

PART XIII

That Challenging Moment

If we could ~~see~~ point to the particular moment in our life which is fraught with tragedy, could we avoid it, by-pass it? If we had prescience, or intuitive consciousness, wouldn't fate be just as inevitable? Aren't there forces, beyond our control, that lead us into that grooved path, that inevitable challenging moment - that <sup>totality and</sup> fatality of our fate? That destiny, the one and only moment in our life, once discharged, speeds with the assurance of an arrow to our destruction or salvation! Blindly, even enchantingly, we travel our course oblivious to all warnings - assuming there are no warnings, as if we believe in the inevitability of the inevitable - when events and circumstances are there ripe to form the mechanism for the projectile's first propulsion.

Was it insouciance on the part of Cynthia to accept Foster's invitation to go along on the trip to New York; or was it the great temptation to visit the fabulous city that had obscured all hesitations and doubts? There was no question of Foster's love for her, of the quiet though firm acceptance of her by his "new" grandmother, and finally the reluctant consent by ~~the~~ truculent old Forrest himself. But, and that was strangest of all, even her parents couldn't find much in the way of objections. Maybe it was the old charm of the "Forrest" name.

Or was it the great changes that had taken place in Portgrave, in time less than a year; changes great enough to confuse a young lady who wasn't sure whether to be in love, or whom to love. George or Foster? Now, is it

Foster? Is it Foster because there is no George to love? And where is George? Is it Blanca?... But George is not of the immediate -- whatever that is. "Long-term-George?" No, just that he is not the kind of love a girl falls in love with. George is what he wants to be - a stranger.

Things and events transpiring in Portgrave, - in one year. And so confusing. The Black building, now the Emporium--which is now Solomon Dreen's, and Lena's, and George's, and Foster's. Foster? The wraps off, and suddenly it's ready for our graduation! A whole year having classes in old churches, in old "barns", and then to graduate in a new fashionable..... They were still hammering in the depths somewhere during the exercises, but the auditorium was ready, the stage spic-and-span, and splendid with flags, draperies and bunting. First graduation out of school. Jerome Black! And Bob Black. Both had a hand.... Bob Black and the new Mrs. Forrest! How quietly the new Mrs Forrest became the New Mrs. Forrest. Only a few years ago. And now the rumored affair between Bob Black and the new Mrs. Forrest, - the old Clara. What, no comment, George! And he, <sup>Bob,</sup> taking on as if he really means it, as if he is really devoted to you George, to the new theatre, to the fashioning of the new spirit of his home-town. Even to his brother! Clara, she is good and means well. Been good to Foster and her. Had she influenced her to accept...?

Is it all in the cards, and what is will be?

But it's all so confusing.

A holiday in New York! The very thought of it was bewildering. Even old Forrest himself seemed to be kind and gracious to her since the talk of her joining them began.

The pullman, the elegance of the cuisine, the swift rush of the train gliding along on the white earth, the jingle of the Christmas bells in the air, the voice of the carollers in the air, all the true and porten-

ded happiness in the air! Now in their own solitude of their own compartment, was the solitude of their own cheer, as if afraid to share it with the outside world? The outside world was cold and wintry, but here in their own world the snow and ice made a glittering castle, their own castle, as shining as the stars -- their own Castle of Christmas and joy!

And then <sup>Grand</sup> Central Station, and the breath of that new world, that phantasy which is New York. The confusion and vortex of strange sounds, the enormous sound of the great and shifting mass of people that move to and fro, and aimlessly, like gnats; the echo of the engine blasts in the sheds and on the tracks, the mangle of the hurrying footfalls and their reflections in the marble floor and the marble walls; the whitening of the breaking in of the sounds of the outside world, and its comingling with the sound, the great sound of human activity within and without. It's a breathless world, this new world, and as heady and stimulating as strong spirits. And you are drunk with the wine of renewed youth. ~~was~~ A new youth and a new vigor. A youthfulness of limb and mind that you didn't know in your youth in the old town, the small town where you spent that forlorn youth. A revitalized youthful longing that seeks to satisfy that longing of another youth that never was satisfied. Never dreamt to have satisfied. But this is a new world, a new planet where everything is possible, where the invincible is no more invincible, where the code of morals and achievement is of another world and has a new beckoning, the beckoning of fulfillment. Its potency, rushing into the priming already there, <sup>it</sup> culminates into a recklessness of exuberance and adventure heretofore damned by restrictions and inhibitions of a past and rigid code.

Only the present!

