

Presumption, F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Presumption" was written in Paris in November 1925. The Post paid \$2500—a raise of \$500—and printed it as a lead piece. The Great Gatsby had been published in April 1925, but its disappointing sale (23,000 copies) compelled Fitzgerald to resume writing stories instead of concentrating on a new novel. This story has obvious connections with Gatsby in its treatment of the poor boy who falls in love with a rich girl and sets out to win her by becoming financially worthy of her. Because "Presumption" was written for the Post it has a happy ending through one of the reversals of fortune that frequently occur in Fitzgerald's commercial fiction. "Rich girls can't live on air." Neither Fitzgerald nor their suitors expected them to.

I

Sitting by the window and staring out into the early autumn dusk, San Juan Chandler remembered only that Noel was coming tomorrow; but when, with a romantic sound that was half gasp, half sigh, he turned from the window, snapped on the light and looked at himself in the mirror, his expression became more materially complicated. He leaned closer. Delicacy balked at the abominable word "pimple", but some such blemish had undoubtedly appeared on his cheek within the last hour, and now formed, with a pair from last week, a distressing constellation of three. Going into the bathroom adjoining his room—Juan had never possessed a bathroom to himself before—he opened a medicine closet, and, after peering about, carefully extracted a promising-looking jar of black ointment and covered each slight protuberance with a black gluey mound. Then, strangely dotted, he returned to the bedroom, put out the light and resumed his vigil over the shadowy garden.

He waited. That roof among the trees on the hill belonged to Noel Garneau's house. She was coming back to it tomorrow; he would see her there... A loud clock on the staircase inside struck seven. Juan went to the glass and removed the ointment with a handkerchief. To his chagrin the spots were still there, even slightly irritated from the chemical sting of the remedy. That settled it—no more chocolate malted milks or eating between meals during his visit to Culpepper Bay. Taking the lid from the jar of talcum he had observed on the dressing table, he touched the laden puff to his cheek. Immediately his brows and lashes bloomed with snow and he coughed chokingly, observing that the triangle of humiliation was still observable upon his otherwise handsome face.

"Disgusting," he muttered to himself. "I never saw anything so disgusting." At twenty, such childish phenomena should be behind him.

Downstairs three gongs, melodious and metallic, hummed and sang. He listened for a moment, fascinated. Then he wiped the powder from his face, ran a comb through his yellow hair and went down to dinner.

Dinner at Cousin Cora's he had found embarrassing. She was so stiff and formal about things like that, and so familiar about Juan's private affairs. The first night of his visit he had tried politely to pull out her chair and bumped into the maid; the second night he remembered the

experience—but so did the maid, and Cousin Cora seated herself unassisted. At home Juan was accustomed to behave as he liked; like all children of deferent and indulgent mothers, he lacked both confidence and good manners. Tonight there were guests. "This is San Juan Chandler, my cousin's son—Mrs Holyoke—and Mr. Holyoke."

The phrase "my cousin's son" seemed to explain him away, seemed to account for his being in Miss Chandler's house: "You understand—we must have our poor relations with us occasionally." But a tone which implied that would be rude—and certainly Cousin Cora, with all her social position, couldn't be rude.

Mr and Mrs Holyoke acknowledged the introduction politely and coolly and dinner was served. The conversation, dictated by Cousin Cora, bored Juan. It was about the garden and about her father, for whom she lived and who was dying slowly and unwillingly upstairs. Towards the salad Juan was wedged into the conversation by a question from Mr Holyoke and a quick look from his cousin.

"I'm just staying for a week," he answered politely; "then I've got to go home because college opens pretty soon."

"Where are you at college?"

Juan named his college, adding almost apologetically, "You see, my father went there."

He wished that he could have answered that he was at Yale or Princeton, where he wanted to go. He was prominent at Henderson and belonged to a good fraternity, but it annoyed him when people occasionally failed to recognize his alma mater's name.

"I suppose you've met all the young people here," supposed Mrs Holyoke—"my daughter?"

"Oh, yes"—her daughter was the dumpy, ugly girl with the thick spectacles—"oh, yes." And he added, "I knew some people who lived here before I came."

"The little Garneau girl," explained Cousin Cora.

"Oh, yes. Noel Garneau," agreed Mrs Holyoke. "Her mother's a great beauty. How old is Noel now? She must be—"

"Seventeen," supplied Juan; "but she's old for her age."

"Juan met her on a ranch last summer. They were on a ranch together. What is it that they call those ranches, Juan?"

"Dude ranches."

"Dude ranches. Juan and another boy worked for their board." Juan saw no reason why Cousin Cora should have supplied this information; she continued on an even more annoying note: "Noel's mother sent her out

there to keep her out of mischief, but Juan says the ranch was pretty gay itself."

Mr Holyoke supplied a welcome change of subject.

"Your name is—" he inquired, smiling and curious.

"San Juan Chandler. My father was wounded in the battle of San Juan Hill and so they called me after it—like Kenesaw Mountain Landis."

He had explained this so many times that the sentences rolled off automatically—in school he had been called Santy, in college he was Don.

"You must come to dinner while you're here," said Mrs Holyoke vaguely.

The conversation slipped away from him as he realized freshly, strongly, that Noel would arrive tomorrow. And she was coming because he was here. She had cut short a visit in the Adirondacks on receipt of his letter. Would she like him now—in this place that was so different from Montana? There was a spaciousness, an air of money and pleasure about Culpepper for which San Juan Chandler—a shy, handsome, spoiled, brilliant, penniless boy from a small Ohio city—was unprepared. At home, where father was a retired clergyman, Juan went with the nice people. He didn't realize until this visit to a fashionable New England resort that where there are enough rich families to form a self-sufficient and exclusive group, such a group is invariably formed. On the dude ranch they had all dressed alike; here his ready-made Prince of Wales suit seemed exaggerated in style, his hat correct only in theory—an imitation hat—his very ties only projections of the ineffable Platonic ties which were worn here at Culpepper Bay. Yet all the differences were so small that he was unable quite to discern them.

