

John Jackson's Arcady, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

The first letter, crumpled into an emotional ball, lay at his elbow, and it did not matter faintly now what this second letter contained. For a long time after he had stripped off the envelope, he still gazed up at the oil painting of slain grouse over the sideboard, just as though he had not faced it every morning at breakfast for the past twelve years. Finally he lowered his eyes and began to read:

"Dear Mr. Jackson:

This is just a reminder that you have consented to speak at our annual meeting Thursday. We don't want to dictate your choice of a topic, but it has occurred to me that it would be interesting to hear from you on What Have I Got Out of Life. Coming from you this should be an inspiration to everyone.

"We are delighted to have you anyhow, and we appreciate the honor that you confer on us by coming at all.

Most cordially yours,
ANTHONY ROREBACK,
Sec. Civic Welfare League."

"What have I got out of life?" repeated John Jackson aloud, raising up his head.

He wanted no more breakfast, so he picked up both letters and went out on his wide front porch to smoke a cigar and lie about for a lazy half hour before he went downtown. He had done this each morning for ten years—ever since his wife ran off one windy night and gave him back the custody of his leisure hours. He loved to rest on this porch in the fresh warm mornings and through a porthole in the green vines watch the automobiles pass along the street, the widest, shadiest, pleasantest street in town.

"What have I got out of life?" he said again, sitting down on a creaking wicker chair; and then, after a long pause, he whispered, "Nothing."

The word frightened him. In all his forty-five years he had never said such a thing before. His greatest tragedies had not embittered him, only made him sad. But here beside the warm friendly rain that tumbled from his eaves onto the familiar lawn, he knew at last that life had stripped him clean of all happiness and all illusion.

He knew this because of the crumpled ball which closed out his hope in his only son. It told him what a hundred hints and indications had told him before; that his son was weak and vicious, and the language in which it was conveyed was no less emphatic for being polite. The letter was from the dean of the college at New Haven, a gentleman who said exactly what he meant in every word:

"Dear Mr. Jackson:

It is with much regret that I write to tell you that your son, Ellery Hamil Jackson, has been requested to withdraw from the university. Last year largely, I am afraid, out of personal feeling toward you, I yielded to your request that he be allowed another chance. I see now that this was a mistake, and I should be failing in my duty if I did not tell you that he is not the sort of boy we want here. His conduct at the sophomore dance was such that several undergraduates took it upon themselves to administer violent correction.

"It grieves me to write you this, but I see no advantage in presenting the case otherwise than as it is. I have requested that he leave New Haven by the day after tomorrow. I am, sir,

"Yours very sincerely,
AUSTIN SCHEMMERHORN
Dean of the College."

What particularly disgraceful thing his son had done John Jackson did not care to imagine. He knew without any question that what the dean said was true. Why, there were houses already in this town where his son, John Jackson's son, was no longer welcome! For a while Ellery had been forgiven because of his father, and he had been more than forgiven at home, because John Jackson was one of those rare men who can forgive even their own families. But he would never be forgiven any more. Sitting on his porch this morning beside the gentle April rain, something had happened in his father's heart.

"What have I had out of life?" John Jackson shook his head from side to side with quiet, tired despair. "Nothing!"

He picked up the second letter, the civic-welfare letter, and read it over; and then helpless, dazed laughter shook him physically until he trembled in his chair. On Wednesday, at the hour when his delinquent boy would arrive at the motherless home, John Jackson would be standing on a platform downtown, delivering one hundred resounding platitudes of inspiration and cheer. "Members of the association"—their faces, eager, optimistic, impressed, would look up at him like hollow moons—"I have been requested to try to tell you in a few words what I have had from life—"

Many people would be there to hear, for the clever young secretary had hit upon a topic with the personal note—what John Jackson, successful, able and popular, had found for himself in the tumultuous grab bag. They would listen with wistful attention, hoping that he would disclose some secret formula that would make their lives as popular and successful and happy as his own. They believed in rules; all the young men in the city believed in hard-and-fast rules, and many of them clipped coupons and sent away for little booklets that promised them the riches and good fortune they desired.

"Members of the association, to begin with, let me say that there is so much in life that if we don't find it, it is not the fault of life, but of ourselves."

The ring of the stale, dull words mingled with the patter of the rain went on and on endlessly, but John Jackson knew that he would never make that speech, or any speeches ever again. He had dreamed his last dream too long, but he was awake at last.

"I shall not go on flattering a world that I have found unkind," he whispered to the rain. "Instead, I shall go out of this house and out of this town and somewhere find again the happiness that I possessed when I was young."

