

What a Handsome Pair! F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

At four o'clock on a November afternoon in 1902, Teddy Van Beck got out of a hansom cab in front of a brownstone house on Murray Hill. He was a tall, round-shouldered young man with a beaked nose and soft brown eyes in a sensitive face. In his veins quarreled the blood of colonial governors and celebrated robber barons; in him the synthesis had produced, for that time and place, something different and something new.

His cousin, Helen Van Beck, waited in the drawing-room. Her eyes were red from weeping, but she was young enough for it not to detract from her glossy beauty—a beauty that had reached the point where it seemed to contain in itself the secret of its own growth, as if it would go on increasing forever. She was nineteen and, contrary to the evidence, she was extremely happy.

Teddy put his arm around her and kissed her cheek, and found it changing into her ear as she turned her face away. He held her for a moment, his own enthusiasm chilling; then he said:

"You don't seem very glad to see me."

Helen had a premonition that this was going to be one of the memorable scenes of her life, and with unconscious cruelty she set about extracting from it its full dramatic value. She sat in a corner of the couch, facing an easy-chair.

"Sit there," she commanded, in what was then admired as a "regal manner," and then, as Teddy straddled the piano stool: "No, don't sit there. I can't talk to you if you're going to revolve around."

"Sit on my lap," he suggested.

"No."

Playing a one-handed flourish on the piano, he said, "I can listen better here."

Helen gave up hopes of beginning on the sad and quiet note.

"This is a serious matter, Teddy. Don't think I've decided it without a lot of consideration. I've got to ask you—to ask you to release me from our understanding."

"What?" Teddy's face paled with shock and dismay.

"I'll have to tell you from the beginning. I've realized for a long time that we have nothing in common. You're interested in your music, and I can't even play chopsticks." Her voice was weary as if with suffering; her small teeth tugged at her lower lip.

"What of it?" he demanded, relieved. "I'm musician enough for both. You wouldn't have to understand banking to marry a banker, would you?"

"This is different," Helen answered. "What would we do together? One important thing is that you don't like riding; you told me you were afraid of horses."

"Of course I'm afraid of horses," he said, and added reminiscently: "They try to bite me."

"It makes it so—"

"I've never met a horse—socially, that is—who didn't try to bite me. They used to do it when I put the bridle on; then, when I gave up putting the bridle on, they began reaching their heads around trying to get at my calves."

The eyes of her father, who had given her a Shetland at three, glistened, cold and hard, from her own.

"You don't even like the people I like, let alone the horses," she said.

"I can stand them. I've stood them all my life."

"Well, it would be a silly way to start a marriage. I don't see any grounds for mutual—mutual—"

"Riding?"

"Oh, not that." Helen hesitated, and then said in an unconvinced tone, "Probably I'm not clever enough for you."

"Don't talk such stuff!" He demanded some truth: "Who's the man?"

It took her a moment to collect herself. She had always resented Teddy's tendency to treat women with less ceremony than was the custom of the day. Often he was an unfamiliar, almost frightening young man.

"There is someone," she admitted. "It's someone I've always known slightly, but about a month ago, when I went to Southampton, I was—thrown with him."

"Thrown from a horse?"

"Please, Teddy," she protested gravely. "I'd been getting more unhappy about you and me, and whenever I was with him everything seemed all right." A note of exaltation that she would not conceal came into Helen's voice. She rose and crossed the room, her straight, slim legs outlined by the shadows of her dress. "We rode and swam and played tennis together—did the things we both liked to do."

He stared into the vacant space she had created for him. "Is that all that drew you to this fellow?"

"No, it was more than that. He was thrilling to me like nobody ever has been." She laughed. "I think what really started me thinking about it was one day we came in from riding and everybody said aloud what a nice pair we made."

"Did you kiss him?"

She hesitated. "Yes, once."

He got up from the piano stool. "I feel as if I had a cannon ball in my stomach," he exclaimed.

The butler announced Mr. Stuart Oldhorne.

"Is he the man?" Teddy demanded tensely.

She was suddenly upset and confused. "He should have come later. Would you rather go without meeting him?"

But Stuart Oldhorne, made confident by his new sense of proprietorship, had followed the butler.