But from the morning three days ago when he had stepped off the train into a group of young people who were waiting at the station for some friend of their own, he had been uneasy; and Cousin Cora's introductions, which seemed to foist him horribly upon whomever he was introduced to, did not lessen his discomfort. He thought mechanically that she was being kind, and considered himself lucky that her invitation had coincided with his wild desire to see Noel Garneau again. He did not realize that in three days he had come to hate Cousin Cora's cold and snobbish patronage.

Noel's fresh, adventurous voice on the telephone next morning made his own voice quiver with nervous happiness. She would call for him at two and they would spend the afternoon together. All morning he lay in the garden, trying unsuccessfully to renew his summer tan in the mild lemon light of the September sun, sitting up quickly whenever he heard the sound of Cousin Cora's garden shears at the end of a neighbouring border. He was back in his room, still meddling desperately with the white powder puff, when Noel's roadster stopped outside and she came up the front walk. Noel's eyes were dark blue, almost violet, and her lips, Juan had often thought, were like very small, very soft, red cushions—only cushions sounded all wrong, for they were really the most delicate lips in the world. When she talked they parted to the shape of "Oo!" and her eyes opened wide as though she was torn between tears and laughter at the

poignancy of what she was saying. Already, at seventeen, she knew that men hung on her words in a way that frightened her. To Juan her most indifferent remarks assumed a highly ponderable significance and begot an intensity in him—a fact which Noel had several times found somewhat of a strain. He ran downstairs, down the gravel path towards her. "Noel, my dear," he wanted so much to say, "you are the loveliest thing—the loveliest thing. My heart turns over when I see your beautiful face and smell that sweet fresh smell you have around you." That would have been the precious, the irreplaceable truth. Instead he faltered, "Why, hello, Noel! How are you?... Well, I certainly am glad. Well, is this your car? What kind is it? Well, you certainly look fine."

And he couldn't look at her, because when he did his face seemed to him to be working idiotically—like someone else's face. He got in, they drove off and he made a mighty effort to compose himself; but as her hand left the steering wheel to fall lightly on his, a perverse instinct made him jerk his hand away. Noel perceived the embarrassment and was puzzled and—sorry.

They went to the tennis tournament at the Culpepper Club. He was so little aware of anything except Noel that later he told Cousin Cora they hadn't seen the tennis, and believed it himself.

Afterwards they loitered about the grounds, stopped by innumerable people who welcomed Noel home. Two men made him uneasy—one a small handsome youth of his own age with shining brown eyes that were bright as the glass eyes of a stuffed owl; the other a tall, languid dandy of twenty-five who was introduced to her, Juan rightly deduced, at his own request.

When they were in a group of girls he was more comfortable. He was able to talk, because being with Noel gave him confidence before these others, and his confidence before the others made him more confident with Noel. The situation improved.

There was one girl, a sharp, pretty blonde named Holly Morgan, with whom he had spent some facetiously sentimental hours the day before, and in order to show Noel that he had been able to take care of himself before her return he made a point of talking aside to Holly Morgan. Holly was not responsive. Juan was Noel's property, and though Holly liked him, she did not like him nearly well enough to annoy Noel.

"What time do you want me for dinner, Noel?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock," said Noel. "Billy Harper'll call for you."

Juan felt a twinge of disappointment. He had thought that he and Noel were to be alone for dinner; that afterwards they would have a long talk on the dark veranda and he would kiss her lips as he had upon that never-to-be-forgotten Montana night, and give her his DKE pin to wear. Perhaps the others would leave early—he had told Holly Morgan of his love for Noel; she should have sense enough to know.

At twilight Noel dropped him at Miss Chandler's gate, lingered for a moment with the engine cut off. The promise of the evening—the first

lights in the houses along the bay, the sound of a remote piano, the little coolness in the wind—swung them both up suddenly into that paradise which Juan, drunk with ecstasy and terror, had been unable to evoke.

"Are you glad to see me?" she whispered.

"Am I glad?" The words trembled on his tongue. Miserably he struggled to bend his emotion into a phrase, a look, a gesture, but his mind chilled at the thought that nothing, nothing, nothing could express what he felt in his heart.

"You embarrass me," he said wretchedly. "I don't know what to say." Noel waited, attuned to what she expected, sympathetic, but too young quite to see that behind the mask of egotism, of moody childishness, which the intensity of Juan's devotion compelled him to wear, there was a tremendous emotion.

"Don't be embarrassed," Noel said. She was listening to the music now a tune they had danced to in the Adirondacks. The wings of a trance folded about her and the inscrutable someone who waited always in the middle distance loomed down over her with passionate words and dark romantic eyes. Almost mechanically, she started the engine and slipped the gear into first.

"At eight o'clock," she said, almost abstractedly. "Good-bye, Juan." The car moved off down the road. At the corner she turned and waved her hand and Juan waved back, happier than he had ever been in his life, his soul dissolved to a sweet gas that buoyed up his body like a balloon. Then the roadster was out of sight and, all unaware, he had lost her.

II

Cousin Cora's chauffeur took him to Noel's door. The other male guest, Billy Harper, was, he discovered, the young man with the bright brown eyes whom he had met that afternoon. Juan was afraid of him; he was on such familiar, facetious terms with the two girls—towards Noel his attitude seemed almost irreverent—that Juan was slighted during the conversation at dinner. They talked of the Adirondacks and they all seemed to know the group who had been there. Noel and Holly spoke of boys at Cambridge and New Haven and of how wonderful it was that they were going to school in New York this whiter. Juan meant to invite Noel to the autumn dance at his college, but he thought that he had better wait and do it in a letter, later on. He was glad when dinner was over.

The girls went upstairs. Juan and Billy Harper smoked.

"She certainly is attractive," broke out Juan suddenly, his repression bursting into words.

"Who? Noel?"

"Yes."

"She's a nice girl," agreed Harper gravely.

Juan fingered the DKE pin in his pocket.

"She's wonderful," he said. "I like Holly Morgan pretty well—I was handing her a sort of line yesterday afternoon—but Noel's really the most attractive girl I ever knew."

Harper looked at him curiously, but Juan, released from the enforced and artificial smile of dinner, continued enthusiastically: "Of course it's silly to fool with two girls. I mean, you've got to be careful not to get in too deep."