Nodding his head, he tore both letters into small fragments and dropped them on the table beside him. For half an hour longer he sat there, rocking a little and smoking his cigar slowly and blowing the blue smoke out into the rain.

II

Down at his office, his chief clerk, Mr. Fowler, approached him with his morning smile.

"Looking fine, Mr. Jackson. Nice day if it hadn't rained."

"Yeah," agreed John Jackson cheerfully. "Clear up in an hour. Anybody outside?"

"A lady named Mrs. Ralston."

Mr. Fowler raised his grizzled eyebrows in facetious mournfulness.

"Tell her I can't see her," said John Jackson, rather to his clerk's surprise. "And let me have a pencil memorandum of the money I've given away through her these twenty years."

"Why—yes, sir."

Mr. Fowler had always urged John Jackson to look more closely into his promiscuous charities; but now, after these two decades, it rather alarmed him.

When the list arrived—its preparation took an hour of burrowing through old ledgers and check stubs—John Jackson studied it for a long time in silence.

"That woman's got more money than you have," grumbled Fowler at his elbow. "Every time she comes in she's wearing a new hat. I bet she never hands out a cent herself—just goes around asking other people."

John Jackson did not answer. He was thinking that Mrs. Ralston had been one of the first women in town to bar Ellery Jackson from her house. She did quite right, of course; and yet perhaps back there when Ellery was sixteen, if he had cared for some nice girl—

"Thomas J. MacDowell's outside. Do you want to see him? I said I didn't think you were in, because on second thoughts, Mr. Jackson, you look tired this morning—"

"I'll see him," interrupted John Jackson.

He watched Fowler's retreating figure with an unfamiliar expression in his eyes. All that cordial diffuseness of Fowler's—he wondered what it covered in the man's heart. Several times, without Fowler's knowledge, Jackson had seen him giving imitations of the boss for the benefit of the other employes; imitations with a touch of malice in them that John Jackson had smiled at then, but that now crept insinuatingly into his mind.

"Doubtless he considers me a good deal of a fool," murmured John Jackson thoughtfully, "because I've kept him long after his usefulness was over. It's a way men have, I suppose, to despise anyone they can impose on."

Thomas J. MacDowell, a big barn door of a man with huge white hands, came boisterously into the office. If John Jackson had gone in for enemies he must have started with Tom MacDowell. For twenty years they had fought over every question of municipal affairs, and back in 1908 they had once stood facing each other with clenched hands on a public platform, because Jackson had said in print what everyone knew—that MacDowell was the worst political influence that the town had ever known. That was forgotten now; all that was remembered of it went into a peculiar flash of the eye that passed between them when they met.

"Hello, Mr. Jackson," said MacDowell with full, elaborate cordiality. "We need your help and we need your money."

"How so?"

"Tomorrow morning, in the Eagle, you'll see the plan for the new Union Station. The only thing that'll stand in the way is the question of location. We want your land."

"My land?"

"The railroad wants to build on the twenty acres just this side of the river, where your warehouse stands. If you'll let them have it cheap we get our station; if not, we can just whistle into the air."

Jackson nodded.

"I see."

"What price?" asked MacDowell mildly.

"No price."

His visitor's mouth dropped open in surprise.

"That from you?" he demanded.

John Jackson got to his feet.

"I've decided not to be me local goat any more," he announced steadily. "You threw out the only fair, decent plan because it interfered with some private reservations of your own. And now that there's a snag, you'd like the punishment to fall on me. I tear down my warehouse and hand over some of the best property in the city for a song because you made a little 'mistake' last year!"

"But last year's over now," protested MacDowell. "Whatever happened then doesn't change the situation now. The city needs the station, and so"—there was a faint touch of irony in his voice—"and so naturally I come to its leading citizen, counting on his well-known public spirit."

"Go out of my office, MacDowell," said John Jackson suddenly. "I'm tired."

MacDowell scrutinized him severely.

"What's come over you today?"

Jackson closed his eyes.

"I don't want to argue," he said after a while.

MacDowell slapped his fat upper leg and got to his feet.

"This is a funny attitude from you," he remarked. "You better think it over."

"Good-by."

Perceiving, to his astonishment, that John Jackson meant what he said, MacDowell took his monstrous body to the door.

"Well, well," he said, turning and shaking his finger at Jackson as if he were a bad boy, "who'd have thought it from you after all?"

When he had gone Jackson rang again for his clerk.