The two men regarded each other with a curious impotence of expression; there can be no communication between men in that position, for their relation is indirect and consists in how much each of them has possessed or will possess of the woman in question, so that their emotions pass through her divided self as through a bad telephone connection.

Stuart Oldhorne sat beside Helen, his polite eyes never leaving Teddy. He had the same glowing physical power as she. He had been a star athlete at Yale and a Rough Rider in Cuba, and was the best young horseman on Long Island. Women loved him not only for his points but for a real sweetness of temper.

"You've lived so much in Europe that I don't often see you," he said to Teddy. Teddy didn't answer and Stuart Oldhorne turned to Helen: "I'm early; I didn't realize—"

"You came at the right time," said Teddy rather harshly. "I stayed to play you my congratulations."

To Helen's alarm, he turned and ran his fingers over the keyboard. Then he began. What he was playing, neither Helen nor Stuart knew, but Teddy always remembered. He put his mind in order with a short résumé of the history of music, beginning with some chords from The Messiah and ending with Debussy's La Plus Que Lent, which had an evocative quality for him, because he had first heard it the day his brother died. Then, pausing for an instant, he began to play more thoughtfully, and the lovers on the sofa could feel that they were alone—that he had left them and had no more traffic with them—and Helen's discomfort lessened. But the flight, the elusiveness of the music, piqued her, gave her a feeling of annoyance. If Teddy had played the current sentimental song from Erminie, and had played it with feeling, she would have understood and been moved, but he was plunging her suddenly into a world of mature emotions, whither her nature neither could nor wished to follow.

She shook herself slightly and said to Stuart: "Did you buy the horse?"

"Yes, and at a bargain... Do you know I love you?"

"I'm glad," she whispered.

The piano stopped suddenly. Teddy closed it and swung slowly around: "Did you like my congratulations?"

"Very much," they said together.

"It was pretty good," he admitted. "That last was only based on a little counterpoint. You see, the idea of it was that you make such a handsome pair."

He laughed unnaturally; Helen followed him out into the hall.

"Good-by, Teddy," she said. "We're going to be good friends, aren't we?"

"Aren't we?" he repeated. He winked without smiling, and with a clicking, despairing sound of his mouth, went out quickly.

For a moment Helen tried vainly to apply a measure to the situation, wondering how she had come off with him, realizing reluctantly that she had never for an instant held the situation in her hands. She had a dim realization that Teddy was larger in scale; then the very largeness frightened her and, with relief and a warm tide of emotion, she hurried into the drawing-room and the shelter of her lover's arms.

Their engagement ran through a halcyon summer. Stuart visited Helen's family at Tuxedo, and Helen visited his family in Wheatley Hills. Before breakfast, their horses' hoofs sedately scattered the dew in sentimental glades, or curtained them with dust as they raced on dirt roads. They bought a tandem bicycle and pedaled all over Long Island—which Mrs. Cassius Ruthven, a contemporary Cato, considered "rather fast" for a couple not yet married. They were seldom at rest, but when they were, they reminded people of His Move on a Gibson pillow.

Helen's taste for sport was advanced for her generation. She rode nearly as well as Stuart and gave him a decent game in tennis. He taught her some polo, and they were golf crazy when it was still considered a comic game. They liked to feel fit and cool together. They thought of themselves as a team, and it was often remarked how well mated they were. A chorus of pleasant envy followed in the wake of their effortless glamour.

They talked.

"It seems a pity you've got to go to the office," she would say. "I wish you did something we could do together, like taming lions."

"I've always thought that in a pinch I could make a living breeding and racing horses," said Stuart.

"I know you could, you darling."

In August he brought a Thomas automobile and toured all the way to Chicago with three other men. It was an event of national interest and their pictures were in all the papers. Helen wanted to go, but it wouldn't have been proper, so they compromised by driving down Fifth Avenue on a sunny September morning, one with the fine day and the fashionable crowd, but distinguished by their unity, which made them each as strong as two.

"What do you suppose?" Helen demanded. "Teddy sent me the oddest present—a cup rack."

Stuart laughed. "Obviously, he means that all we'll ever do is win cups."

"I thought it was rather a slam," Helen ruminated. "I saw that he was invited to everything, but he didn't answer a single invitation. Would you mind very much stopping by his apartment now? I haven't seen him for months and I don't like to leave anything unpleasant in the past."

