

Image on the Heart, F. Scott Fitzgerald

The train rolled into the little French town as if it were entering a dusty garden. As the floor of the railroad carriage trembled and shifted with the brakes, the stationary human figures outside the window became suddenly mobile as the train itself, and began running along beside it. The passengers seemed to blend right into the countryside as soon as the porters on the platform were running as fast as the train.

She was waiting for him—eight months was a long time and they were shy with each other for a moment. She had fair hair—delicate, shiny, essentially private hair—it was not arranged as blondes preferred at the moment but rather as if it were to be let down for someone alone sometime, somewhere. There was no direct challenge in it, and in her face there were the sort of small misproportions that kept her from being smooth and immediately pretty. But in her nineteen years she had managed to be a standard of beauty to two or three men—Tudy was lovely to those to whom she wanted to be lovely.

They got into one of those old-fashioned victorias that have a last refuge in the south of France; as the horse started off down the cobblestoned street, the man turned to the girl beside him and asked simply:

“Do you still want to marry me?”

“Yes, Tom.”

“Thank God.”

They interlaced hands and arms. Even though the cab was moving so slowly up a hill of the old town that pedestrians kept pace with them, it didn't seem necessary to let go. Everything seemed all right in this mellow Provencal sunshine.

“It seemed forever till you'd come,” Tudy murmured. “Forever and forever. The University closes in another week—and that's the end of my education.”

“You finish as a freshman.”

“Just a freshman. But I'd rather have had this than any finishing school—especially because you gave it to me.”

“I had to bring you up to my standard,” he said lightly. “Do you feel improved?”

“Do I! Maybe you think these French universities haven't got standards. It's—” She broke off to say suddenly: “There's you, Tom— don't you see? That French officer coming out of the magasin de tabac across the street—he's your double.”

Tom looked over toward the sleepy sidewalk, picked out the man, and agreed. “He does look like me, at least like I looked ten years ago. We'll have to look him up if he lives here.”

“I know him, he's been here a week on leave. He's a naval aviator from Toulon. I wanted to meet him because he looked so much like you.”

Like Tom the man was darkly blond and handsome with a flickering in his face, a firelight over high cheekbones. Not having thought much of the matter for years, he stared curiously at the naval officer—who recognized Tudy and waved at her—and said meditatively:

"So that's what Hook like."

A minute later the carriage clattered into a green cove under a roof of poplars; beneath the soft roof slept the Hotel des Thermes, tranquil as when it had been a Roman Bath two thousand years before.

"Of course, you'll stay on at your pension until Mother comes," he said.

"I have to, Tom. I'm still a student. Isn't that absurd—when you think that I'm a widow?"

The carriage had drawn up at the door. The concierge was bowing.

"Mother will be here in ten days—then the wedding—then we're off for Sicily."

She pressed his hand.

"In half an hour at the Pension Duval," she said. "I'll be in the front garden waiting."

"As soon as I snatch a bath," he said.

As the cab started off without him, Tudy squeezed back in the corner. She was trying not to think too much but irresistibly she kept saying to herself:

"I'm a lost soul maybe—I don't feel at all like I ought to feel. Oh, if he'd only come a week ago."

They had known each other for many years before this rendezvous in France. Or rather Tom had known her people, for he had thought of her as a little girl until one day at Rehoboth Beach a year before. Then word had gone around the hotel that there was a bride of a week whose husband had been tragically drowned that morning. Tom took charge of the immediate situation—it developed that she had no one to turn to and that she was left penniless. He fell in love with her and with her helplessness, and after a few months he persuaded her to let him lend her the money to go abroad and study for a year—and put something between herself and the past. There were no strings attached—indeed, nothing had been said—but he knew that she responded to him in so far as her grief permitted, and there was correspondence more and more intimate and in a few months he wrote asking her to marry him.

She wrote him a glowing answer—and thus it was that he was here. Thus it was that she sat opposite him in an outdoor restaurant on the Rue de Provence that night. The electric lights behind the leaves swayed into sight sometimes in a faint wind, making her head into a ball of white gold.