"I'm going away," he remarked casually. "I may be gone for some time—perhaps a week, perhaps longer. I want you to cancel every engagement I have and pay off my servants at home and close up my house."

Mr. Fowler could hardly believe his ears.

"Close up your house?"

Jackson nodded.

"But why—why is it?" demanded Fowler in amazement.

Jackson looked out the high window upon the gray little city drenched now by slanting, slapping rain—his city, he had felt sometimes, in those rare moments when life had lent him time to be happy. That flash of green trees running up the main boulevard—he had made that possible, and Children's Park, and the white dripping buildings around Courthouse Square over the way.

"I don't know," he answered, "but I think I ought to get a breath of spring."

When Fowler had gone he put on his hat and raincoat and, to avoid anyone who might be waiting, went through an unused filing room that gave access to the elevator. The filing room was actively inhabited this morning, however; and, rather to his surprise, by a young boy about nine years old, who was laboriously writing his initials in chalk on the steel files.

"Hello!" exclaimed John Jackson.

He was accustomed to speak to children in a tone of interested equality.

"I didn't know this office was occupied this morning."

The little boy looked at him steadily.

"My name's John Jackson Fowler," he announced.

"What?"

"My name's John Jackson Fowler."

"Oh, I see. You're—you're Mr. Fowler's son?"

"Yeah, he's my father."

"I see." John Jackson's eyes narrowed a little. "Well, I bid you good morning."

He passed on out the door, wondering cynically what particular ax Fowler hoped to grind by this unwarranted compliment. John Jackson Fowler! It was one of his few sources of relief that his own son did not bear his name.

A few minutes later he was writing on a yellow blank in the telegraph office below:

"ELLERY JACKSON, CHAPEL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT.

"THERE IS NOT THE SLIGHTEST REASON FOR COMING HOME, BECAUSE YOU HAVE NO HOME TO COME TO ANY MORE. THE MAMMOTH TRUST COMPANY OF NEW YORK WILL PAY YOU FIFTY DOLLARS A MONTH FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, OR FOR AS LONG AS YOU CAN KEEP YOURSELF OUT OF JAIL.

"JOHN JACKSON."

"That's—that's a long message, sir," gasped the dispatcher, startled. "Do you want it to go straight?"

"Straight," said John Jackson, nodding.

III

He rode seventy miles that afternoon, while the rain dried up into rills of dust on the windows of the train and the country became green with vivid spring. When the sun was growing definitely crimson in the west he disembarked at a little lost town named Florence, just over the border of the next state. John Jackson had been born in this town; he had not been back here for twenty years.

The taxi driver, whom he recognized, silently, as a certain George Stirling, playmate of his youth, drove him to a battered hotel, where, to the surprise of the delighted landlord, he engaged a room. Leaving his raincoat on the sagging bed, he strolled out through a deserted lobby into the street.

It was a bright, warm afternoon, and the silver sliver of a moon riding already in the east promised a clear, brilliant night. John Jackson walked along a somnolent Main Street, where every shop and hitching post and horse fountain made some strange thing happen inside him, because he had known these things for more than inanimate objects as a little boy. At one shop, catching a glimpse of a familiar face through the glass, he hesitated; but changing his mind, continued along the street, turning off at a wide road at the corner. The road was lined sparsely by a row of battered houses, some of them repainted a pale unhealthy blue and all of them set far back in large plots of shaggy and unkempt land.

He walked along the road for a sunny half mile—a half mile shrunk up now into a short green aisle crowded with memories. Here, for example, a careless mule had stamped permanently on his thigh the mark of an iron shoe. In that cottage had lived two gentle old maids, who gave brown raisin cakes every Thursday to John Jackson and his little brother—the brother who had died as a child.

As he neared the end of his pilgrimage his breath came faster and the house where he was born seemed to run up to him on living feet. It was a collapsed house, a retired house, set far back from the road and sunned and washed to the dull color of old wood.

One glance told him it was no longer a dwelling. The shutters that remained were closed tight, and from the tangled vines arose, as a single chord, a rich shrill sound of a hundred birds. John Jackson left the road and stalked across the yard knee-deep in abandoned grass. When he came near, something choked up his throat. He paused and sat down on a stone in a patch of welcome shade.

This was his own house, as no other house would ever be; within these plain walls he had been incomparably happy. Here he had known and learned that kindness which he had carried into life. Here he had found the secret of those few simple decencies, so often invoked, so inimitable and

so rare, which in the turmoil of competitive industry had made him to coarser men a source of half-scoffing, half-admiring surprise. This was his house, because his honor had been born and nourished here; he had known every hardship of the country poor, but no preventable regret.