He wouldn't go in with her. "I'll sit and answer questions about the auto from passers-by."

The door was opened by a woman in a cleaning cap, and Helen heard the sound of Teddy's piano from the room beyond. The woman seemed reluctant to admit her.

"He said don't interrupt him, but I suppose if you're his cousin—"

Teddy welcomed her, obviously startled and somewhat upset, but in a minute he was himself again.

"I won't marry you," he assured her. "You've had your chance."

"All right," she laughed.

"How are you?" He threw a pillow at her. "You're beautiful! Are you happy with this—this centaur? Does he beat you with his riding crop?" He peered at her closely. "You look a little duller than when I knew you. I used to whip you up to a nervous excitement that bore a resemblance to intelligence."

"I'm happy, Teddy. I hope you are."

"Sure, I'm happy; I'm working. I've got MacDowell on the run and I'm going to have a shebang at Carnegie Hall next September." His eyes became malicious. "What did you think of my girl?"

"Your girl?"

"The girl who opened the door for you."

"Oh, I thought it was a maid." She flushed and was silent.

He laughed. "Hey, Betty!" he called. "You were mistaken for the maid!"

"And that's the fault of my cleaning on Sunday," answered a voice from the next room.

Teddy lowered his voice. "Do you like her?" he demanded.

"Teddy!" She teetered on the arm of the sofa, wondering whether she should leave at once.

"What would you think if I married her?" he asked confidentially.

"Teddy!" She was outraged; it had needed but a glance to place the woman as common. "You're joking. She's older than you... You wouldn't be such a fool as to throw away your future that way."

He didn't answer.

"Is she musical?" Helen demanded. "Does she help you with your work?"

"She doesn't know a note. Neither did you, but I've got enough music in me for twenty wives."

Visualizing herself as one of them, Helen rose stiffly.

"All I can ask you is to think how your mother would have felt—and those who care for you... Good-by, Teddy."

He walked out the door with her and down the stairs.

"As a matter of fact, we've been married for two months," he said casually. "She was a waitress in a place where I used to eat."

Helen felt that she should be angry and aloof, but tears of hurt vanity were springing to her eyes.

"And do you love her?"

"I like her; she's a good person and good for me. Love is something else. I loved you, Helen, and that's all dead in me for the present. Maybe it's coming out in my music. Some day I'll probably love other women—or maybe there'll never be anything but you. Good-by, Helen."

The declaration touched her. "I hope you'll be happy, Teddy. Bring your wife to the wedding."

He bowed noncommittally. When she had gone, he returned thoughtfully to his apartment.

"That was the cousin that I was in love with," he said.

"And was it?" Betty's face, Irish and placid, brightened with interest. "She's a pretty thing."

"She wouldn't have been as good for me as a nice peasant like you."

"Always thinking of yourself, Teddy Van Beck."

He laughed. "Sure I am, but you love me, anyhow?"

"That's a big wur-red."

"All right. I'll remember that when you come begging around for a kiss. If my grandfather knew I married a bog trotter, he'd turn over in his grave. Now get out and let me finish my work."

He sat at the piano, a pencil behind his ear. Already his face was resolved, composed, but his eyes grew more intense minute by minute, until there was a glaze in them, behind which they seemed to have joined his ears in counting and hearing. Presently there was no more indication in his face that anything had occurred to disturb the tranquillity of his Sunday morning.

II

Mrs. Cassius Ruthven and a friend, veils flung back across their hats, sat in their auto on the edge of the field.

"A young woman playing polo in breeches." Mrs. Ruthven sighed. "Amy Van Beck's daughter. I thought when Helen organized the Amazons she'd stop at divided skirts. But her husband apparently has no objections, for there he stands, egging her on. Of course, they always have liked the same things."

"A pair of thoroughbreds, those two," said the other woman complacently, meaning that she admitted them to be her equals. "You'd never look at them and think that anything had gone wrong."

She was referring to Stuart's mistake in the panic of 1907. His father had bequeathed him a precarious situation and Stuart had made an error of judgment. His honor was not questioned and his crowd stood by him loyally, but his usefulness in Wall Street was over and his small fortune was gone.