Billy Harper didn't answer. Noel and Holly came downstairs. Holly suggested bridge, but Juan didn't play bridge, so they sat talking by the fire. In some fashion Noel and Billy Harper became involved in a conversation about dates and friends, and Juan began boasting to Holly Morgan, who sat beside him on the sofa.

"You must come to a prom at college," he said suddenly. "Why don't you? It's a small college, but we have the best bunch in our house and the proms are fun."

"I'd love it."

"You'd only have to meet the people in our house."

"What's that?"

"DKE." He drew the pin from his pocket. "See?"

Holly examined it, laughed and handed it back.

"I wanted to go to Yale," he went on, "but my family always go to the same place."

"I love Yale," said Holly.

"Yes," he agreed vaguely, half hearing her, his mind moving between himself and Noel. "You must come up. I'll write you about it."

Time passed. Holly played the piano. Noel took a ukulele from the top of the piano, strummed it and hummed. Billy Harper turned the pages of the music. Juan listened, restless, unamused. Then they sauntered out into the dark garden, and finding himself beside Noel at last, Juan walked her quickly ahead until they were alone.

"Noel," he whispered, "here's my Deke pin. I want you to have it."

She looked at him expressionlessly.

"I saw you offering it to Holly Morgan," she said.

"Noel," he cried in alarm, "I wasn't offering it to her. I just showed it to her. Why, Noel, do you think— "

"You invited her to the prom."

"I didn't. I was just being nice to her."

The others were close behind. She took the Deke pin quickly and put her finger to his lips in a facile gesture of caress.

He did not realize that she had not been really angry about the pin or the prom, and that his unfortunate egotism was forfeiting her interest.

At eleven o'clock Holly said she must go, and Billy Harper drove his car to the front door.

"I'm going to stay a few minutes if you don't mind," said Juan, standing in the door with Noel. "I can walk home."

Holly and Billy Harper drove away. Noel and Juan strolled back into the drawing-room, where she avoided the couch and sat down in a chair.

"Let's go out on the veranda," suggested Juan uncertainly.

"Why?"

"Please, Noel."

Unwillingly she obeyed. They sat side by side on a canvas settee and he put his arm around her.

"Kiss me," he whispered. She had never seemed so desirable to him before.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to. I don't kiss people any more."

"But—me?" he demanded incredulously.

"I've kissed too many people. I'll have nothing left if I keep on kissing people."

"But you'll kiss me, Noel?"

"Why?"

He could not even say, "Because I love you." But he could say it, he knew that he could say it, when she was in his arms.

"If I kiss you once, will you go home?"

"Why, do you want me to go home?"

"I'm tired. I was travelling last night and I can never sleep on a train. Can you? I can never— "

Her tendency to leave the subject willingly made him frantic.

"Then kiss me once," he insisted.

"You promise?"

"You kiss me first."

"No, Juan, you promise first."

"Don't you want to kiss me?"

"Oh-h-h!" she groaned.

With gathering anxiety Juan promised and took her in his arms. For one moment at the touch of her lips, the feeling of her, of Noel, close to him, he forgot the evening, forgot himself—rather became the inspired, romantic self that she had known. But it was too late. Her hands were on his shoulders, pushing him away.

"You promised."

"Noel— "

She got up. Confused and unsatisfied, he followed her to the door.

"Noel— "

"Good night, Juan."

As they stood on the doorstep her eyes rose over the line of dark trees towards the ripe harvest moon. Some glowing thing would happen to her soon, she thought, her mind far away. Something that would dominate her, snatch her up out of life, helpless, ecstatic, exalted.

"Good night, Noel. Noel, please— "

"Good night, Juan. Remember we're going swimming tomorrow. It's wonderful to see you again. Good night."

She dosed the door.

III

Towards morning he awoke from a broken sleep, wondering if she had not kissed him because of the three spots on his cheek. He turned on the light and looked at them. Two were almost invisible. He went into the bathroom, doused all three with the black ointment and crept back into bed.

Cousin Cora greeted him stiffly at breakfast next morning.

"You kept your great-uncle awake last night," she said. "He heard you moving around in your room."

"I only moved twice," he said unhappily. "I'm terribly sorry."

"He has to have his sleep, you know. We all have to be more considerate when there's someone sick. Young people don't always think of that. And he was so unusually well when you came."

It was Sunday, and they were to go swimming at Holly Morgan's house, where a crowd always collected on the bright easy beach. Noel called for him, but they arrived before any of his half-humble remarks about the night before had managed to attract her attention. He spoke to those he knew and was introduced to others, made ill at ease again by their cheerful familiarity with one another, by the correct informality of their clothes. He

was sure they noticed that he had worn only one suit during his visit to Culpepper Bay, varying it with white flannel trousers. Both pairs of trousers were out of press now, and after keeping his great-uncle awake he had not felt like bothering Cousin Cora about it at breakfast.

Again he tried to talk to Holly, with the vague idea of making Noel jealous, but Holly was busy and she eluded him. It was ten minutes before he extricated himself from a conversation with the obnoxious Miss Holyoke. At the moment he managed this he perceived to his horror that Noel was gone.

When he last saw her she had been engaged in a light but somehow intent conversation with the tall well-dressed stranger she had met yesterday. Now she wasn't in sight. Miserable and horribly alone, he strolled up and down the beach, trying to look as if he were having a good time, seeming to watch the bathers, but keeping a sharp eye out for Noel. He felt that his self-conscious perambulations were attracting unbearable attention and sat down unhappily on a sand dune beside Billy Harper. But Billy Harper was neither cordial nor communicative, and after a minute hailed a man across the beach and went to talk to him.

Juan was desperate. When, suddenly, he spied Noel coming down from the house with the tall man, he stood up with a jerk, convinced that his features were working wildly.

She waved at him.

"A buckle came off my shoe," she called. "I went to have it put on. I thought you'd gone in swimming."

He stood perfectly still, not trusting his voice to answer. He understood that she was through with him; there was someone else. Immediately he wanted above all things to be away. As they came nearer, the tall man glanced at him negligently and resumed his vivacious, intimate conversation with Noel. A group suddenly closed around them.