Out of the cozy warmth of Grand Central's brilliant caverns they came out into the evening twilight of a gray world, made phantasmal by floating feathery wisps of snow flakes, mild and soundless as a cat's paw; made transparent through the myriads of lights like ectoplasmic spectres, yet,

tee, as myriads of glistening crystals. Then as the twilight deepened into evening, they came through like streaks of yellow light, like waves from outer space.

Through the heart of New York and the rush of Forty-second street there were ever present the crisp and ruddy winter faces, gay with <sup>the hope of</sup> Christmas, and decked out in their most bizarre and jelliest, providing a never ending backdrop to the march and kaleidoscopic pattern of the glow and shadow and color that passed and greeted them and smiled at them as they proceeded to the Biltmore hotel.

The miracle that is New York. The eyes can't conceive nor can the mind contain it all. The enormity of the scene and the swiftness of change, the flux and fluidity of the great mass surrounding you. Even the plastic mind of youth - exposed to it for the first time - cannot hold its impress. At least not for the time being. In later years maybe the great spectacle will spread itself like a fantasmagoria before a magic lantern, and the eyes' mirror will reflect the memory back on the screen of mind in different views, versions and visions as on the screen of the rising curtain on the stage. The scene will be magnified and glorified, but the spots and episode will there mere stand out clear in bold relief; for the mind's lens had lost nothing, had made a true record, and now nourished and fertilized by the growth of the years must put them in their true perspective and magnificence - and the reel will begin its unreeling. For the present it must remain still, bewildering, introspective and overwhelming..... in the booming and deserted canyons and great hollows along the avenues of giant structures that overpower you..... in the wilderness of your soul that sears with and over the great swarming mass..... in the booming, cawing, raucous babble of sound that is sweeping over you like the sea, but hasn't the sibilance and muse of the sea - a sound overpowering and without relief!

Dinner at the Biltmore! The chattering, warm atmosphere. The joyful, warm heart of New York! The crystal candelabra sparkling their prisms in the

myriad crystals, shedding a hale over your head that reflects liquid pools of flame in your eyes, and deep crimson in your face. And your blood drinks in the sharp flaming drink. Never drank at home. But this is New York. Just a bit - just a bit, and then more. Champagne! You dreamed of it way back home, your father joked about it. But here it is. Sparkling and winking at you with a hundred ~~eyes~~ eyes. Perhaps your first sip is disappointing, but the New Yorkers do it. Why shouldn't you? You are no hic. The second and... they taste better. Your head is swimming, but you feel jelly. The elder Forrests who ~~were~~ total strangers to you are your friends now. The old Mr. Forrest sitting across the table from you, the thin, dear little man - he is neither thin nor dear, you think. You almost love him sitting there and dangling his watch-chain over the wide expanse of ~~the~~ belly. You are fascinated by the fatness and roundness of the belly and the thickness of the chain. But you wonder why you had never seen him like that before, or why you hadn't appreciated his wit. He smiles broadly to you. Everybody is smiling, ~~and~~. And the world is all smiles and floating in champagne. Fester was a bit unreal when he visited you in your room to give you a midnight kiss and say goodnight. It was no more than that. The elder ones were waiting for him in their suite.

So was the first night in the strange Metropolis. And so was the second night.

And then another day, and another night!

And the wonders and the round of dreams intoxicated her more and more. And the elder couple were safe and satisfied in their suite at the Biltmore -- after an extravaganza on Broadway, and a midnight supper and a cabaret, and martinis and dancing and more drinks (for this is New York, and one lives only once), and more hilarity ... go on, go, go... and everything is good and glewing and safe ... and the young ones lived the life of young ones ... and Mrs. Forrest took the hand off the throttle ... and the engine of

life rushed on its merry untrammled way ... and Cynthia knew the life that was one exquisite burning moment - that one challenging moment!

PART XLV

THE QUALITY OF INFINITY

CHAPTER IV

And It Will Come to Pass In the End of Days:

That I will make the heavens to tremble,  
And the earth shall be shaken out of her place,  
For the wrath of the Lord of hosts,  
And for the day of His fierce anger....

"For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof  
Shall not give their light:  
The sun shall be darkened in his going forth,  
And the moon shall not cause her light to shine....

(Then) "Behold, I create new heavens  
And a new earth:  
And the former things shall not be remembered,  
Nor come into mind.  
But be ye glad and rejoice for ever  
In that which I create....  
And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard....  
There shall be no more thence an infant of days,  
Nor an old man that hath not filled his days;  
For the youngest shall die a hundred years old....  
They shall not build, and another inhabit,  
They shall not plant, and another eat.  
For as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people,  
And Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands....  
And it will come to pass that before they call I will answer,  
And while they are yet speaking, I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
And dust shall be the serpent's food....  
And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den.  
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain;  
For the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah)