a few love epigrams beginning: "A woman of thirty is—" The train was crowded and a sustained, excited chatter flowed along the aisles of the coaches. There were very young girls in a gallantly concealed state of terror; there were privately bored girls who would never see twenty-five again; there were unattractive girls, blandly unconscious of what was in store; and there were little, confident parties who felt as though they were going home.

"They say it's not like Yale," said Josephine. "They don't do things so elaborately

here. They don't rush you from place to place, from one tea to another, like they do at New Haven."

"Will you ever forget that divine time last spring?" exclaimed Lillian.

They both sighed.

"At least there'll be Louie Randall," said Josephine.

There would indeed be Louie Randall, whom Josephine had seen fit to invite herself, without the formality of telling her Princeton escort that he was coming. The escort, at that moment pacing up and down at the station platform with many other young men, was probably under the impression that it was his party. But he was wrong; it was Josephine's party; even Lillian was coming with another Princeton man, named Martin Munn, whom Josephine had thoughtfully provided. "Please ask her," she had written. "We'll manage to see a lot of each other, if you do, because the man I'm coming with isn't really very keen about me, so he won't mind."

But Paul Dempster cared a lot; so much so that when the train came puffing up from the Junction he gulped a full pint of air, which is a mild form of swooning. He had been devoted to Josephine for a year—long after her own interest had waned—he had long lost any power of judging her objectively; she was become simply a projection of his own dreams, a radiant, nebulous mass of light.

But Josephine saw Paul clearly enough as they stepped off the train. She gave herself up to him immediately, as if to get it over with, to clear the decks for more vital action.

"So thrilled—so thrilled! So darling to ask me!" Immemorial words, still doing service after fifteen years.

She took his arm snugly, settling it in hers with a series of little readjustments, as if she wanted it right because it was going to be there forever.

"I bet you're not glad to see me at all," she whispered. "I'll bet you've forgotten me. I know you."

Rudimentary stuff, but it sent Paul Dempster into a confused and happy trance. He had the adequate surface of nineteen, but, within, all was still in a ferment of adolescence.

He could only answer gruffly: "Big chance." And then: "Martin had a chemistry lab. He'll meet us at the club."

Slowly the crowd of youth swirled up the steps and beneath Blair arch, floating in an autumn dream and scattering the yellow leaves with their feet. Slowly they moved between stretches of greensward under the elms and cloisters, with breath misty upon the crisp evening, following the hope that lay just ahead, the goal of happiness almost reached.

They sat before a big fire in the Witherspoon Club, the largest of those undergraduate mansions for which Princeton is famous. Martin Munn, Lillian's escort, was a quiet, handsome boy whom Josephine had met several times, but whose sentimental nature she had not explored. Now, with the phonograph playing Down Among the Sheltering Palms, with the soft orange light of the great room glowing upon the scattered groups, who seemed to have brought in the atmosphere of infinite promise from outside, Josephine looked at him appraisingly. A familiar current of curiosity coursed through her; already her replies to Paul had grown abstracted. But still in the warm enchantment of the walk from the station, Paul did not

notice. He was far from guessing that he had already been served his ration; of special attention he would get no more. He was now cast for another rôle.

At the exact moment when it was suggested that they dress for dinner the party became aware of an individual who had just entered the club and was standing by the entrance looking not exactly at home, for he blinked about unfamiliarly, but not in the least ill at ease. He was tall, with long, dancing legs, and his face was that of an old, experienced weasel to whom no henhouse was impregnable.

"Why, Louie Randall!" exclaimed Josephine in a tone of astonishment.

She talked to him for a moment as if unwillingly, and then introduced him all around, meanwhile whispering to Paul: "He's a boy from New Haven. I never dreamed he'd follow me down here."

Randall within a few minutes was somehow one of the party. He had a light and witty way about him; no dark suspicions had penetrated Paul's mind.

"Oh, by the way," said Louie Randall, "I wonder if I can find a place to change my clothes. I've got a suitcase outside."

There was a pause. Josephine was apparently uninterested. The pause grew difficult, and Paul heard himself saying: "You can change in my room if you want to."

"I don't want to put you out."

"Not at all."

Josephine raised her eyebrows at Paul, disclaiming responsibility for the man's presumption; a moment later, Randall said: "Do you live near here?"

"Pretty near."