Keeping the group in the corner of his eye, Juan began to move carefully and steadily towards the gate that led to the road. He started when the casual voice of a man behind him said, "Going?" and he answered, "Got to" with what purported to be a reluctant nod. Once behind the shelter of the parked cars, he began to run, slowed down as several chauffeurs looked at him curiously. It was a mile and a half to the Chandler house and the day was broiling, but he walked fast lest Noel, leaving the party—"With that man," he thought bitterly—should overtake him trudging along the road. That would be more than he could bear.

There was the sound of a car behind him. Immediately Juan left the road and sought concealment behind a convenient hedge. It was no one from the party, but thereafter he kept an eye out for available cover, walking fast, or even running, over unpromising open spaces.

He was within sight of his cousin's house when it happened. Hot and dishevelled, he had scarcely flattened himself against the back of a tree when Noel's roadster, with the tall man at the wheel, flashed by down the road. Juan stepped out and looked after them. Then, blind with sweat and misery, he continued on towards home.

IV

At luncheon, Cousin Cora looked at him closely.

"What's the trouble?" she inquired. "Did something go wrong at the beach this morning?"

"Why, no," he exclaimed in simulated astonishment. "What made you think that?"

"You have such a funny look. I thought perhaps you'd had some trouble with the little Garneau girl."

He hated her.

"No, not at all."

"You don't want to get any idea in your head about her," said Cousin Cora.

"What do you mean?" He knew with a start what she meant.

"Any ideas about Noel Garneau. You've got your own way to make." Juan's face burned. He was unable to answer. "I say that in all kindness. You're not in any position to think anything serious about Noel Garneau."

Her implications cut deeper than her words. Oh, he had seen well enough that he was not essentially of Noel's sort, that being nice in Akron wasn't enough at Culpepper Bay. He had that realization that comes to all boys in his position that for every advantage—that was what his mother called this visit to Cousin Cora's—he paid a harrowing price in self-esteem. But a world so hard as to admit such an intolerable state of

affairs was beyond his comprehension. His mind rejected it all completely, as it had rejected the dictionary name for the three spots on his face. He wanted to let go, to vanish, to be home. He determined to go home tomorrow, but after this heart-rending conversation he decided to put off the announcement until tonight.

That afternoon he took a detective story from the library and retired upstairs to read on his bed. He finished the book by four o'clock and came down to change it for another. Cousin Cora was on the veranda arranging three tables for tea.

"I thought you were at the club," she exclaimed in surprise. "I thought you'd gone up to the club."

"I'm tired," he said. "I thought I'd read."

"Tired!" she exclaimed. "A boy your age! You ought to be out in the open air playing golf—that's why you have that spot on your cheek"—Juan winced; his experiments with the black salve had irritated it to a sharp redness—"instead of lying around reading on a day like this."

"I haven't any clubs," said Juan hurriedly.

"Mr Holyoke told you you could use his brother's clubs. He spoke to the caddie master. Run on now. You'll find lots of young people up there who want to play. I'll begin to think you're not having a good time."

In agony Juan saw himself dubbing about the course alone—seeing Noel coming under his eye. He never wanted to see Noel again except out in Montana—some bright day, when she would come saying, "Juan, I never knew—never understood what your love was."

Suddenly he remembered that Noel had gone into Boston for the afternoon. She would not be there. The horror of playing alone suddenly vanished.

The caddie master looked at him disapprovingly as he displayed his guest card, and Juan nervously bought a half-dozen balls at a dollar each in an effort to neutralize the imagined hostility. On the first tee he glanced around. It was after four and there was no one in sight except two old men practising drives from the top of a little hill. As he addressed his ball he heard someone come up on the tee behind him and he breathed easier at the sharp crack that sent his ball a hundred and fifty yards down the fairway.

"Playing alone?"

He looked around. A stout man of fifty, with a huge face, high forehead, long wide upper lip and great undershot jaw, was taking a driver from a bulging bag. "Why—yes."

"Mind if I go round with you?"

"Not at all."

Juan greeted the suggestion with a certain gloomy relief. They were evenly matched, the older man's steady short shots keeping pace with Juan's occasional brilliancy. Not until the seventh hole did the conversation rise above the fragmentary boasting and formalized praise which forms the small talk of golf.

"Haven't seen you around before."

"I'm just visiting here," Juan explained, "staying with my cousin, Miss Chandler."

"Oh yes—know Miss Chandler very well. Nice old snob."

"What?" inquired Juan.

"Nice old snob, I said. No offence... Your honour, I think." Not for several holes did Juan venture to comment on his partner's remark.

"What do you mean when you say she's a nice old snob?" he inquired with interest.

"Oh, it's an old quarrel between Miss Chandler and me," answered the older man brusquely. "She's an old friend of my wife's. When we were married and came out to Culpepper Bay for the summer, she tried to freeze us out. Said my wife had no business marrying me. I was an outsider."

"What did you do?"

"We just let her alone. She came round, but naturally I never had much love for her. She even tried to put her oar in before we were married." He laughed. "Cora Chandler of Boston—how she used to boss the girls around in those days! At twenty-five she had the sharpest tongue in Back Bay. They were old people there, you know—Emerson and Whittier to dinner and all that. My wife belonged to that crowd too. I was from the Middle West... Oh, too bad. I should have stopped talking. That makes me two up again."

Suddenly Juan wanted to present his case to this man—not quite as it was, but adorned with a dignity and significance it did not so far possess. It began to round out in his mind as the sempiternal struggle of the poor young man against a snobbish, purse-proud world. This new aspect was comforting, and he put out of his mind the less pleasant realization that, superficially at least, money hadn't entered into it. He knew in his heart that it was his unfortunate egotism that had repelled Noel, his embarrassment, his absurd attempt to make her jealous with Holly. Only indirectly was his poverty concerned; under different circumstances it might have given a touch of romance.

"I know exactly how you must have felt," he broke out suddenly as they walked toward the tenth tee. "I haven't any money and I'm in love with a girl who has—and it seems as if every busybody in the world is determined to keep us apart."

For a moment Juan believed this. His companion looked at him sharply.