"Oh, you've been so good to me," she said. "And I really have worked hard, and I've loved it here."

"That's why I want to be married here, because I've so often thought of you in this old town—my heart's been here for eight months."

"And I've pictured you stopping here when you were a boy, and loving it so much you wanted to send me here."

"Did you really think of me—like your letters said?"

"Every day," she answered quickly. "Every letter was true. Sometimes I couldn't get home fast enough to write you."

If only he had come a week ago!

Tom talked on:

"And you like the idea of Sicily? I have two months. If you have any other place--"

"No, Sicily's all right--I mean Sicily's wonderful."

Four men, two of them naval officers, and a girl had come into the little cafe. One face among them emerged in the hundred little flashlights and dark patches of leaves--it was that of Lieutenant de Marine Riccard, the man Tudy had pointed out that afternoon. The party settled themselves at a table opposite, grouping and regrouping with laughter.

"Let's go," Tudy said suddenly. "We'll ride up to the University."

"But isn't that my double? I'm curious to meet him."

"Oh, he's very--young. He's just here on leave and he's going back soon, I think--he probably wants to talk to his friends. Do let's go."

Obediently he signaled for the check, but it was too late. Riccard has risen from the table, with him two of the other men.

"--'Sieu Croirier."

"--'Sieu Silve."

"--soir."

"--chantee."

"Why, we do look alike," Tom said to Riccard.

Riccard smiled politely.

"Excuse me? Oh, yes--I see--a little bit of a bit." Then he conceded rather haughtily, "I am the English type, I had a Scotswoman for a grandmother."

"You speak English well."

"I have known English and American people." Fragmentarily his eyes strayed towards Tudy. "You speak French well, I wish I could speak so good English. Tell me," he said intently, "do you know any tricks?"

"Tricks?" Tom asked in surprise.

"Americans all know tricks and I am like an American that way. We have been doing tricks this evening before we came here. Do you know the trick with the fork where you hit it so"--he illustrated with graphic gesturing--"and it lands here in the glass?"

"I've seen it. I can't do it."

"Neither can I mostly, but sometimes though. Garcon, bring a fork. Also there are some tricks with matches--very interesting. They make you think, these tricks."

Suddenly Tom remembered that though tricks were no hobby of his, he did happen to have with him something of the sort bought for a nephew and undelivered. It was in

his trunk in the hotel, and it was plain that Riccard would consider it a prince among jests. Pleased by the thought, he watched the French people bring their ready concentration, their delight in simple things made complex, to bear upon the forks and matches and handkerchiefs that presently came into play. He liked watching them; he felt young with them; he laughed in tune to Tudy's laughter—it was fine to be sitting beside her in the soft balm of a Provencal night watching French people make nonsense at the day's end..

He was an astute man, but he was so wrapped up in his dream of Tudy that it was not until two nights later that he realized something was not as it should be. They had invited several of her friends from the University and Lieutenant Riccard to dine with them in the same little cafe. Tom did the trick that he had recovered from his trunk, a familiar old teaser that depended on two little rubber bulbs connected by a thin cord two yards long.

One of the bulbs was planted under the table cloth beneath Riccard's plate, and by squeezing the other bulb from across the table, Tom was able to make the Frenchman's plate rise and fall inexplicably, jiggle, bump, tilt, and conduct itself in a generally supernatural manner. It was not Tom's notion of the cream of human wit, but Riccard had asked for it and so far as practical jokes go it was a decided success.

"I don't know what can be the matter with my fork tonight," Riccard said mournfully. "You Americans will think I am barbarian. There! I have done it again! Can it be that my hand is trembling?" He looked anxiously at his hands. "No—yet there it is—I am destined to spill things tonight. It is one of those matters in life that can never be explained—"

He started as the knife on his plate gave a little sympathetic clink.

"Mon Dieu!" Once again he attempted a logical treatment of the situation, but he was obviously disturbed and he kept a watchful eye on the plate. "It is because I haven't flown in ten days," he decided. "You see, I am used to currents of air, to adjustments very sudden, and when it does not come I imagine it—"

It was a warm night, but there was extra dew on his young forehead, and then Tudy's voice, very clear and piercing, cut through the tranquil air.