"Because I have a taxi and I could take you there if you're going to change, and you could show me where it is. I don't want to put you out."

The repetition of this ambiguous statement suggested that otherwise Paul might find his belongings in the street. He rose unwillingly; he did not hear Josephine whisper to Martin Munn: "Please don't you go yet." But Lillian did, and without minding at all. Her love affairs never conflicted with Josephine's, which is why they had been intimate friends so long. When Louie Randall and his involuntary host had departed, she excused herself and went to dress upstairs.

"I'd like to see all over the clubhouse," suggested Josephine. She felt the old excitement mounting in her pulse, felt her cheeks begin to glow like an electric heater.

"These are the private dining rooms," Martin explained as they walked around... "The billiard room... The squash courts... This library is modeled on something in a Cercersion monastery in—in India or somewhere... This"—he opened a door and peered in—"this is the president's room, but I don't know where the light is."

Josephine walked in with a little laugh. "It's very nice in here," she said. "You can't see anything at all. Oh, what have I run into? Come and save me!"

When they emerged a few minutes later, Martin smoothed back his hair hurriedly.

"You darling!" he said.

Josephine made a funny little clicking sound.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Why have you got such a funny look on your face?"

Josephine didn't answer.

"Have I done something? Are you angry? You look as if you'd seen a ghost," he said.

"You haven't done anything," she answered, and added, with an effort: "You were—sweet." She shuddered. "Show me my room, will you?"

"How strange," she was thinking. "He's so attractive, but I didn't enjoy kissing him at all. For the first time in my life—even when it was a man I didn't especially care for—I had no feeling about him at all. I've often been bored afterward, but at the time it's always meant something."

The experience depressed her more than she could account for. This was only her second prom, but neither before nor after did she ever enjoy one so little. She had never been more enthusiastically rushed, but through it all she seemed to float in a detached dream. The men were not individuals tonight, but dummies; men from Princeton, men from New Haven, new men, old beaux—were all as unreal as sticks. She wondered if her face wore that bovine expression she had often noted on the faces of stupid and apathetic girls.

"It's a mood," she told herself. "I'm just tired."

But next day, at a bright and active luncheon, she seemed to herself to have less vivacity than the dozen girls who boasted wanly that they hadn't gone to bed at all. After the football game she walked with Paul Dempster to the station, trying contritely to give him the last end of the week-end, as she had given him the beginning.

"Then why won't you go to the theater with us tonight?" he was pleading. "That was the understanding in my letter. We were to come to New York with you and all go to the theater."

"Because," she explained patiently, "Lillian and I have to be back to school by eight. That's the only condition on which we were allowed to come."

"Oh, hell," he said. "I'll bet you're doing something tonight with that Randall."

She denied this scornfully, but Paul was suddenly realizing that Randall had dined with them, Randall had slept upon his couch, and Randall, though at the game he had sat on the Yale side of the field, was somehow with them now.

His was the last face that Paul saw as the train pulled out for the Junction.

He had thanked Paul very graciously and asked him to stay with him if he was ever in New Haven.

Nevertheless, if the miserable Princetonian had witnessed a scene in the Pennsylvania Station an hour later, his pain would have been moderated, for now Louie Randall was arguing bitterly:

"But why not take a chance? The chaperon doesn't know what time you have to be in."

"We do."

When finally he had accepted the inevitable and departed, Josephine sighed and

turned to Lillian.

"Where are we going to meet Wallie and Joe? At the Ritz?"

"Yes, and we'd better hurry," said Lillian. "The Follies begin at nine."

II

It had been like that for almost a year—a game played with technical mastery, but with the fire and enthusiasm gone—and Josephine was still a month short of eighteen. One evening during Thanksgiving vacation, as they waited for dinner in the library of Christine Dicer's house on Gramercy Park, Josephine said to Lillian:

"I keep thinking how excited I'd have been a year ago. A new place, a new dress, meeting new men."

"You've been around too much, dearie; you're blase."

Josephine bridled impatiently: "I hate that word, and it's not true. I don't care about anything in the world except men, and you know it. But they're not like they used to be... What are you laughing at?"

"When you were six years old they were different?"