And yet another memory, a memory more haunting than any other, and grown strong at this crisis in his life, had really drawn him back. In this yard, on this battered porch, in the very tree over his head, he seemed still to catch the glint of yellow hair and the glow of bright childish eyes that had belonged to his first love, the girl who had lived in the long-vanished house across the way. It was her ghost who was most alive here, after all.

He got up suddenly, stumbling through the shrubbery, and followed an almost obliterated path to the house, starting at the whirring sound of a blackbird which rose out of the grass close by. The front porch sagged dangerously at his step as he pushed open the door. There was no sound inside, except the steady slow throb of silence; but as he stepped in a word came to him, involuntary as his breath, and he uttered it aloud, as if he were calling to someone in the empty house.

"Alice," he cried; and then louder, "Alice!"

From a room at the left came a short, small, frightened cry. Startled, John Jackson paused in the door, convinced that his own imagination had evoked the reality of the cry.

"Alice!" he called doubtfully.

"Who's there?"

There was no mistake this time. The voice, frightened, strange, and yet familiar, came from what had once been the parlor, and as he listened John Jackson was aware of a nervous step within. Trembling a little, he pushed open the parlor door.

A woman with alarmed bright eyes and reddish gold hair was standing in the center of the bare room. She was of that age that trembles between the enduring youth of a fine, unworried life and the imperative call of forty years, and there was that indefinable loveliness in her face that youth gives sometimes just before it leaves a dwelling it has possessed for long. Her figure, just outside of slenderness, leaned with dignified grace against the old mantel on which her white hand rested, and through a rift in the shutter a shaft of late sunshine fell through upon her gleaming hair.

When John Jackson came in the doorway her large gray eyes closed and then opened again, and she gave another little cry. Then a curious thing happened; they stared at each other for a moment without a word, her hand dropped from the mantel and she took a swaying step toward him. And, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, John Jackson came forward, too, and took her into his arms and kissed her as if she were a little child.

"Alice!" he said huskily.

She drew a long breath and pushed herself away from him.

"I've come back here," he muttered unsteadily, "and find you waiting in this room where we used to sit, just as if I'd never been away."

"I only dropped in for a minute," she said, as if that was the most important thing in the world. "And now, naturally, I'm going to cry."

"Don't cry."

"I've got to cry. You don't think"—she smiled through wet eyes—"you don't think that things like this hap—happen to a person every day."

John Jackson walked in wild excitement to the window and threw it open to the afternoon.

"What were you doing here?" he cried, turning around. "Did you just come by accident today?"

"I come every week. I bring the children sometimes, but usually I come alone."

"The children!" he exclaimed. "Have you got children?"

She nodded.

"I've been married for years and years."

They stood there looking at each other for a moment; then they both laughed and glanced away.

"I kissed you," she said.

"Are you sorry?"

She shook her head.

"And the last time I kissed you was down by that gate ten thousand years ago."

He took her hand, and they went out and sat side by side on the broken stoop. The sun was painting the west with sweeping bands of peach bloom and pigeon blood and golden yellow.

"You're married," she said. "I saw in the paper—years ago."

He nodded.

"Yes, I've been married," he answered gravely. "My wife went away with someone she cared for many years ago."

"Ah, I'm sorry." And after another long silence—"It's a gorgeous evening, John Jackson."

"It's a long time since I've been so happy."

There was so much to say and to tell that neither of them tried to talk, but only sat there holding hands, like two children who had wandered for a long time through a wood and now came upon each other with unimaginable happiness in an accidental glade. Her husband was poor, she said; he knew that from the worn, unfashionable dress which she wore with such an air. He was George Harland—he kept a garage in the village.

"George Harland—a red-headed boy?" he asked wonderingly.

She nodded.

"We were engaged for years. Sometimes I thought we'd never marry. Twice I postponed it, but it was getting late to just be a girl—I was twenty-five, and so finally we did. After that I was in love with him for over a year."

When the sunset fell together in a jumbled heap of color in the bottom of the sky, they strolled back along the quiet road, still hand in hand.

"Will you come to dinner? I want you to see the children. My oldest boy is just fifteen."

She lived in a plain frame house two doors from the garage, where two little girls were playing around a battered and ancient but occupied baby carriage in the yard.

"Mother! Oh, mother!" they cried.

Small brown arms swirled around her neck as she knelt beside them on the walk.

"Sister says Anna didn't come, so we can't have any dinner."

"Mother'll cook dinner. What's the matter with Anna?"