"Stop it, Tom. Stop it!"

He looked at her with an amazement as great as Riccard's. In fear of a contagious mirth he had been avoiding her eyes, but he saw suddenly that there was no mirth in her face at all—only an engrossed compassion.

His world tilted like the plate for a moment, righted itself; he explained to Riccard the mechanics of the joke, and then as a sort of atonement, presented him with the apparatus. Riccard, trying to get back at someone, tried immediately to put it into action, inveigling the proprietor of the restaurant to sit down on it, but for the time Tom only remembered the expression on Tudy's face when she had cried out. What did it mean when she could be so sorry for another man? Perhaps it was a general tenderness, perhaps her maternal instinct was so strong that he would be glad later when she felt that way about their children. Oh, she was good, but there was something in him unreconciled to the poignancy, the spontaneity of that cry—and on the way home in the cab he asked her:

"Are you by any chance interested in this French boy? If you are, it's all right with me. We've been apart for a long time and if you've changed—"

She took his face between her hands and looked into his eyes.

"How can you say that to me?"

"Well, I thought that maybe gratitude was influencing you—"

"Gratitude has nothing to do with it. You're the best man I ever knew."

"The point is, do I happen to be attractive to you?"

"Of course you are—other men seem unimportant when you're around. That's why I don't like to see them. Oh, Tom, I wish your mother would hurry so we can get married and leave here—"

As he caught her into his arms, she gave a sob that went through him like a knife. But as the minutes passed and she half lay in his arms in the shadow of the cab's awning, he loved her so much and felt so close to her that he couldn't believe anything could really have gone wrong.

Tudy took her examinations. "Not that they matter, because of course I'm not going on. But that's what you sent me for. I'm now 'finished.' Darling, do I look finished?"

He regarded her appraisingly.

"You've probably learned enough French to get you in trouble," he said. "You're a little sweeter, perhaps, but not much—there wasn't very much room for improvement."

"Oh, but French wasn't all I learned. How about Siamese? I sat next to the cutest little Siamese all during one lecture course, and he tried so desperately to make up to me. I learned to say, 'No, I will not climb out the window of the pension tonight' in Siamese. Do you want to hear me say it?"

It was a bright morning—he had called for her at eight to walk to the University. Arm in arm they strolled.

"What are you going to do while I'm being examined?" she asked.

"I'm going to get the car—"

"Our car—I'm wild to see it."

"It's a funny little thing, but it'll take us all over Italy—"

"Then what will you do the rest of the time, after you get the car?"

"Why, I'll try it out and then I'll probably stop in front of the cafe about noon and have a bock, and maybe run into Riccard or one of your French friends—"

"What do you talk about with Riccard?" she asked.

"Oh, we do tricks. We don't talk—not exactly, at least it doesn't seem like talk."

She hesitated. "I don't see why you like to talk to Riccard," she said at last.

"He's a very nice type, very impetuous and fiery—"

"I know," she said suddenly. "He once told me he'd resign his commission if I'd fly to China with him and fight in the war."

When she said this, they had come to a halt engulfed by a crowd of students pouring into the buildings. She joined them as if she had said nothing at all:

"Goodbye, darling. I'll be on this corner at one o'clock."

He walked thoughtfully down to the garage. She had told him a great deal. He wasn't asking her to fly to China; he was asking her to go for a quiet honeymoon in Sicily. He promised her security, not adventure.

"Well, it's absurd to be jealous of this man," he thought. "I'm just getting a little old before my time."

So in the week of waiting for his mother, he organized picnics and swimming parties and trips to Arles and Nimes, inviting Tudy's friends from the University, and they danced and sang and were very gay in little restaurant gardens and bistros all over that part of Provence—and behaved in such a harmless, lazy, wasteful summer manner that Tom, who wanted only to be alone with Tudy, almost managed to convince himself that he was having a good time...

...until the night on the steps of Tudy's pension when he broke the silence and told her he wasn't.