"They were. They used to have more spirit when we played drop-the-handkerchief—even the little Ikeys that used to come in the back gate. The boys at dancing school were so exciting; they were all so sweet. I used to wonder what it would be like to kiss every one of them, and sometimes it was wonderful. And then came Travis and Tony Harker and Ridge Saunders and Ralph and John Bailey, and finally I began to realize that I was doing it all. They were nothing, most of them—not heroes or men of the world or anything I thought. They were just easy. That sounds conceited, but it's true."

She paused for a moment.

"Last night in bed I was thinking of the sort of man I really could love, but he'd be different from anybody I've ever met. He'd have to have certain things. He wouldn't necessarily be very handsome, but pleasant looking; and with a good figure, and strong. Then he'd have to have some kind of position in the world, or else not care whether he had one or not; if you see what I mean. He'd have to be a leader, not just like everybody else. And dignified, but very pash, and with lots of experience, so I'd believe everything he said or thought was right. And every time I looked at him I'd have to get that thrill I sometimes get out of a new man; only with him I'd have to get it over and over every time I looked at him, all my life."

"And you'd want him to be very much in love with you. That's what I'd want first of all."

"Of course," said Josephine abstractedly, "but principally I'd want to be always sure of loving him. It's much more fun to love someone than to be loved by someone."

There were footsteps in the hall outside and a man walked into the room. He was an officer in the uniform of the French aviation—a glove-fitting tunic of horizon blue, and boots and belt that shone like mirrors in the lamplight. He was young, with gray eyes that seemed to be looking off into the distance, and a red-brown military mustache. Across his left breast was a line of colored ribbons, and there were gold-embroidered stripes on his arms and wings on his collar.

"Good evening," he said courteously. "I was directed in here. I hope I'm not breaking into something."

Josephine did not move; from head to foot she saw him, and as she watched he seemed to come nearer, filling her whole vision. She heard Lillian's voice, and then the officer's voice, saying:

"My name's Dicer; I'm Christine's cousin. Do you mind if I smoke a cigarette?"

He didn't sit down. He moved about the room and turned over a magazine, not oblivious to their presence, but as if respecting their conversation. But when he saw that silence had fallen, he sat against a table near them with his arms folded and smiled at them.

"You're in the French army," Lillian ventured.

"Yes, I've just got back, and very glad to be here."

He didn't look glad, Josephine noticed. He looked as if he wanted to get out now, but had no place to go to.

For the first time in her life she felt no confidence. She had absolutely nothing to say. She hoped the emptiness that she had felt ever since her soul poured suddenly out toward his beautiful image didn't show in her face. She made her lips into a smile, and kept thinking how once, long ago, Travis de Coppet had worn his uncle's opera cloak to dancing school and suddenly seemed like a man out of the great world. So, now, the war overseas had gone on so long, touched us so little, save for confining us to our own shores, that it had a legendary quality about it, and the figure before her seemed to have stepped out of a gigantic red fairy tale.

She was glad when the other dinner guests came and the room filled with people, strangers she could talk to or laugh with or yawn at, according to their deserts. She despised the girls fluttering around Captain Dicer, but she admired him for not showing by a flicker of his eye that he either enjoyed it or hated it. Especially she disliked a tall, possessive blonde who once passed, her hand on his arm; he should have flicked away with a handkerchief the contamination of his immaculateness.

They went in to dinner; he was far away from her, and she was glad. All she could see of him was his blue cuff farther up the table when he reached for a glass, but she felt that they were alone together, none the less because he did not know.

The man next to her gave her the superfluous information that he was a hero:

"He's Christine's cousin, brought up in France, and joined at the beginning of the war. He was shot down behind the German lines and escaped by jumping off a train. There was a lot about it in the papers. I think he's over here on some kind of propaganda work... Great horseman too. Everybody likes him."

After dinner she sat quietly while two men talked over her, sat persistently willing him to come to her. Ah, but she would be so nice, avoiding any curiosity or sentimentality about his experiences, avoiding any of the things that must have bored and embarrassed him since he had been home. She heard the voices around him:

"Captain Dicer... Germans crucify all the Canadian soldiers they capture... How much longer do you think the war... to be behind the enemy lines... Were you frightened?" And then a heavy, male voice telling him about it, between puffs of a cigar: "The way I see it, Captain Dicer, neither side is getting anywhere. It strikes me

they're afraid of each other."

It seemed a long time later that he came over to her, but at just the right moment, when there was a vacant seat beside her and he could slip into it.