He stood in a group of men with whom he would presently play, noting things to tell Helen after the game—she wasn't turning with the play soon enough and several times she was unnecessarily ridden off at important moments. Her ponies were sluggish—the penalty for playing with borrowed mounts—but she was, nevertheless, the best player on the field, and in the last minute she made a save that brought applause.

"Good girl! Good girl!"

Stuart had been delegated with the unpleasant duty of chasing the women from the field. They had started an hour late and now a team from New Jersey was waiting to play; he sensed trouble as he cut across to join Helen and walked beside her toward the stables. She was splendid, with her flushed cheeks, her shining, triumphant eyes, her short, excited breath. He temporized for a minute.

"That was good—that last," he said.

"Thanks. It almost broke my arm. Wasn't I pretty good all through?"

"You were the best out there."

"I know it."

He waited while she dismounted and handed the pony to a groom.

"Helen, I believe I've got a job."

"What is it?"

"Don't jump on the idea till you think it over. Gus Myers wants me to manage his racing stables. Eight thousand a year."

Helen considered. "It's a nice salary; and I bet you could make yourself up a nice string from his ponies."

"The principal thing is that I need the money; I'd have as much as you and things would be easier."

"You'd have as much as me," Helen repeated. She almost regretted that he would need no more help from her. "But with Gus Myers, isn't there a string attached? Wouldn't he expect a boost up?"

"He probably would," answered Stuart bluntly, "and if I can help him socially, I will. As a matter of fact, he wants me at a stag dinner tonight."

"All right, then," Helen said absently. Still hesitating to tell her her game was over, Stuart followed her glance toward the field, where a runabout had driven up and parked by the ropes.

"There's your old friend, Teddy," he remarked dryly—"or rather, your new friend, Teddy. He's taking a sudden interest in polo. Perhaps he thinks the horses aren't biting this summer."

"You're not in a very good humor," protested Helen. "You know, if you say the word, I'll never see him again. All I want in the world is for you and I to be together."

"I know," he admitted regretfully. "Selling horses and giving up clubs put a crimp in that. I know the women all fall for Teddy, now he's getting famous, but if he tries to fool around with you I'll break his piano over his head... Oh, another thing," he began, seeing the men already riding on the field. "About your last chukker—"

As best he could, he put the situation up to her. He was not prepared for the fury that swept over her.

"But it's an outrage! I got up the game and it's been posted on the bulletin board for three days."

"You started an hour late."

"And do you know why?" she demanded. "Because your friend Joe Morgan insisted that Celie ride sidesaddle. He tore her habit off her three times, and she only got here by climbing out the kitchen window."

"I can't do anything about it."

"Why can't you? Weren't you once a governor of this club? How can women ever expect to be any good if they have to quit every time the men want the field? All the men want is for the women to come up to them in the evening and tell them what a beautiful game they played!"

Still raging and blaming Stuart, she crossed the field to Teddy's car. He got out and greeted her with concentrated intensity:

"I've reached the point where I can neither sleep nor eat from thinking of you. What point is that?"

There was something thrilling about him that she had never been conscious of in the old days; perhaps the stories of his philanderings had made him more romantic to her.

"Well, don't think of me as I am now," she said. "My face is getting rougher every day and my muscles lean out of an evening dress like a female impersonator. People are beginning to refer to me as handsome instead of pretty. Besides, I'm in a vile humor. It seems to me women are always just edged out of everything."

Stuart's game was brutal that afternoon. In the first five minutes, he realized that Teddy's runabout was no longer there, and his long slugs began to tally from all angles. Afterward, he bumped home across country at a gallop; his mood was not assuaged by a note handed him by the children's nurse:

DEAR:

Since your friends made it impossible for us to play, I wasn't going to sit there just dripping; so I had Teddy bring me home. And since you'll be out to dinner, I'm going into New York with him to the theater. I'll either be out on the theater train or spend the night at mother's.

HELEN.

Stuart went upstairs and changed into his dinner coat. He had no defense against the unfamiliar claws of jealousy that began a slow dissection of his insides. Often Helen had gone to plays or dances with other men, but this was different. He felt toward Teddy the faint contempt of the physical man for the artist, but the last six months had bruised his pride. He perceived the possibility that Helen might be seriously interested in someone else.