"Perhaps you'd better think it over," he said.

"Think what over, Tom?"

"Whether you love me enough to marry me."

Alarmed she cried: "Why, Tom, of course I do."

"I'm not so sure. I like to see you have a good time, but I'm not the sort of man who could ever play—well, call it 'background.' "

"But you're not background. I'm trying to please you, Tom; I thought you wanted to see a lot of young people and be very Provencal and dance the Carmagnol' and all that."

"But it seems to be Riccard who's dancing it with you. You didn't actually have to kiss him tonight."

"You were there—you saw. There was nothing secret about it. It was in front of a lot of people."

"I didn't like it."

"Oh, I'm sorry if it hurt you, Tom. It was all playing. Sometimes with a man it's difficult to avoid those things. You feel like a fool if you do. It was just Provence, just the lovely night—and I'll never see him again after three or four days."

He shook his head slowly.

"No, I've changed ideas. I don't think we'll see him any more at all."

"What?" Was it alarm or relief in her voice? "Oh, then all right, Tom—that's all right. You know best."

"Is that agreed then?"

"You're absolutely right," she repeated after a minute. "But I think we could see him once more, just before he goes."

"I'll see him tomorrow," he said almost gruffly. "You're not a child and neither is he. It isn't as if you were a debutante tapering off some heartsick swain."

"Then why can't you and I go away until he leaves."

"That's running away—that'd be a fine way to start a marriage."

"Well, do what you want," she said, and he saw by the starlight that her face was strained. "You know that more than anything in the world I want to marry you, Tom."

Next day on the Rue de Provence he encountered Riccard; by mutual instinct they turned to a table of the nearest cafe.

"I must talk to you," said Riccard.

"I wanted to talk to you," Tom said, but he waited.

Riccard tapped his breast pocket.

"I have a letter here from Tudy delivered by hand this morning."

"Yes?"

"You must understand that I am fond of you too, Tom—that I am very sad about the whole thing."

"Well, what?" Tom demanded impatiently. "If Tudy wrote that she was in love with you—"

Riccard tapped his pocket again.

"She did not say that. I could show you this letter—"

"I don't want to see it."

Their tempers were rising.

"You're upsetting Tudy," Tom said. "Your business is to keep out."

Riccard's answer was humble but his eyes were proud.

"I have no money," he said.

And, of all things, Tom was sorry for him.

"A girl must make her choice," he said kindly. "You're in the way now."

"I understand that, too. I shall perhaps shorten my leave. I shall borrow a friend's plane and fly down, and if I crash so much the better."

"That's nonsense."

They shook hands and Tom duplicated the other's formal little bow, succinct as a salute...

He picked up Tudy at her pension an hour later. She was lovely in an inky blue

muslin dress above which her hair shone like a silver angel. As they drove away from the house he said:

"I feel like a brute. But you can't have two men, can you—like a young girl at a dance?"

"Oh, I know it—don't talk about it, darling. He did it all. I haven't done anything I couldn't tell you about."

Riccard had said much the same thing. What bothered Tom was the image on the heart.

They drove southward past cliffs that might have had Roman lookouts posted on them, or that might have concealed barbarians waiting to drop boulders upon the Roman legions if they defiled through some pass.

Tom kept thinking: "Between Riccard and me which is the Roman, and which is the barbarian?"

...Over the crest of a cliff a singing dot came into sight—a dark bee, a hawk—an airplane. They looked up idly, then they were suddenly thinking the same thing, wondering if it were Riccard on his way back to the naval base in Toulon.

"It probably is." Her voice sounded dry and uninterested.

"It looks like an old-fashioned monoplane to me."

"Oh, I guess he can fly anything. He was picked to make some flight to Brazil that they called off. It was in the papers before you came—"

She broke off because of a sudden change of the situation in the sky. After passing over them the plane had begun to circle back, and in a moment its flight resolved itself into a slowly graduated spiral which was undoubtedly intended to center over the road a quarter of a mile ahead of them.

"What's he trying to do?" exclaimed Tom. "Drop flowers on us?"