"I wanted to talk to the prettiest girl for a while. I've wanted to all evening; it's been pretty heavy going."

Josephine wanted to lean against the shining leather of his belt, and more, she wanted to take his head in her lap. All her life had pointed toward this moment. She knew what he wanted, and gave it to him; not words, but a smile of warmth and delight—a smile that said, "I'm yours for the asking; I'm won." It was not a smile that undervalued herself, because through its beauty it spoke for both of them, expressed all the potential joy that existed between them.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm a girl."

"I thought you were a flower. I wondered why they put you on a chair."

"Vive la France," answered Josephine demurely. She dropped her eyes to his chest. "Do you collect stamps, too, or only coins?"

He laughed. "It's good to meet an American girl again. I hoped they'd at least put me across from you at table, so I could rest my eyes on you."

"I could see your cuff."

"I could see your arm. At least—yes, I thought it was your green bracelet."

Later he suggested: "Why couldn't you come out with me one of these evenings?"

"It's not done. I'm still in school."

"Well, some afternoon then. I'd like to go to a tea-dance place and hear some new tunes. The newest thing I know is Waiting for the Robert E. Lee."

"My nurse used to sing me to sleep with it."

"When could you?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to make up a party. Your aunt, Mrs. Dicer, is very strict."

"I keep forgetting," he agreed. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," she said, anticipating by a month.

That was the point at which they were interrupted and the evening ended for her. The other young men in dinner coats looked like people in mourning beside the banner of his uniform. Some of them were persistent about Josephine, but she was in a reverie of horizon blue and she wanted to be alone.

"This is it at last," something whispered inside her.

Later that night and next day, she still moved in a trance. Another day more and she would see him—forty-eight hours, forty, thirty. The very word "blase" made her laugh; she had never known such excitement, such expectation. The blessed day itself was a haze of magic music and softly lit winter rooms, of automobiles where

her knee trembled against the top lacing of his boot. She was proud of the eyes that followed them when they danced; she was proud of him even when he was dancing with another girl.

"He may think I'm too young," she thought anxiously. "That's why he won't say anything. If he did, I'd leave school; I'd run away with him tonight."

School opened next day and Josephine wrote home:

DEAR MOTHER:

I wonder if I can't spend part of the vacation in New York. Christine Dicer wants me to stay a week with her, which would still leave me a full ten days in Chicago. One reason is that the Metropolitan is putting on Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen and if I come home right away I can only see the Rheingold. Also there are two evening dresses that aren't finished—

The answer came by return post:

... because, in the first place, your eighteenth birthday falls then, and your father would feel very badly, because it would be the first birthday you hadn't passed with us; and, in the second place, I've never met the Dicers; and, thirdly, I've planned a little dance for you and I need your help; and, lastly, I can't believe that the reasons you give are your real ones. During Christmas week the Chicago Grand Opera Company is giving—

Meanwhile Capt. Edward Dicer had sent flowers and several formal little notes that sounded to her like translations from the French. She was self-conscious, answering them; so she did it in slang. His French education and his years in the war while America was whirling toward the Jazz Age had made him, though he was only twenty-three, seem of a more formal, more courteous generation than her own. She wondered what he would think of such limp exotics as Travis de Coppet, or Book Chaffee, or Louie Randall. Two days before vacation he wrote asking when her train left for the West. That was something, and for seventy-two hours she lived on it, unable to turn her attention to the masses of Christmas invitations and unheeded letters that she had meant to answer before leaving. But on the day itself, Lillian brought her a marked copy of Town Tattle that, from its ragged appearance, had already been passed around the school.

It is rumored that a certain Tuxedo papa who was somewhat irascible about the marital choice of a previous offspring views with equanimity the fact that his remaining daughter is so often in company with a young man fresh from his exploits in the French army.

Captain Dicer did not come to the train. He sent no flowers. Lillian, who loved Josephine like part of herself, wept in their compartment. Josephine comforted her, saying: "But listen, darling; it's all the same to me. I didn't have a chance, being in school like we were. It's all right." But she was awake hours and hours after Lillian was asleep.

III

Eighteen—it was to have meant so many things: When I'm eighteen I can—Until a girl's eighteen—You'll see things differently when you're eighteen.