He was in a bad humor at Gus Myers' dinner—annoyed with his host for talking so freely about their business arrangement. When at last they rose from the table, he decided that it was no go and called Myers aside.

"Look here. I'm afraid this isn't a good idea, after all."

"Why not?" His host looked at him in alarm. "Are you going back on me? My dear fellow—"

"I think we'd better call it off."

"And why, may I ask? Certainly I have the right to ask why."

Stuart considered. "All right, I'll tell you. When you made that little speech, you mentioned me as if you had somehow bought me, as if I was a sort of employee in your office. Now, in the sporting world that doesn't go; things are more—more democratic. I grew up with all these men here tonight, and they didn't like it any better than I did."

"I see," Mr. Myers reflected carefully—"I see." Suddenly he clapped Stuart on the back. "That is exactly the sort of thing I like to be told; it helps me. From now on I won't mention you as if you were in my—as if we had a business arrangement. Is that all right?"

After all, the salary was eight thousand dollars.

"Very well, then," Stuart agreed. "But you'll have to excuse me tonight. I'm catching a train to the city."

"I'll put an automobile at your disposal."

At ten o'clock he rang the bell of Teddy's apartment on Forty-eighth Street.

"I'm looking for Mr. Van Beck," he said to the woman who answered the door. "I know he's gone to the theater, but I wonder if you can tell me—" Suddenly he guessed who the woman was. "I'm Stuart Oldhorne," he explained. "I married Mr. Van Beck's cousin."

"Oh, come in," said Betty pleasantly. "I know all about who you are."

She was just this side of forty, stoutish and plain of face, but full of a keen, brisk vitality. In the living room they sat down.

"You want to see Teddy?"

"He's with my wife and I want to join them after the theater. I wonder if you know where they went?"

"Oh, so Teddy's with your wife." There was a faint, pleasant brogue in her voice. "Well, now, he didn't say exactly where he'd be tonight."

"Then you don't know?"

"I don't—not for the life of me," she admitted cheerfully. "I'm sorry."

He stood up, and Betty saw the thinly hidden anguish in his face. Suddenly she was really sorry.

"I did hear him say something about the theater," she said ruminatively. "Now sit down and let me think what it was. He goes out so much and a play once a week is enough for me, so that one night mixes up with the others in my head. Didn't your wife say where to meet them?"

"No. I only decided to come in after they'd started. She said she'd catch the theater train back to Long Island or go to her mother's."

"That's it," Betty said triumphantly, striking her hands together like cymbals. "That's what he said when he called up—that he was putting a lady on the theater train for Long Island, and would be home himself right afterward. We've had a child sick and it's driven things from my mind."

"I'm very sorry I bothered you under those conditions."

"It's no bother. Sit down. It's only just after ten."

Feeling easier, Stuart relaxed a little and accepted a cigar.

"No, if I tried to keep up with Teddy, I'd have white hair by now," Betty said. "Of course, I go to his concerts, but often I fall asleep—not that he ever knows it. So long as he doesn't take too much to drink and knows where his home is, I don't bother about where he wanders." As Stuart's face grew serious again, she changed her tone: "All and all, he's a good husband to me and we have a happy life together, without interfering with each other. How would he do working next to the nursery and groaning at every sound? And how would I do going to Mrs. Ruthven's with him, and all of them talking about high society and high art?"

A phrase of Helen's came back to Stuart: "Always together—I like for us to do everything together."

"You have children, haven't you, Mr. Oldhorne?"

"Yes. My boy's almost big enough to sit a horse."

"Ah, yes; you're both great for horses."

"My wife says that as soon as their legs are long enough to reach stirrups, she'll be interested in them again." This didn't sound right to Stuart and he modified it: "I mean she always has been interested in them, but she never let them monopolize her or come between us. We've always believed that marriage ought to be founded on companionship, on having the same interests. I mean, you're musical and you help your husband."

Betty laughed. "I wish Teddy could hear that. I can't read a note or carry a tune."

"No?" He was confused. "I'd somehow got the impression that you were musical."

"You can't see why else he'd have married me?"

"Not at all. On the contrary."