She didn't answer. During what must have been less than a minute of time, the car and plane approached the same spot. Tom stopped the car.

"If this is one of his tricks, let's get out."

"Oh, he wouldn't—"

"But look!"

The plane had come out of its dive, straightened out and was headed straight for them. Tom caught at Tudy's hand, trying to pull her from the car, but he had misjudged the time and the plane was already upon them, with a roaring din—then suddenly it was over them and away.

"The fool!" Tom cried.

"He's a wonderful flier." Her face was still and calm. "He might have killed himself."

Tom got back in the car and sat looking at her for a moment. Then he turned the car around and started back the way they had come.

For a long time they drove in silence. Then she asked:

"What are you going to do—send me home to America?"

The simplicity of her question confused him; it was impossible to punish her for an episode that was no fault of her own, yet he had intended just that when he turned the car around.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, stalling.

Her face had that fatalistic helplessness that he had seen on it one day ten months before when he broke the news to her that her husband had left nothing. And the same wave of protective love that had swept over him then swept over him again now. In the same moment he realized that the tragedy of her marriage—which had come so quickly she scarcely knew what had happened—had not really matured her. And by protecting her from its consequences he had aided the retardation.

"You're just a girl," he said aloud. "I suppose it's my fault."

In that case his responsibility was not over, and deep in his heart he knew that in spite of her inopportune coquetry so obvious under her thin denials, he did not want it to be over. On the contrary he seized upon it as a reason for holding her to him.

"You're making a little trip," he said as they neared town. "But not to America. I want you to go up to Paris for three or four days and shop a little. Meanwhile I'll go down to Marseilles and meet Mother."

Tudy cheered up at the suggestion.

"I'll get my graduation dress and my trousseau at the same time."

"All right, but I want you to leave this afternoon. So pack your bags right away."

An hour later they stood together in the station.

"I miss my exam tomorrow," she said.

"But it'll give you a chance to come down to earth."

He hated the phrase even as it left his lips: To come down to earth—was that an appealing prospect to hold out to any woman?

"Goodbye, dearest, dearest Tom."

As the train started off he ran beside it a moment, throwing into her window a packet of two bright handkerchiefs she had liked in a bazaar.

"Thanks—oh, thanks."

It was a long platform—when he came out at its end into the sunlight he stopped. There was his heart in motion with the train; he could feel the rip when the shadow of the last car broke from under the station roof.

She wrote immediately from Paris.

Oh, I miss you so, Tom. And I miss Provence, too. (Then a lot of erasing.) I miss everything that I've grown so fond of this last year. But I don't miss any person but you!

There are no Americans in the streets—maybe we belong at home now and always did. They have a life they never take us into. They plan their lives so differently. But our American lives are so strange that we can never figure things out ahead. Like the hurricanes in Florida and the tornadoes and floods. All of a sudden things happen to us and we hardly know what hit us.

But I guess we must like that sort of thing or our ancestors wouldn't have come to America. Does this make sense? There is a man knocking on the door with a package. More later.

Later:

Darling, it is my wedding dress and I cried on it just a little in the corner where I can wash it out. And darling, it makes me think of my other wedding dress and of how kind you have been to me and how I love you.

It is blue—oh, the frailest blue. I'm getting afraid I won't be able to get the tears out of the corner.

Later:

I did—and it is so lovely, hanging now in the closet with the door open. It's now eight o'clock—you know l'heure bleu—when everything is really blue—and I'm going to walk up to the Opera along the Avenue de l'Opera and then back to the hotel.

Before I go to sleep I'll think of you and thank you for the dress and the lovely year and the new life you're giving me.

Your devoted, your loving,
TUDY.

P.S. I still think I should have stayed and gone with you to meet your mother in Marseilles. She—

Tom broke off and went back to the signature: "Your devoted, your loving." Which was she? He read back over the letter pausing at any erasure, for an erasure often means an evasion, a second thought. And a love letter should come like a fresh stream from the heart, with no leaf on its current.