"Anna's father's sick. She couldn't come."

A tall, tired man of fifty, who was reading a paper on the porch, rose and slipped a coat over his suspenders as they mounted the steps.

"Anna didn't come," he said in a noncommittal voice.

"I know. I'm going to cook dinner. Who do you suppose this is here?"

The two men shook hands in a friendly way, and with a certain deference to John Jackson's clothes and his prosperous manner, Harland went inside for another chair.

"We've heard about you a great deal, Mr. Jackson," he said as Alice disappeared into the kitchen. "We heard about a lot of ways you made them sit up and take notice over yonder."

John nodded politely, but at the mention of the city he had just left a wave of distaste went over him.

"I'm sorry I ever left here," he answered frankly. "And I'm not just saying that either. Tell me what the years have done for you, Harland. I hear you've got a garage."

"Yeah—down the road a ways. I'm doing right well, matter of fact. Nothing you'd call well in the city," he added in hasty depreciation.

"You know, Harland," said John Jackson, after a moment, "I'm very much in love with your wife."

"Yeah?" Harland laughed. "Well, she's a pretty nice lady, I find."

"I think I always have been in love with her, all these years."

"Yeah?" Harland laughed again. That someone should be in love with his wife seemed the most casual pleasantry. "You better tell her about it. She don't get so many nice compliments as she used to in her young days."

Six of them sat down at table, including an awkward boy of fifteen, who looked like his father, and two little girls whose faces shone from a hasty toilet. Many things had happened in the town, John discovered; the factitious prosperity which had promised to descend upon it in the late 90's had vanished when two factories had closed up and moved away, and the population was smaller now by a few hundred than it had been a quarter of a century ago.

After a plentiful plain dinner they all went to the porch, where the children silhouetted themselves in silent balance on the railing and unrecognizable people called greeting as they passed along the dark, dusty street. After a while the younger children went to bed, and the boy and his father arose and put on their coats.

"I guess I'll run up to the garage," said Harland. "I always go up about this time every night. You two just sit here and talk about old times."

As father and son moved out of sight along the dim street John Jackson turned to Alice and slipped his arm about her shoulder and looked into her eyes.

"I love you, Alice."

"I love you."

Never since his marriage had he said that to any woman except his wife. But this was a new world tonight, with spring all about him in the air, and he felt as if he were holding his own lost youth in his arms.

"I've always loved you," she murmured. "Just before I go to sleep every night, I've always been able to see your face. Why didn't you come back?"

Tenderly he smoothed her hair. He had never known such happiness before. He felt that he had established dominance over time itself, so that it rolled away for him, yielding up one vanished springtime after another to the mastery of his overwhelming emotion.

"We're still young, we two people," he said exultantly. "We made a silly mistake a long, long time ago, but we found out in time."

"Tell me about it," she whispered.

"This morning, in the rain, I heard your voice."

"What did my voice say?"

"It said, 'Come home.'"

"And here you are, my dear."

"Here I am."

Suddenly he got to his feet.

"You and I are going away," he said. "Do you understand that?"

"I always knew that when you came for me I'd go."

Later, when the moon had risen, she walked with him to the gate.

"Tomorrow!" he whispered.

"Tomorrow!"

His heart was going like mad, and he stood carefully away from her to let footsteps across the way approach, pass and fade out down the dim street. With a sort of wild innocence he kissed her once more and held her close to his heart under the April moon.

IV

When he awoke it was eleven o'clock, and he drew himself a cool bath, splashing around in it with much of the exultation of the night before.

"I have thought too much these twenty years," he said to himself. "It's thinking that makes people old."

It was hotter than it had been the day before, and as he looked out the window the dust in the street seemed more tangible than on the night before. He breakfasted alone downstairs, wondering with the incessant wonder of the city man why fresh cream is almost unobtainable in the country. Word had spread already that he was home, and several men rose to greet him as he came into the lobby. Asked if he had a wife and

children, he said no, in a careless way, and after he had said it he had a vague feeling of discomfort.

"I'm all alone," he went on, with forced jocularly. "I wanted to come back and see the old town again."

"Stay long?" They looked at him curiously.

"Just a day or so."

He wondered what they would think tomorrow. There would be excited little groups of them here and there along the street with the startling and audacious news.

"See here," he wanted to say, "you think I've had a wonderful life over there in the city, but I haven't. I came down here because life had beaten me, and if there's any brightness in my eyes this morning it's because last night I found a part of my lost youth tucked away in this little town."