That, at least, was true. Josephine saw her vacation invitations as so many overdue bills. Abstractedly she counted them as she always had before—twenty-eight dances, nineteen dinner and theater parties, fifteen tea dances and receptions, a dozen luncheons, a few miscellaneous bids, ranging from early breakfast for the Yale Glee Club to a bob party at Lake Forest—seventy-eight in all, and with the small dance

she was giving herself, seventy-nine. Seventy-nine promises of gayety, seventy-nine offers to share fun with her. Patiently she sat down, choosing and weighing, referring doubtful cases to her mother.

"You seem a little white and tired," her mother said.

"I'm wasting away. I've been jilted."

"That won't worry you very long. I know my Josephine. Tonight at the Junior League german you'll meet the most marvelous men."

"No, I won't, mother. The only hope for me is to get married. I'll learn to love him and have his children and scratch his back--"

"Josephine!"

"I know two girls who married for love who told me they were supposed to scratch their husbands' backs and send out the laundry. But I'll go through with it, and the sooner the better."

"Every girl feels like that sometimes," said her mother cheerfully. "Before I was married I had three or four beaus, and I honestly liked each one of them as well as the others. Each one had certain qualities I liked, and I worried about it so long that it didn't seem worth while; I might as well have counted eenie, meenie, mynie, mo. Then one day when I was feeling lonely your father came to take me driving, and from that day I never had a single doubt. Love isn't like it is in books."

"But it is," said Josephine gloomily. "At least for me it always has been."

For the first time it seemed to her more peaceful to be with a crowd than to be alone with a man. The beginning of a line wearied her; how many lines had she listened to in three years? New men were pointed out as exciting, were introduced, and she took pleasure in freezing them to unhappiness with languid answers and wandering glances. Ancient admirers looked favorably upon the metamorphosis, grateful for a little overdue time at last. Josephine was glad when the holiday drew to a close. Returning from a luncheon one gray afternoon, the day after New Year's, she thought that for once it was nice to think she had nothing to do until dinner. Kicking off her overshoes in the hall, she found herself staring at something on the table that at first seemed a projection of her own imagination. It was a card fresh from a case--MR. EDWARD DICER.

Instantly the world jerked into life, spun around dizzily and came to rest on a new world. The hall where he must have stood throbbled with life; she pictured his straight figure against the open door, and thought how he must have stood with his hat and cane in hand. Outside the house, Chicago, permeated with his presence, pulsed with the old delight. She heard the phone ring in the downstairs lounge and, still in her fur coat, ran for it.

"Hello!"

"Miss Josephine, please."

"Oh, hello!"

"Oh. This is Edward Dicer."

"I saw your card."

"I must have just missed you."

What did the words matter when every word was winged and breathless?

"I'm only here for the day. Unfortunately, I'm tied up for dinner tonight with the people I'm visiting."

"Can you come over now?"

"If you like."

"Come right away."

She rushed upstairs to change her dress, singing for the first time in weeks. She sang:

"Where's my shoes?
Where's my new gray shoes, shoes, shoes?
I think I put them here,
But I guess—oh, where the deuce—"

Dressed, she was at the head of the stairs when the bell rang.

"Never mind," she called to the maid; "I'll answer."

She opened upon Mr. and Mrs. Warren Dillon. They were old friends and she hadn't seen them before this Christmas.

"Josephine! We came to meet Constance here, but we hoped we'd have a glimpse of you; but you're rushing around so."

Aghast, she led the way into the library. "What time is sister meeting you?" she asked when she could.

"Oh, in half an hour, if she isn't delayed."

She tried to be especially polite, to atone in advance for what impoliteness might be necessary later. In five minutes the bell rang again; there was the romantic figure on the porch, cut sharp and clear against the bleak sky; and up the steps behind him came Travis de Coppet and Ed Bement.

"Stay!" she whispered quickly. "These people will all go."

"I've two hours," he said. "Of course, I'll wait if you want me to."

She wanted to throw her arms around him then, but she controlled herself, even her hands. She introduced everyone, she sent for tea. The men asked Edward Dicer questions about the war and he parried them politely but restlessly.

After half an hour he asked Josephine: "Have you the time? I must keep track of my train."

They might have noticed the watch on his own wrist and taken the hint, but he fascinated them all, as though they had isolated a rare specimen and were determined to find out all about it. Even had they realized Josephine's state of mind, it would have seemed to them that she was selfish to want something of such general interest for her own.