After a few minutes, he said good night, somehow liking her. When he had gone, Betty's expression changed slowly to one of exasperation; she went to the telephone and called her husband's studio:

"There you are, Teddy. Now listen to me carefully. I know your cousin is with you and I want to talk with her... Now, don't lie. You put her on the phone. Her husband has been here, and if you don't let me talk to her, it might be a serious matter."

She could hear an unintelligible colloquy, and then Helen's voice:

"Hello."

"Good evening, Mrs. Oldhorne. Your husband came here, looking for you and Teddy. I told him I didn't know which play you were at, so you'd better be thinking which one. And I told him Teddy was leaving you at the station in time for the theater train."

"Oh, thank you very much. We—"

"Now, you meet your husband or there's trouble for you, or I'm no judge of men. And—wait a minute. Tell Teddy, if he's going to be up late, that Josie's sleeping light, and he's not to touch the piano when he gets home."

Betty heard Teddy come in at eleven, and she came into the drawing-room smelling of camomile vapor. He greeted her absently; there was a look of suffering in his face and his eyes were bright and far away.

"You call yourself a great musician, Teddy Van Beck," she said, "but it seems to me you're much more interested in women."

"Let me alone, Betty."

"I do let you alone, but when the husbands start coming here, it's another matter."

"This was different, Betty. This goes way back into the past."

"It sounds like the present to me."

"Don't make any mistake about Helen," he said. "She's a good woman."

"Not through any fault of yours, I know."

He sank his head wearily in his hands. "I've tried to forget her. I've avoided her for six years. And then, when I met her a month ago, it all rushed over me. Try and understand, Bet. You're my best friend; you're the only person that ever loved me."

"When you're good I love you," she said.

"Don't worry. It's over. She loves her husband; she just came to New York with me because she's got some spite against him. She follows me a certain distance just like she always has, and then— Anyhow, I'm not

going to see her any more. Now go to bed, Bet. I want to play for a while."

He was on his feet when she stopped him.

"You're not to touch the piano tonight."

"Oh, I forgot about Josie," he said remorsefully. "Well, I'll drink a bottle of beer and then I'll come to bed."

He came close and put his arm around her.

"Dear Bet, nothing could ever interfere with us."

"You're a bad boy, Teddy," she said. "I wouldn't ever be so bad to you."

"How do you know, Bet? How do you know what you'd do?"

He smoothed down her plain brown hair, knowing for the thousandth time that she had none of the world's dark magic for him, and that he couldn't live without her for six consecutive hours. "Dear Bet," he whispered. "Dear Bet."

III

The Oldhorns were visiting. In the last four years, since Stuart had terminated his bondage to Gus Myers, they had become visiting people. The children visited Grandmother Van Beck during the winter and attended school in New York. Stuart and Helen visited friends in Asheville, Aiken and Palm Beach, and in the summer usually occupied a small cottage on someone's Long Island estate. "My dear, it's just standing there empty. I wouldn't dream of accepting any rent. You'll be doing us a favor by occupying it."

Usually, they were; they gave out a great deal of themselves in that eternal willingness and enthusiasm which makes a successful guest—it became their profession. Moving through a world that was growing rich with the war in Europe, Stuart had somewhere lost his way. Twice playing brilliant golf in the national amateur, he accepted a job as professional at a club which his father had helped to found. He was restless and unhappy.

This week-end they were visiting a pupil of his. As a consequence of a mixed foursome, the Oldhorns went upstairs to dress for dinner surcharged with the unpleasant accumulation of many unsatisfactory months. In the afternoon, Stuart had played with their hostess and Helen with another man—a situation which Stuart always dreaded, because it forced him into competition with Helen. He had actually tried to miss that putt on the eighteenth—to just miss it. But the ball dropped in the cup. Helen went through the superficial motions of a good loser, but she devoted herself pointedly to her partner for the rest of the afternoon.

Their expressions still counterfeited amusement as they entered their room.

When the door closed, Helen's pleasant expression faded and she walked toward the dressing table as though her own reflection was the only decent company with which to forgather. Stuart watched her, frowning.

"I know why you're in a rotten humor," he said; "though I don't believe you know yourself."

"I'm not in a rotten humor," Helen responded in a clipped voice.

"You are; and I know the real reason—the one you don't know. It's because I holed that putt this afternoon."