At noon, as he walked toward Alice's house, the heat increased and several times he stopped to wipe the sweat from his forehead. When he turned in at the gate he saw her waiting on the porch, wearing what was apparently a Sunday dress and moving herself gently back and forth in a rocking-chair in a way that he remembered her doing as a girl.

"Alice!" he exclaimed happily.

Her finger rose swiftly and touched her lips.

"Look out!" she said in a low voice.

He sat down beside her and took her hand, but she replaced it on the arm of her chair and resumed her gentle rocking.

"Be careful. The children are inside."

"But I can't be careful. Now that life's begun all over again, I've forgotten all the caution that I learned in the other life, the one that's past."

"Sh-h-h!"

Somewhat irritated, he glanced at her closely. Her face, unmoved and unresponsive, seemed vaguely older than it had yesterday; she was white and tired. But he dismissed the impression with a low, exultant laugh.

"Alice, I haven't slept as I slept last night since I was a little boy, except that several times I woke up just for the joy of seeing the same moon we once knew together. I'd got it back."

"I didn't sleep at all."

"I'm sorry."

"I realized about two o'clock or three o'clock that I could never go away from my children—even with you."

He was struck dumb. He looked at her blankly for a moment, and then he laughed—a short, incredulous laugh.

"Never, never!" she went on, shaking her head passionately. "Never, never, never! When I thought of it I began to tremble all over, right in my bed." She hesitated. "I don't know what came over me yesterday evening, John. When I'm with you, you can always make me do or feel or think just exactly what you like. But this is too late, I guess. It doesn't seem real at all; it just seems sort of crazy to me, as if I'd dreamed it, that's all."

John Jackson laughed again, not incredulously this time, but on a menacing note.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

She began to cry and hid her eyes behind her hand because some people were passing along the road.

"You've got to tell me more than that," cried John Jackson, his voice rising a little. "I can't just take that and go away."

"Please don't talk so loud," she implored him. "It's so hot and I'm so confused. I guess I'm just a small-town woman, after all. It seems somehow awful to be talking here with you, when my husband's working all day in the dust and heat."

"Awful to be talking here?" he repeated.

"Don't look that way!" she cried miserably. "I can't bear to hurt you so. You have children, too, to think of—you said you had a son."

"A son." The fact seemed so far away that he looked at her, startled. "Oh, yes, I have a son."

A sort of craziness, a wild illogic in the situation had communicated itself to him; and yet he fought blindly against it as he felt his own mood of ecstasy slipping away. For twenty hours he had recaptured the power of seeing things through a mist of hope—hope in some vague, happy destiny that lay just over the hill—and now with every word she uttered the mist was passing, the hope, the town, the memory, the very face of this woman before his eyes.

"Never again in this world," he cried with a last despairing effort, "will you and I have a chance at happiness!"

But he knew, even as he said this, that it had never been a chance; simply a wild, desperate sortie from two long-beleaguered fortresses by night.

He looked up to see that George Harland had turned in at the gate.

"Lunch is ready," called Alice, raising her head with an expression of relief. "John's going to be with us too."

"I can't," said John Jackson quickly. "You're both very kind."

"Better stay." Harland, in oily overalls, sank down wearily on the steps and with a large handkerchief polished the hot space beneath his thin gray hair. "We can give you some iced tea." He looked up at John. "I don't know whether these hot days make you feel your age like I feel mine."

"I guess—it affects all of us alike," said John Jackson with an effort. "The awful part of it is that I've got to go back to the city this afternoon."

"Really?" Harland nodded with polite regret.

"Why, yes. The fact is I promised to make a speech."

"Is that so? Speak on some city problem, I suppose."

"No; the fact is"—the words, forming in his mind to a senseless rhythm, pushed themselves out—"I'm going to speak on What Have I Got Out of Life."

Then he became conscious of the heat indeed; and still wearing that smile he knew so well how to muster, he felt himself sway dizzily against the porch rail. After a minute they were walking with him toward the gate.

"I'm sorry you're leaving," said Alice, with frightened eyes. "Come back and visit your old town again."

"I will."

Blind with unhappiness, he set off up the street at what he felt must be a stumble; but some dim necessity made him turn after he had gone a little way and smile back at them and wave his hand. They were still standing there, and they waved at him and he saw them turn and walk together into their house.

"I must go back and make my speech," he said to himself as he walked on, swaying slightly, down the street. "I shall get up and ask aloud 'What have I got out of life?' And there before them all I shall answer, 'Nothing.' I shall tell them the truth; that life has beaten me at every turning and used me for its own obscure purposes over and over; that everything I have loved has turned to ashes, and that every time I have stooped to pat a dog I have felt his teeth in my hand. And so at last they will learn the truth about one man's heart."