"Does the girl care about you?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Well, go after her, young man. All the money in this world hasn't been made by a long shot."

"I'm still in college," said Juan, suddenly taken aback.

"Won't she wait for you?"

"I don't know. You see, the pressure's pretty strong. Her family want her to marry a rich man"—his mind visualized the tall well-dressed stranger of this morning and invention soared—"an easterner that's visiting here, and I'm afraid they'll all sweep her off her feet. If it's not this man, it's the next."

His friend considered.

"You can't have everything, you know," he said presently. "I'm the last man to advise a young man to leave college, especially when I don't know anything about him or his abilities; but if it's going to break you up not to get her, you better think about getting to work."

"I've been considering that," said Juan frowning. The idea was ten seconds old in his mind.

"All girls are crazy now, anyhow," broke out the older man. "They begin to think of men at fifteen, and by the time they're seventeen they run off with the chauffeur next door."

"That's true," agreed Juan absently. He was absorbed in the previous suggestion. "The trouble is that I don't live in Boston. If I left college I'd want to be near her, because it might be a few months before I'd be able to support her. And I don't know how I'd go about getting a position in Boston."

"If you're Cora Chandler's cousin, that oughtn't to be difficult. She knows everybody in town. And the girl's family will probably help you out, once you've got her—some of them are fools enough for anything in these crazy days."

"I wouldn't like that."

"Rich girls can't live on air," said the older man grimly.

They played for a while in silence. Suddenly, as they approached a green, Juan's companion turned to him frowning.

"Look here, young man," he said, "I don't know whether you are really thinking of leaving college or whether I've just put the idea in your head. If I have, forget it. Go home and talk it over with your family. Do what they tell you to."

"My father's dead."

"Well, then ask your mother. She's got your best interest at heart."

His attitude had noticeably stiffened, as if he were sorry he had become even faintly involved in Juan's problem. He guessed that there was something solid in the boy, but he suspected his readiness to confide in strangers and his helplessness about getting a job. Something was lacking—not confidence, exactly—"It might be a few months before I was able to support her"—but something stronger, fiercer, more external. When they walked together into the caddie house he shook hands with him and was about to turn away, when impulse impelled him to add one word more.

"If you decide to try Boston come and see me," he said. He pressed a card into Juan's hand. "Good-bye. Good luck. Remember, a woman's like a street car— "

He walked into the locker room. After paying his caddie, Juan glanced down at the card which he still held in his hand.

"Harold Garneau," it read, "23-7 State Street."

A moment later Juan was walking nervously and hurriedly from the grounds of the Culpepper Club, casting no glance behind.

V

One month later San Juan Chandler arrived in Boston and took an inexpensive room in a small downtown hotel. In his pocket was two hundred dollars in cash and an envelope full of liberty bonds aggregating fifteen hundred dollars more—the whole being a fund which had been started by his father when he was born, to give him his chance in life. Not without argument had he come into possession of this—not without tears had his decision to abandon his last year at college been approved by his mother. He had not told her everything; simply that he had an advantageous offer of a position in Boston; the rest she guessed and was tactfully silent. As a matter of fact, he had neither a position nor a plan, but he was twenty-one now, with the blemishes of youth departed for ever. One thing Juan knew—he was going to marry Noel Garneau. The sting and hurt and shame of that Sunday morning ran through his dreams, stronger than any doubts he might have felt, stronger even than the romantic boyish love for her that had blossomed one dry, still Montana night. That was still there, but locked apart; what had happened later overlay it, muffled it. It was necessary now to his pride, his self-respect, his very existence, that he have her, in order to wipe out his memory of the day on which he had grown three years.

He hadn't seen her since. The following morning he had left Culpepper Bay and gone home.

Yes, he had a wonderful time. Yes, Cousin Cora had been very nice. Nor had he written, though a week later a surprised but somehow flippant and

terrible note had come from her, saying how pleasant it was to have seen him again and how bad it was to leave without saying good-bye.

"Holly Morgan sends her best," it concluded, with kind, simulated reproach. "Perhaps she ought to be writing instead of me. I always thought you were fickle, and now I know it."

The poor effort which she had made to hide her indifference made him shiver. He did not add the letter to a certain cherished package tied with blue ribbon, but burned it up in an ash tray—a tragic gesture which almost set his mother's house on fire.

So he began his life in Boston, and the story of his first year there is a fairy tale too immoral to be told. It is the story of one of those mad, illogical successes upon whose substantial foundations ninety-nine failures are later reared. Though he worked hard, he deserved no special credit for it—no credit, that is, commensurate with the reward he received. He ran into a man who had a scheme, a preposterous scheme, for the cold storage of sea food which he had been trying to finance for several years. Juan's inexperience allowed him to be responsive and he invested twelve hundred dollars. In his first year this appalling indiscretion paid him 400 per cent. His partner attempted to buy him out, but they reached a compromise and Juan kept his shares.

The inner sense of his own destiny which had never deserted him whispered that he was going to be a rich man. But at the end of that year an event took place which made him think that it didn't matter after all.

He had seen Noel Garneau twice—once entering a theatre and once riding through a Boston street in the back of her limousine, looking, he thought afterwards, bored and pale and tired. At the time he had thought nothing; an overwhelming emotion had seized his heart, held it helpless, suspended, as though it were in the grasp of material fingers. He had shrunk back hastily under the awning of a shop and waited trembling, horrified, ecstatic, until she went by. She did not know he was in Boston—he did not want her to know until he was ready. He followed her every move in the society columns of the papers. She was at school, at home for Christmas, at Hot Springs for Easter, coming out in the fall. Then she was a debutante, and every day he read of her at dinners and dances and assemblies and balls and charity functions and theatricals of the Junior

League. A dozen blurred newspaper unlikenesses of her filled a drawer of his desk. And still he waited. Let Noel have her fling.

When he had been sixteen months in Boston, and when Noel's first season was dying away in the hum of the massed departure for Florida, Juan decided to wait no longer. So on a raw, damp February day, when children in rubber boots were building darns in the snow-filled gutters, a blond, handsome, well-dressed young man walked up the steps of the Garneau's Boston house and handed his card to the maid. With his heart beating loud, he went into a drawing-room and sat down.