Then a second the next morning:

I'm so glad for your telegram—this will reach you just before you start down to Marseilles. Give your mother my dearest love and tell her how much I hate missing her and how I wish I could welcome her to Provence. (There were two lines crossed out and rewritten.) I will be starting back day after tomorrow. How funny it is to be buying things, when I never had any money like this to spend before—\$225.00—that's what it was, after I'd figured the hotel bill and even thought of keeping enough cash in hand so I won't arrive absolutely penniless.

I've bought two presents, I hope you won't mind, one for your mother and one for somebody else and that's you. And don't think I've stinted myself and that I won't be a pretty bride for you! In fact I haven't waited until my wedding day to find out. I've dressed all up half a dozen times and stood in front of the mirror.

I'll be glad when it's over. Won't you, darling? I mean I'll be glad when it's begun—won't you, darling?

Meanwhile, on the morning after she left, Tom had run into Riccard in the street. He nodded to him coldly, still angry about the airplane stunt, but Riccard seemed so unconscious of any guilt, seemed to think of it merely as a trick as innocuous

as the bulb under the plate, that Tom waived the matter and stood talking with him a while under the freckled poplar shadows.

"So you decided not to go," he remarked.

"Oh, I shall go, but not until tomorrow after all. And how is Madame—I mean Tudy?"

"She's gone up to Paris to do some shopping."

He felt a malicious satisfaction in seeing Riccard's face fall.

"Where does she stay there? I would like to send her a telegram of goodbye."

No, you don't, Tom thought. Aloud he lied:

"I'm not sure—the hotel where she was going to stay is full."

"When does she come back?"

"She gets here day after tomorrow morning. I'm going to meet her with the car at Avignon."

"I see." Riccard hesitated for a moment. "I hope you will be very happy," he said.

His face was sad and bright at once; he was a gallant and charming young man, and Tom was sorry for a moment that they had not met under other circumstances.

But next day, driving to Marseilles, a very different idea came to him. Suppose instead of going to the air base at Toulon today, Riccard should go to Paris. There were not an infinite number of good hotels and in a morning's search he might find out which was Tudy's. And in the inevitable emotion of a "last meeting," who could tell what might happen.

The worry so possessed him that when he reached Marseilles he put in a telephone call for the Naval Aviation Depot at Toulon.

"I'm calling Lieutenant Riccard," he said.

"I do not understand."

"Lieutenant Riccard."

"This is not Lieutenant Riccard, surely?"

"No. I want to speak to Lieutenant Riccard."

"Ah."

"Is he there?"

"Riccard—wait till I look in the orderly room book... Yes... he is here—or at least he was here."

Tom's heart turned over as he waited.

"He is here," said the voice. "He is in the mess room. One minute."

Tom put the receiver very gently on the hook. His first instinct was relief—Riccard could not make it now; then he felt ashamed of his suspicions. Strolling that

morning around a seaport where so many graver things had happened, he thought again of Tudy in a key above jealousy. He knew, though, that love should be a simpler, kinder thing; but every man loves out of something in himself that cannot be changed, and if he loved possessively and jealously, he could not help it.

Before he met his mother at the steamer he wired Tudy in Paris, asking an answer with a last thought that she might not be there. Bringing his mother back to the hotel for lunch he asked the concierge:

"Have you a telegram for me?"

It was there. His hands trembled as he opened it.

WHERE ELSE SHOULD I BE STOP LEAVING AT SIX TONIGHT AND REACHING AVIGNON TOMORROW MORNING AT FIVE A.M.
TUDY.

Driving up through Provence with his mother in the afternoon he said:

"You're very brave to try to go around the world by yourself at seventy-eight."

"I suppose I am," she said. "But your father and I wanted to see China and Japan—and that was not to be—so I sometimes think I'm going to see them for him, as if he were alive."

"You loved each other, didn't you?"

She looked at him as if his question was a young impertinence.

"Of course." Then she said suddenly: "Tom, is something making you unhappy?"

"Certainly not. Look what we're passing, Mother—you're not looking."

"It's a river—the Rhone, isn't it?"

"It's the Rhone. And after I've settled you at the Hotel des Thermes I'll be following this same river up to Avignon to meet my girl."