The arrival of Constance, her married sister, did not help matters; again Dicer was caught up into the phenomenon of human curiosity. As the clock in the hall struck

six, he shot a desperate glance at Josephine. With a belated appreciation of the situation, the group broke itself up. Constance took the Dillons upstairs to the other sitting room, the two young men went home.

Silence, save for the voices fading off on the stairs, the automobile crunching away on the snow outside. Before a word was said, Josephine rang for the maid, and instructing her that she was not at home, closed the door into the hall. Then she went and sat down on the couch next to him and clasped her hands and waited.

"Thank God," he said. "I thought if they stayed another minute--"

"Wasn't it terrible?"

"I came out here because of you. The night you left New York I was ten minutes late getting to the train because I was detained at the French propaganda office. I'm not much good at letters. Since then I've thought of nothing but getting out here to see you."

"I felt sad." But not now; now she was thinking that in a moment she would be in his arms, feeling the buttons of his tunic press bruisingly against her, feeling his diagonal belt as something that bound them both and made her part of him. There were no doubts, no reservations, he was everything she wanted.

"I'm over here for six months more--perhaps a year. Then, if this damned war goes on, I'll have to go back. I suppose I haven't really got the right--"

"Wait--wait!" she cried. She wanted a moment longer to taste, to feel fully her happiness. "Wait," she repeated, putting her hand on his. She felt every object in the room vividly; she saw the seconds passing, each one carrying a load of loveliness toward the future. "All right; now tell me."

"Just that I love you," he whispered. She was in his arms, her hair against his cheek. "We haven't known each other long, and you're only eighteen, but I've learned to be afraid of waiting."

Now she leaned her head back until she was looking up at him, supported by his arm. Her neck curved gracefully, full and soft, and she leaned in toward his shoulder, as she knew how, so that her lips were every minute closer to him. "Now," she thought. He gave a funny little sigh and pulled her face up to his.

After a minute she leaned away from him and twisted herself upright.

"Darling--darling--darling," he said.

She looked at him, stared at him. Gently he pulled her over again and kissed her. This time, when she sat up, she rose and went across the room, where she opened a dish of almonds and dropped some in her mouth. Then she came back and sat beside him, looking straight ahead, then darting a sudden glance at him.

"What are you thinking, darling, darling Josephine?" She didn't answer; he put both hands over hers. "What are you feeling, then?"

As he breathed, she could hear the faint sound of his leather belt moving on his shoulder; she could feel his strong, kind handsome eyes looking at her; she could feel his proud self feeding on glory as others feed on security; she heard the jingle of spurs ring in his strong, rich, compelling voice.

"I feel nothing at all," she said.

"What do you mean?" He was startled.

"Oh, help me!" she cried. "Help me!"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Kiss me again."

He kissed her. This time he held on to her and looked down into her face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You mean you don't love me?"

"I don't feel anything."

"But you did love me."

"I don't know."

He let her go. She went across the room and sat down.

"I don't understand," he said after a minute.

"I think you're perfect," she said, her lips quivering.

"But I'm not—thrilling to you?"

"Oh, yes, very thrilling. I was thrilled all afternoon."

"Then what is it, darling?"

"I don't know. When you kissed me I wanted to laugh." It made her sick to say this, but a desperate, interior honesty drove her on. She saw his eyes change, saw him withdrawing a little from her. "Help me," she repeated.

"Help you how? You'll have to be more definite. I love you; I thought perhaps you loved me. That's all. If I don't please you—"

"But you do. You're everything—you're everything I've always wanted." Her voice continued inside herself: "But I've had everything."

"But you simply don't love me."

"I've got nothing to give you. I don't feel anything at all."

He got up abruptly. He felt her vast, tragic apathy pervading the room, and it set up an indifference in him now, too—a lot of things suddenly melted out of him.

"Good-by."

"You won't help me," she murmured abstractedly.

"How in the devil can I help you?" he answered impatiently. "You feel indifferent to me. You can't change that, but neither can I. Good-by."

"Good-by."

She was very tired and lay face downward on the couch with that awful, awful realization that all the old things are true. One cannot both spend and have. The love of her life had come by, and looking in her empty basket, she had found not a

flower left for him—not one. After a while she wept.

“Oh, what have I done to myself?” she wailed. “What have I done? What have I done?”