She turned slowly, incredulously, from the mirror.

"Oh, so I have a new fault! I've suddenly become, of all things, a poor sport!"

"It's not like you to be a poor sport," he admitted, "but otherwise why all this interest in other men, and why do you look at me as if I'm—well, slightly gamy?"

"I'm not aware of it."

"I am." He was aware, too, that there was always some man in their life now—some man of power and money who paid court to Helen and gave her the sense of solidity which he failed to provide. He had no cause to be jealous of any particular man, but the pressure of many was irritating. It annoyed him that on so slight a grievance, Helen should remind him by her actions that he no longer filled her entire life.

"If Anne can get any satisfaction out of winning, she's welcome to it," said Helen suddenly.

"Isn't that rather petty? She isn't in your class; she won't qualify for the third flight in Boston."

Feeling herself in the wrong, she changed her tone.

"Oh, that isn't it," she broke out. "I just keep wishing you and I could play together like we used to. And now you have to play with dubs, and get their wretched shots out of traps. Especially"—she hesitated—"especially when you're so unnecessarily gallant."

The faint contempt in her voice, the mock jealousy that covered a growing indifference was apparent to him. There had been a time when, if he danced with another woman, Helen's stricken eyes followed him around the room.

"My gallantry is simply a matter of business," he answered. "Lessons have brought in three hundred a month all summer. How could I go to see you play at Boston next week, except that I'm going to coach other women?"

"And you're going to see me win," announced Helen. "Do you know that?"

"Naturally, I want nothing more," Stuart said automatically. But the unnecessary defiance in her voice repelled him, and he suddenly wondered if he really cared whether she won or not.

At the same moment, Helen's mood changed and for a moment she saw the true situation—that she could play in amateur tournaments and Stuart could not, that the new cups in the rack were all hers now, that he had given up the fiercely competitive sportsmanship that had been the breath of life to him in order to provide necessary money.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for you, Stuart!" There were tears in her eyes. "It seems such a shame that you can't do the things you love, and I can. Perhaps I oughtn't to play this summer."

"Nonsense," he said. "You can't sit home and twirl your thumbs."

She caught at this: "You wouldn't want me to. I can't help being good at sports; you taught me nearly all I know. But I wish I could help you."

"Just try to remember I'm your best friend. Sometimes you act as if we were rivals."

She hesitated, annoyed by the truth of his words and unwilling to concede an inch; but a wave of memories rushed over her, and she thought how brave he was in his eked-out, pieced-together life; she came and threw her arms around him.

"Darling, darling, things are going to be better. You'll see."

Helen won the finals in the tournament at Boston the following week. Following around with the crowd, Stuart was very proud of her. He hoped that instead of feeding her egotism, the actual achievement would make things easier between them. He hated the conflict that had grown out of their wanting the same excellences, the same prizes from life.

Afterward he pursued her progress toward the clubhouse, amused and a little jealous of the pack that fawned around her. He reached the club among the last, and a steward accosted him. "Professionals are served in the lower grill, please," the man said.

"That's all right. My name's Oldhorne."

He started to walk by, but the man barred his way.

"Sorry, sir. I realize that Mrs. Oldhorne's playing in the match, but my orders are to direct the professionals to the lower grill, and I understand you are a professional."

"Why, look here—" Stuart began, wildly angry, and stopped. A group of people were listening. "All right; never mind," he said gruffly, and turned away.

The memory of the experience rankled; it was the determining factor that drove him, some weeks later, to a momentous decision. For a long time he had been playing with the idea of joining the Canadian Air Force, for service in France. He knew that his absence would have little practical bearing on the lives of Helen and the children; happening on some friends who were also full of the restlessness of 1915, the matter was suddenly decided. But he had not counted on the effect upon Helen; her reaction was not so much one of grief or alarm, but as if she had been somehow outwitted.

"But you might have told me!" she wailed. "You leave me dangling; you simply take yourself away without any warning."

Once again Helen saw him as the bright and intolerably blinding hero, and her soul winced before him as it had when they first met. He was a warrior; for him, peace was only the interval between wars, and peace was destroying him. Here was the game of games beckoning him— Without

throwing over the whole logic of their lives, there was nothing she could say.