But he had a curious fear as he passed through the great gate of Avignon at four o'clock next morning that she would not be there. There had been a warning in the thin song of his motor, in the closed ominous fronts of the dark villages, in the gray break of light in the sky. He drank a glass of beer in the station buffet where several Italian emigrant families were eating from their baskets. Then he went out on the station platform and beckoned to a porter.

"There will be a lady with some baggage to carry."

Now the train was coming out of the blue dawn. Tom stood midway on the platform trying to pick out a face at a window or vestibule as it slid to rest, but there was no face. He walked along beside the sleepers, but there was only an impatient conductor taking off small baggage. Tom went up to look at the luggage thinking maybe it was hers, that it was new and he hadn't recognized it—then suddenly the train was in motion. Once more he glanced up and down the platform.

"Tom!"

She was there.

"Tudy—it's you."

"Didn't you expect me?"

She looked wan and tired in the faint light. His instinct was to pick her up and carry her out to the car.

"I didn't know there was another wagon-lit," he said excitedly. "Thank heaven there was."

"Darling, I'm so glad to see you. All this is my trousseau, that I told you about. Be careful of them, porter—the strings won't hold probably."

"Put this luggage in the car," he said to the porter. "We're going to have coffee in the buffet."

"Bien, Monsieur."

In the buffet Tudy took smaller packages from her purse.

"This is for your mother. I spent a whole morning finding this for her and I wouldn't show it to you for anything."

She found another package.

"This for you, but I won't open it now. Oh, I was going to be so economical, but I bought two presents for you. I haven't ten francs left. It's good you met me."

"Darling, you're talking so much you're not eating."

"I forgot."

"Well, eat—and drink your coffee. I don't mean hurry—it's only half-past four in the morning."

They drove back through a day that was already blooming; there were peasants in the fields who looked at them as they went by, crawling up on one knee to stare over the tips of the young vines.

"What do we do now?" she said. "Oh, yes, now we get married."

"We certainly do—tomorrow morning. And when you get married in France, you know you've been married. I spent the whole first day you were away signing papers. Once I had to forge your signature, but I gave the man ten francs—"

"Oh, Tom—" she interrupted softly. "Don't talk for a minute. It's so beautiful this morning, I want to look at it."

"Of course, darling." He looked at her. "Is something the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm just confused." She smoothed her face with her hands as if she were parting it in the middle. "I'm almost sure I left something, but I can't think what."

"Weddings are always confusing," he said consolingly. "I'm supposed to forget the ring or something by the best traditions. Now just think of that—the groom has to remember to forget the ring."

She laughed and her mood seemed to change, but when Tom saw her at intervals in the packing and preparations of the day, he noticed that the air of confusion, of

vagueness, remained about her. But next morning when he called at her pension at nine, she seemed so beautiful to him with her white-gold hair gleaming above her frail blue frock that he remembered only how much he loved her.

"But don't crush my bouquet," she said. "Are you sure you want me?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Even if—even if I have been rather foolish?"

"Of course."

"Even if—"

He kissed her lips gently.

"That'll do," he said. "I know you were a little in love with Riccard, but it's all over and we won't ever mention it again—is that agreed?"

Momentarily she seemed to hesitate. "Yes, Tom."

So they were married. And it seemed very strange to be married in France. Afterward they gave a little breakfast for a few friends at the hotel and afterward Tudy, who had moved over from the pension the day before, went upstairs to change her clothes and do her last packing, while Tom went to his mother's room and sat with her for a while. She was not starting off with them, but would rest here a day or two and then motor down to Marseilles to catch another boat.

"I worry about your being alone," he said.

"I know my way about, son. You just think about Tudy—remember, you've given her her head for eight months and she may need a little firmness. You're twelve years older than she is and you ought to be that much wiser—" She broke off, "But every marriage works out in its own way."

Leaving his mother's room Tom went down to the office to pay his bill.

"Someone wishes to see Monsieur," said the clerk.

It was a French railroad conductor carrying a package.