A sound of a dress on the stairs, light feet in the hall, an exclamation—Noel!

"Why, Juan," she exclaimed, surprised, pleased, polite, "I didn't know you were in Boston. It's so good to see you. I thought you'd thrown me over for ever."

In a moment he found voice—it was easier now than it had been. Whether or not she was aware of the change, he was a nobody no longer. There was something solid behind him that would prevent him ever again from behaving like a self-centred child.

He explained that he might settle in Boston, and allowed her to guess that he had done extremely well; and, though it cost him a twinge of pain, he spoke humourously of their last meeting, implying that he had left the swimming party on an impulse of anger at her. He could not confess that the impulse had been one of shame. She laughed. Suddenly he grew curiously happy.

Half an hour passed. The fire glowed in the hearth. The day darkened outside and the room moved into that shadowy twilight, that weather of indoors, which is like a breathless starshine. He had been standing; now he sat down beside her on the couch.

"Noel— "

Footsteps sounded lightly through the hall as the maid went through to the front door. Noel reached up quickly and turned up the electric lamp on the table behind her head.

"I didn't realize how dark it was growing," she said rather quickly, he thought. Then the maid stood in the doorway.

"Mr Templeton," she announced.

"Oh, yes," agreed Noel.

Mr Templeton, with a Harvard-Oxford drawl, mature, very much at home, looked at him with just a flicker of surprise, nodded, mumbled a bare politeness and took an easy position in front of the fire. He exchanged several remarks with Noel which indicated a certain familiarity with her movements. Then a short silence fell. Juan rose.

"I want to see you soon," he said. "I'll phone, shall I, and you tell me when I can call?"

She walked with him to the door.

"So good to talk to you again," she told him cordially. "Remember, I want to see a lot of you, Juan."

When he left he was happier than he had been for two years. He ate dinner alone at a restaurant, almost singing to himself; and then, wild with

elation, walked along the waterfront till midnight. He awoke thinking of her, wanting to tell people that what had been lost was found again. There had been more between them than the mere words said—Noel's sitting with him in the half-darkness, her slight but perceptible nervousness as she came with him to the door.

Two days later he opened the Transcript to the society page and read down to the third item. There his eyes stopped, became like china eyes:

Mr and Mrs Harold Garneau announce the engagement of their daughter Noel to Mr Brooks Fish Templeton. Mr Templeton graduated from Harvard in the class of 1912 and is a partner in—

VI

At three o'clock that afternoon Juan rang the Garneaus' doorbell and was shown into the hall. From somewhere upstairs he heard girls' voices, and another murmur came from the drawing-room on the right, where he had talked to Noel only the week before.

"Can you show me into some room that isn't being used?" he demanded tensely of the maid. "I'm an old friend—it's very important—I've got to see Miss Noel alone."

He waited in a small den at the back of the hall. Ten minutes passed—ten minutes more; he began to be afraid she wasn't coming. At the end of half an hour the door bounced open and Noel came hurriedly in.

"Juan!" she cried happily. "This is wonderful! I might have known you'd be the first to come." Her expression changed as she saw his face, and she hesitated. "But why were you shown in here?" she went on quickly. "You must come and meet everyone. I'm rushing around today like a chicken without a head."

"Noel!" he said thickly.

"What?"

Her hand was on the door knob. She turned, startled.

"Noel, I haven't come to congratulate you," Juan said, his face white and, his voice harsh with his effort at self-control. "I've come to tell you you're making an awful mistake."

"Why—Juan!"

"And you know it," he went on. "You know no one loves you as I love you, Noel. I want you to marry me."

She laughed nervously.

"Why, Juan, that's silly! I don't understand your talking like this. I'm engaged to another man."

"Noel, will you come here and sit down?"

"I can't, Juan—there're a dozen people outside. I've got to see them. It wouldn't be polite. Another time, Juan. If you come another time I'd love to talk to you."

"Now!" The word was stark, unyielding, almost savage. She hesitated.

"Ten minutes," he said.

"I've really got to go, Juan."

She sat down uncertainly, glancing at the door. Sitting beside her, Juan told her simply and directly everything that had happened to him since they had met, a year and a half before. He told her of his family, his Cousin Cora, of his inner humiliation at Culpepper Bay. Then he told her of his coming to Boston and of his success, and how at last, having something to bring her, he had come only to find he was too late. He kept back nothing. In his voice, as in his mind, there was no pretence now, no self-consciousness, but only a sincere and overmastering emotion. He had no defence for what he was doing, he said, save this—that he had somehow gained the right to present his case, to have her know how much his devotion had inspired him, to have her look once, if only in passing, upon the fact that for two years he had loved her faithfully and well.

When Juan finished, Noel was crying. It was terrible, she said, to tell her all this—just when she had decided about her life. It hadn't been easy, yet it was done now, and she was really going to marry this other man. But she had never heard anything like this before—it upset her. She was—oh, so terribly sorry, but there was no use. If he had cared so much he might have let her know before.

But how could he let her know? He had had nothing to offer her except the fact that one summer night out West they had been overwhelmingly drawn together.

"And you love me now," he said in a low voice. "You wouldn't cry, Noel, if you didn't love me. You wouldn't care."

"I'm—I'm sorry for you."

"It's more than that. You loved me the other day. You wanted me to sit beside you in the dark. Didn't I feel it—didn't I know? There's something between us, Noel—a sort of pull. Something you always do to me and I to you—except that one sad time. Oh, Noel, don't you know how it breaks my heart to see you sitting there two feet away from me, to want to put my arms around you and know you've made a senseless promise to another man?" There was a knock outside the door.

"Noel!"

She raised her head, putting a handkerchief quickly to her eyes.

"Yes?"

"It's Brooks. May I come in?" Without waiting for an answer, Templeton opened the door and stood looking at them curiously. "Excuse me," he said. He nodded brusquely at Juan. "Noel, there are lots of people here—"

"In a minute," she said lifelessly.

"Aren't you well?"

"Yes."

He came into the room, frowning.

"What's been upsetting you, dear?" He glanced quickly at Juan, who stood up, his eyes blurred with tears. A menacing note crept into Templeton's voice. "I hope no one's been upsetting you."