"This is my sort of thing," he said confidently, younger with his excitement. "A few more years of this life and I'd go to pieces, take to drink. I've somehow lost your respect, and I've got to have that, even if I'm far away."

She was proud of him again; she talked to everyone of his impending departure. Then, one September afternoon, she came home from the city, full of the old feeling of comradeship and bursting with news, to find him buried in an utter depression.

"Stuart," she cried, "I've got the—" She broke off. "What's the matter, darling? Is something the matter?"

He looked at her dully. "They turned me down," he said.

"What?"

"My left eye." He laughed bitterly. "Where that dub cracked me with the brassie. I'm nearly blind in it."

"Isn't there anything you can do?"

"Nothing."

"Stuart!" She stared at him aghast. "Stuart, and I was going to tell you! I was saving it for a surprise. Elsa Prentice has organized a Red Cross unit to serve with the French, and I joined it because I thought it would be wonderful if we both went. We've been measured for uniforms and bought our outfits, and we're sailing the end of next week."

IV

Helen was a blurred figure among other blurred figures on a boat deck, dark against the threat of submarines. When the ship had slid out into the obscure future, Stuart walked eastward along Fifty-seventh Street. His grief at the severance of many ties was a weight he carried in his body, and he walked slowly, as if adjusting himself to it. To balance this there was a curious sensation of lightness in his mind. For the first time in twelve years he was alone, and the feeling came over him that he was alone for good; knowing Helen and knowing war, he could guess at the experiences she would go through, and he could not form any picture of a renewed life together afterward. He was discarded; she had proved the stronger at last. It seemed very strange and sad that his marriage should have such an ending.

He came to Carnegie Hall, dark after a concert, and his eye caught the name of Theodore Van Beck, large on the posted bills. As he stared at it, a green door opened in the side of the building and a group of people in evening dress came out. Stuart and Teddy were face to face before they recognized each other.

"Hello, there!" Teddy cried cordially. "Did Helen sail?"

"Just now."

"I met her on the street yesterday and she told me. I wanted you both to come to my concert. Well, she's quite a heroine, going off like that... Have you met my wife?"

Stuart and Betty smiled at each other.

"We've met."

"And I didn't know it," protested Teddy. "Women need watching when they get toward their dotage... Look here, Stuart; we're having a few people up to the apartment. No heavy music or anything. Just supper and a few débutantes to tell me I was divine. It will do you good to come. I imagine you're missing Helen like the devil."

"I don't think I—"

"Come along. They'll tell you you're divine too."

Realizing that the invitation was inspired by kindness, Stuart accepted. It was the sort of gathering he had seldom attended, and he was surprised to meet so many people he knew. Teddy played the lion in a manner at once assertive and skeptical. Stuart listened as he enlarged to Mrs. Cassius Ruthven on one of his favorite themes:

"People tried to make marriages cooperative and they've ended by becoming competitive. Impossible situation. Smart men will get to fight shy of ornamental women. A man ought to marry somebody who'll be grateful, like Betty here."

"Now don't talk so much, Theodore Van Beck," Betty interrupted. "Since you're such a fine musician, you'd do well to express yourself with music instead of rash words."

"I don't agree with your husband," said Mrs. Ruthven. "English girls hunt with their men and play politics with them on absolutely equal terms, and it tends to draw them together."

"It does not," insisted Teddy. "That's why English society is the most disorganized in the world. Betty and I are happy because we haven't any qualities in common at all."

His exuberance grated on Stuart, and the success that flowed from him swung his mind back to the failure of his own life. He could not know that his life was not destined to be a failure. He could not read the fine story that three years later would be carved proud above his soldier's grave, or know that his restless body, which never spared itself in sport or danger, was destined to give him one last proud gallop at the end.

"They turned me down," he was saying to Mrs. Ruthven. "I'll have to stick to Squadron A, unless we get drawn in."

"So Helen's gone." Mrs. Ruthven looked at him, reminiscing. "I'll never forget your wedding. You were both so handsome, so ideally suited to each other. Everybody spoke of it."

Stuart remembered; for the moment it seemed that he had little else that it was fun to remember.

"Yes," he agreed, nodding his head thoughtfully, "I suppose we were a handsome pair."