"Bonjour, Monsieur," he said politely. "Is it you who has just been married to the young lady who traveled on the P. L. M. yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I did not like to disturb Madame on such a morning, but she left this on the train. It is a cloak."

"Oh, yes," said Tom. "She just missed it this morning."

"I had a little time off duty so I thought I'd bring it myself."

"We're very much obliged. Here's a fifty—no, here's a hundred francs."

The conductor looked at the size of Tom's tip and sighed.

"I cannot keep all this. This is too generous."

"Nonsense! I've been married this morning."

He pressed the money into the man's hand.

"You are very kind, Monsieur. Au revoir, Monsieur. But wait—" He fumbled in his pocket. "I was so full of emotion at your generosity that I almost forgot. This is another article I found—it may belong to Madame or to her brother who got off at Lyons. I have not been able to figure what it is. Au revoir again, Monsieur, and thank you. I appreciate an American gentleman—"

He waved goodbye as he went down the stairs.

Tom was holding in his hands two bulbs of an apparatus that were connected by a long tube. If you pressed one bulb the air went through the tube and inflated the other.

When he came into Tudy's room she was staring out the window in the direction of the University.

"Just taking a last look at my finishing school," she said. "Why, what's the matter?"

He was thinking faster than he ever had in his life.

"Here's your cloak," he said. "The conductor brought it."

"Oh, good! It was an old cloak but—"

"And here's this—" He showed her what he held in his hand. "It seems your brother left it on the train."

The corners of her mouth fell and her eyes pulled her young forehead into a hundred unfamiliar lines. In one moment her face took on all the anguish in the world.

"All right," she said, after a minute. "I knew I should have told you. I tried to tell you this morning. Riccard flew up to Paris in time to meet me in the station and ride south with me. I had no idea he was coming."

"But no doubt you were pleasantly surprised," he said dryly.

"No, I wasn't, I was furious. I didn't see how he knew I was coming south on that train. That's all there was to it, Tom—he rode down as far as Lyons with me. I started to tell you but you were so happy this morning and I couldn't bear to."

Their eyes met, hers wavered away from his out into the great soft-shaking poplar trees.

"I know I can never make you believe it was all right," she said dully. "I suppose we can get an annulment."

The sunlight fell on the square corners of her bags, parked and ready to go.

"I was just getting on the train when I saw him," she said. "There was nothing I could do. Oh, it's so awful—and if he just hadn't dropped that terrible trick you'd never have known."

Tom walked up and down the room a minute.

"I know you're through with me," Tudy said. "Anyhow, you'd just reproach me all the

rest of my life. So we'd better quit. We can call it off."

..We can die, too, he was thinking. He had never wanted anything so much in his life as he wanted to believe her. But he had to decide now not upon what was the truth, for that he would never know for certain, but upon the question as to whether he could now and forever put the matter out of his mind, or whether it would haunt their marriage like a ghost. Suddenly he decided:

"No, we won't quit—we'll try it. And there'll never be any word of reproach."

Her face lighted up; she rose and came toward him and he held her close for a minute.

"We'll go right now," he said.

An hour later they drove away from the hotel, both of them momentarily cheered by the exhilaration of starting a journey, with the little car bulging with bags and new vistas opening up ahead. But in the afternoon as they curved down through Provence, they were silent for a while each with a separate thought. His thought was that he would never know—what her thought was must be left unfathomed—and perhaps unfathomable in that obscure pool in the bottom of every woman's heart.

Toward evening as they reached the seaboard and turned east following a Riviera that twinkled with light, they came out of their separate selves and were cheerful together. When the stars were bright on the water he said:

"We'll build our love up and not down."

"I won't have to build my love up," she said loyally. "It's up in the skies now."

They came to the end of France at midnight and looked at each other with infinite hope as they crossed the bridge over into Italy, into the new sweet warm darkness.

Note

The story was written in Asheville in September 1935, with the working titles "Finishing School" and "A Course in Languages." After the Post apparently declined it, it was finally published in McCall's in April 1936. This story documents Fitzgerald's difficulty in producing commercial stories during 1936-1937. It seems padded with sight-seeing to achieve the required magazine length.