For answer, Noel flopped down over a hill of pillows and sobbed aloud. "Noel"—Templeton sat beside her, and put his arm on her shoulder—"Noel." He turned again to Juan, "I think it would be best if you left us alone, Mr— " the name escaped his memory. "Noel's a little tired."

"I won't go," said Juan.

"Please wait outside then. We'll see you later."

"I won't wait outside. I want to speak to Noel. It was you who interrupted."

"And I have a perfect right to interrupt." His face reddened angrily. "Just who the devil are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Chandler."

"Well, Mr Chandler, you're in the way here—is that plain? Your presence here is an intrusion and a presumption."

"We look at it in different ways."

They glared at each other angrily. After a moment Templeton raised Noel to a sitting posture.

"I'm going to take you upstairs, dear," he said. "This has been a strain today. If you lie down till dinnertime—"

He helped her to her feet. Not looking at Juan, and still dabbing her face with her handkerchief, Noel suffered herself to be persuaded into the hall. Templeton turned in the doorway.

"The maid will give you your hat and coat, Mr Chandler."

"I'll wait right here," said Juan.

VII

He was still there at half past six, when, following a quick knock, a large broad bulk which Juan recognized as Mr Harold Garneau came into the room.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr Garneau, annoyed and peremptory. "Just what can I do for you?"

He came closer and a Sicker of recognition passed over his face.

"Oh!" he muttered.

"Good evening, sir," said Juan.

"It's you, is it?" Mr Garneau appeared to hesitate. "Brooks Templeton said that you were—that you insisted on seeing Noel"—he coughed—"that you refused to go home."

"I want to see Noel, if you don't mind."

"What for?"

"That's between Noel and me, Mr Garneau."

"Mr Templeton and I are quite entitled to represent Noel in this case," said Mr Garneau patiently. "She has just made the statement before her mother and me that she doesn't want to see you again. Isn't that plain enough?"

"I don't believe it," said Juan stubbornly. "I'm not in the habit of lying."

"I beg your pardon. I meant— "

"I don't want to discuss this unfortunate business with you," broke out Garneau contemptuously. "I just want you to leave right now—and come back."

"Why do you call it an unfortunate business?" inquired Juan coolly. "Good night, Mr Chandler."

"You call it an unfortunate business because Noel's broken her engagement"

"You are presumptuous, sir!" cried the older man. "Unbearably sumptuous."

"Mr Garneau, you yourself were once kind enough to tell me— "

"I don't give a damn what I told you!" cried Garneau. "You get out of here now!"

"Very well, I have no choice. I wish you to be good enough to tell Noel that I'll be back tomorrow afternoon."

Juan nodded, went into the hall and took his hat and coat from a chair. Upstairs, he heard running footsteps and a door opened and closed—not before he had caught the sound of impassioned voices and a short broken sob. He hesitated. Then he continued on along the hall towards the front door. Through a portiere of the dining-room he caught sight of a man-servant laying the service for dinner.

He rang the bell the next afternoon at the same hour. This time the butler, evidently instructed, answered the door.

Miss Noel was not at home. Could he leave a note? It was no use; Miss Noel was not in the city. Incredulous but anxious, Juan took a taxicab to

Harold Garneau's office. "Mr Garneau can't see you. If you like, he will speak to you for a moment on the phone."

Juan nodded. The clerk touched a button on the waiting-room switchboard and handed an instrument to Juan.

"This is San Juan Chandler speaking. They told me at your residence that Noel had gone away. Is that true?"

"Yes." The monosyllable was short and cold. "She's gone away for a rest. Won't be back for several months. Anything else?" "Did she leave any word for me?"

"No! She hates the sight of you."

"What's her address?"

"That doesn't happen to be your affair. Good morning."

Juan went back to his apartment and mused over the situation. Noel had been spirited out of town—that was the only expression he knew for it. And undoubtedly her engagement to Templeton was at least temporarily broken. He had toppled it over within an hour. He must see her again—that was the immediate necessity. But where? She was certainly with friends, and probably with relatives. That latter was the first clue to follow—he must find out the names of the relatives she had most frequently visited before.

He phoned Holly Morgan. She was in the south and not expected back Boston till May.

Then he called the society editor of the Boston Transcript. After a short wait, a polite, attentive, feminine voice conversed with him on the wire.

"This is Mr San Juan Chandler," he said, trying to intimate by his voice that he was a distinguished leader of cotillions in the Back Bay. "I want to get some information, if you please, about the family of Mr Harold Garneau."

"Why don't you apply directly to Mr Garneau?" advised the society editor, not without suspicion.

"I'm not on speaking terms with Mr Garneau."

A pause; then—"Well, really, we can't be responsible for giving out information in such a peculiar way."

"But there can't be any secret about who Mr and Mrs Garneau's relations are!" protested Juan in exasperation.

"But how can we be sure that you— "

He hung up the receiver. Two other papers gave no better results, a third was willing, but ignorant. It seemed absurd, almost like a conspiracy, that in a city where the Garneaus were so well known he could not obtain the desired names. It was as if everything had tightened up against his arrival on the scene. After a day of fruitless and embarrassing inquiries in stores, where his questions were looked upon with the suspicion that he might be compiling a sucker list, and of poring through back numbers of the Social Register, he saw that there was but one resource—that was Cousin Cora. Next morning he took the three-hour ride to Culpepper Bay.

It was the first time he had seen her for a year and a half, since the disastrous termination of his summer visit. She was offended—that he knew—especially since she had heard from his mother of the unexpected success. She greeted him coldly and reproachfully; but she told him what he wanted to know, because Juan asked his questions while she was still startled and surprised by his visit. He left Culpepper Bay with the information that Mrs Garneau had one sister, the famous Mrs Morton Poindexter, with whom Noel was on terms of great intimacy. Juan took the midnight train for New York.

Morton Poindexters' telephone number was not in the New York book, and Information refused to divulge it; but Juan procured it reference to the Social Register. He called the house from his

"Miss Noel Garneau—is she in the city?" he inquired, according to his plan. If the name was not immediately familiar, the servant would rent that he had the wrong number.

"Who wants to speak to her, please?"

That was a relief; his heart sank comfortably back into place.

"Oh—a friend."

"No name?"

"No name."

"I'll see."

The servant returned in a moment.

No, Miss Garneau was not there, was not in the city, was not expected.

The phone clicked off suddenly.

Late that afternoon a taxi dropped him in front of the Morton Poindexters' house. It was the most elaborate house that he had ever seen, rising to five storeys on a corner of Fifth Avenue and adorned even with that ghost of a garden which, however minute, is the proudest gesture of money in New York.

He handed no card to the butler, but it occurred to him that he must be expected, for he was shown immediately into the drawing-room. When, after a short wait, Mrs Poindexter entered he experienced for the first time in five days a touch of uncertainty.

Mrs Poindexter was perhaps thirty-five, and of that immaculate fashion which the French describe as *bien soignée*. The inexpressible loveliness of her face was salted with another quality which for want of a better word might be called dignity. But it was more than dignity, for it wore no rigidity, but instead a softness so adaptable, so elastic, that it would withdraw from any attack which life might bring against it, only to spring back at the proper moment, taut, victorious and complete. San Juan saw that even though his guess was correct as to Noel's being in the house, he was up against a force with which he had no contact before. This woman seemed to be not entirely of America, to possess resources which the American woman lacked or handled ineptly.

She received him with a graciousness which, though it was largely external, seemed to conceal no perturbation underneath. Indeed, her attitude appeared to be perfectly passive, just short of encouraging. It was with an effort that he resisted the inclination to lay his cards on the table. "Good evening." She sat down on a stiff chair in the centre of the room and asked him to take an easy-chair near by. She sat looking at him silently until he spoke.

"Mrs Poindexter, I am very anxious to see Miss Garneau. I telephoned your house this morning and was told that she was not here." Mrs Poindexter nodded. "However, I know she is here," he continued evenly. "And I'm determined to see her. The idea that her father and mother can prevent me from seeing her, as though I had disgraced myself in some way—or that you, Mrs Poindexter, can prevent me from seeing her"—his voice rose a little—"is preposterous. This is not the year 1500—nor even the year 1910."

He paused. Mrs Poindexter waited for a moment to see if he had finished. Then she said, quietly and unequivocally, "I quite agree with you."

Save for Noel, Juan thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful before.

"Mrs Poindexter," he began again, in a more friendly tone, "I'm sorry to seem rude. I've been called presumptuous in this matter, and perhaps to some extent I am. Perhaps all poor boys who are in love with wealthy

girls are presumptuous. But it happens that I am no longer a poor boy, and I have good reason to believe that Noel cares for me."

"I see," said Mrs Poindexter attentively. "But of course I knew nothing about all that."

Juan hesitated, again disarmed by her complaisance. Then a surge of determination went over him.

"Will you let me see her?" he demanded. "Or will you insist on keeping up this farce a little longer?"

Mrs Poindexter looked at him as though considering.

"Why should I let you see her?"

"Simply because I ask you. Just as, when someone says 'Excuse me' you step aside for him in a doorway."

Mrs Poindexter frowned.

"But Noel is concerned in this matter as much as you. And I'm not like person in a crowd. I'm more like a bodyguard, with instructions to let no one pass, even if they say 'Excuse me' in a most appealing voice."

"You have instructions only from her father and mother," said Juan, with rising impatience. "She's the person concerned."

"I'm glad you begin to admit that."

"Of course I admit it," he broke out. "I want you to admit it."

"I do."

"Then what's the point of all this absurd discussion?" he demanded heatedly.

She stood up suddenly. "I bid you good evening, sir."

Taken aback, Juan stood up too. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I will not be spoken to like that," said Mrs Poindexter, still in a low cool voice. "Either you can conduct yourself quietly or you can leave this house at once."

Juan realized that he had taken the wrong tone. The words stung at him and for a moment he had nothing to say—as though he were a scolded boy at school. "This is beside the question," he stammered finally. "I want to talk to Noel."

"Noel doesn't want to talk to you." Suddenly Mrs Poindexter held out a sheet of note paper to him. He opened it. It said:

Aunt Jo: As to what we talked about this afternoon: If that intolerable bore calls, as he will probably do, and begins his presumptuous whining, please speak to him frankly. Tell him I never loved him, that I never at any time claimed to love him and that his persistence is revolting to me. Say that I am old enough to know my own mind and that my greatest wish is never to see him again in this world.

Juan stood there aghast. His universe was suddenly about him. Noel did not care, she had never cared. It was all a preposterous joke on him, played by those to whom the business of life had been such jokes from the beginning. He realized now that fundamentally they were all akin—Cousin Cora, Noel, her father, this cold, lovely woman here—affirming the prerogative of the rich to marry always within their caste, to erect artificial barriers and standards against those who could presume upon a summer's philandering. The scales fell from his eyes and he saw his year and a half of struggle and effort not as progress towards a goal but only as a little race he had run by himself, outside, with no one to beat except himself—no one who cared.

Blindly he looked about for his hat, scarcely realizing it was in the hall. Blindly he stepped back when Mrs Poindexter's hand moved towards him half a foot through the mist and Mrs Poindexter's voice said softly, "I'm sorry." Then he was in the hall, the note still clutched in the hand that struggled through the sleeve of his overcoat, the words which he felt he must somehow say choking through his lips.

"I didn't understand. I regret very much that I've bothered you. It wasn't dear to me how matters stood—between Noel and me—"

His hand was on the door knob.

"I'm sorry, too," said Mrs Poindexter. "I didn't realize from what Noel said that what I had to do would be so hard—Mr Templeton."

"Chandler," he corrected her dully. "My name's Chandler."

She stood dead still; suddenly her face went white.

"What?"

"My name—it's Chandler."

Like a flash she threw herself against the half-open door and it bumped shut. Then in a flash she was at the foot of the staircase.

"Noel!" she cried in a high, clear call. "Noel! Noel! Come down, Noel!" Her lovely voice floated up like a bell through the long high central hall. "Noel! Come down! It's Mr Chandler! It's Chandler!"