The meeting was at four, but it was nearly five when he dismounted from the sweltering train and walked toward the Civic Club hall. Numerous cars were parked along the surrounding streets, promising an unusually large crowd. He was surprised to find that even the rear of the hall was thronged with standing people, and that there were recurrent outbursts of applause at some speech which was being delivered upon the platform.

"Can you find me a seat near the rear?" he whispered to an attendant. "I'm going to speak later, but I don't—I don't want to go upon the platform just now."

"Certainly, Mr. Jackson."

The only vacant chair was half behind a pillar in a far corner of the hall, but he welcomed its privacy with relief; and settling himself, looked curiously around him. Yes, the gathering was large, and apparently enthusiastic. Catching a glimpse of a face here and there, he saw that he knew most of them, even by name; faces of men he had lived beside and worked with for twenty years. All the better. These were the ones he must reach now, as soon as that figure on the platform there ceased mouthing his hollow cheer.

His eyes swung back to the platform, and as there was another ripple of applause he leaned his face around the corner to see. Then he uttered a low exclamation—the speaker was Thomas MacDowell. They had not been asked to speak together in several years.

"I've had many enemies in my life," boomed the loud voice over the hall, "and don't think I've had a change of heart, now that I'm fifty and a little gray. I'll go on making enemies to the end. This is just a little lull when I want to take off my armor and pay a tribute to an enemy—because that enemy happens to be the finest man I ever knew."

John Jackson wondered what candidate or protege of MacDowell's was in question. It was typical of the man to seize any opportunity to make his own hay.

"Perhaps I wouldn't have said what I've said," went on the booming voice, "were he here today. But if all the young men in this city came up to me and asked me 'What is being honorable?' I'd answer them, 'Go up to that man and look into his eyes.' They're not happy eyes. I've often sat and looked at him and wondered what went on back of them that made those eyes so sad. Perhaps the fine, simple hearts that spend their hours smoothing other people's troubles never find time for happiness of their own. It's like the man at the soda fountain who never makes an ice-cream soda for himself."

There was a faint ripple of laughter here, but John Jackson saw wonderingly that a woman he knew just across the aisle was dabbing with a handkerchief at her eyes.

His curiosity increased.

"He's gone away now," said the man on the platform, bending his head and staring down for a minute at the floor: "gone away suddenly, I understand. He seemed a little strange when I saw him yesterday; perhaps he gave in at last under the strain of trying to do many things for many men. Perhaps this meeting we're holding here comes a little too late now. But we'll all feel better for having said our say about him.

"I'm almost through. A lot of you will think it's funny that I feel this way about a man who, in fairness to him, I must call an enemy. But I'm going to say one thing more"—his voice rose defiantly—"and it's a stranger thing still. Here, at fifty, there's one honor I'd like to have more than any honor this city ever gave me, or ever had it in its power to give. I'd like to be able to stand up here before you and call John Jackson my friend."

He turned away and a storm of applause rose like thunder through the hall. John Jackson half rose to his feet, and then sank back again in a stupefied way, shrinking behind the pillar. The applause continued until a young man arose on the platform and waved them silent.

"Mrs. Ralston," he called, and sat down.

A woman rose from the line of chairs and came forward to the edge of the stage and began to speak in a quiet voice. She told a story about a man whom—so it seemed to John Jackson—he had known once, but whose actions, repeated here, seemed utterly unreal, like something that had happened in a dream. It appeared that every year many hundreds of babies in the city owed their lives to something this man had done five years before; he had put a mortgage upon his own house to assure the children's hospital on the edge of town. It told how this had been kept secret at the man's own request, because he wanted the city to take pride in the hospital as a community affair, when but for the man's effort, made after the community attempt had failed, the hospital would never have existed at all.

Then Mrs. Ralston began to talk about the parks; how the town had baked for many years under the midland heat; and how this man, not a very rich man, had given up land and time and money for many months that a green line of shade might skirt the boulevards, and that the poor children could leave the streets and play in fresh grass in the center of town.

That was only the beginning, she said; and she went on to tell how, when any such plan tottered, or the public interest lagged, word was brought to John Jackson, and somehow he made it go and seemed to give it life out of his own body, until there was scarcely anything in this city that didn't have a little of John Jackson's heart in it, just as there were few people in this city that didn't have a little of their hearts for John Jackson.

Mrs. Ralston's speech stopped abruptly at this point. She had been crying a little for several moments, but there must have been many people there in the audience who understood what she meant—a mother or a child here and there who had been the recipients of some of that kindness—because the applause seemed to fill the whole room like an ocean, and echoed back and forth from wall to wall.

Only a few people recognized the short grizzled man who now got up from his chair in the rear of the platform, but when he began to speak silence settled gradually over the house.

"You didn't hear my name," he said in a voice which trembled a little, "and when they first planned this surprise meeting I wasn't expected to speak at all. I'm John Jackson's head clerk. Fowler's my name, and when they decided they were going to hold the meeting, anyhow, even though John Jackson had gone away, I thought perhaps I'd like to say a few words"—those who were closest saw his hands clench tighter—"say a few words that I couldn't say if John Jackson was here.

"I've been with him twenty years. That's a long time. Neither of us had gray hair when I walked into his office one day just fired from somewhere and asked him for a job. Since then I can't tell you, gentlemen, I can't tell you what his—his presence on this earth has meant to me. When he told me yesterday, suddenly, that he was going away, I thought to myself that if he never came back I didn't—I didn't want to go on living. That man makes everything in the world seem all right. If you knew how we felt around the office—" He paused and shook his head wordlessly. "Why, there's three of us there—the janitor and one of the other clerks and me—that have sons named after John Jackson. Yes, sir. Because none of us could think of anything better than for a boy to have that name or that example before him through life. But would we tell him? Not a chance. He wouldn't even know what it was all about. Why"—he sank his voice to a hushed whisper—"he'd just look at you in a puzzled way and say, 'What did you wish that on the poor kid for?'"

He broke off, for there was a sudden and growing interruption. An epidemic of head turning had broken out and was spreading rapidly from one corner of the hall until it had affected the whole assemblage. Someone had discovered John Jackson behind the post in the corner, and first an exclamation and then a growing mumble that mounted to a cheer swept over the auditorium.

Suddenly two men had taken him by the arms and set him on his feet, and then he was pushed and pulled and carried toward the platform, arriving somehow in a standing position after having been lifted over many heads.

They were all standing now, arms waving wildly, voices filling the hall with tumultuous clamor. Someone in the back of the hall began to sing "For he's a jolly good fellow," and five hundred voices took up the air and sang it with such feeling, with such swelling emotion, that all eyes were wet and the song assumed a significance far beyond the spoken words.

This was John Jackson's chance now to say to these people that he had got so little out of life. He stretched out his arms in a sudden gesture and they were quiet, listening, every man and woman and child.

"I have been asked—" His voice faltered. "My dear friends, I have been asked to—to tell you what I have got out of life—"

Five hundred faces, touched and smiling, every one of them full of encouragement and love and faith, turned up to him.

"What have I got out of life?"

He stretched out his arms wide, as if to include them all, as if to take to his breast all the men and women and children of this city. His voice rang in the hushed silence.

"Everything!"

At six o'clock, when he walked up his street alone, the air was already cool with evening. Approaching his house, he raised his head and saw that someone was sitting on the outer doorstep, resting his face in his hands. When John Jackson came up the walk, the caller—he was a young man with dark, frightened eyes—saw him and sprang to his feet.

"Father," he said quickly, "I got your telegram, but I—I came home."

John Jackson looked at him and nodded.

"The house was locked," said the young man in an uneasy way.

"I've got the key."

John Jackson unlocked the front door and preceded his son inside.

"Father," cried Ellery Jackson quickly, "I haven't any excuse to make—anything to say. I'll tell you all about it if you're still interested—if you can stand to hear—"

John Jackson rested his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Don't feel too badly," he said in his kind voice. "I guess I can always stand anything my son does."

This was an understatement. For John Jackson could stand anything now forever—anything that came, anything at all.

Notes

"John Jackson's Arcady" was written in April 1924—the last story Fitzgerald wrote in Great Neck before moving to the Riviera. The Post paid \$ 1750 for it. The departure for France was motivated by Fitzgerald's wish to escape the interruptions of metropolitan life, which had delayed work on *The Great Gatsby*, as well as by a desire to economize. Fitzgerald treated his financial problems humorously in two 1924 Post articles—"How to Live on \$36,000 a Year" and "How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year."

Although this story is marred by its patently sentimental ending, it is interesting as a treatment of Fitzgerald's roots-pilgrimage theme—reflecting his increasing sense of deracination and estrangement from his midwestern values.

In 1928 "John Jackson's Arcady" was re-published as a pamphlet for public reading contests.