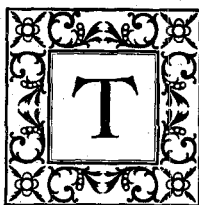


Prince Tatters

BY MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN ANDREWS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. C. YOHN



HERE is a line in geometry whose name is, I think, a tangent. The affair of this line is to come inevitably out of somewhere very far off, and to keep on and on and on till it strikes, for just one moment, the edge of a circle which has been waiting in space for that moment since the solar system was mush. After the line has kept this momentary cosmic date with the circle it goes straight on and on and on again, and what becomes of it beyond that it is of no manner of use inquiring, for we are not built so that we know what infinity means. Of it nothing is heard again inside our limits. Or seldom. Once in a blue moon of æons the tangent makes a back loop, and touches the lost circle for another instant before finality.

Things may happen that way in a life. It is not new to compare life to a circle. Probably every human with nerves has at times regarded his own little specimen of existence and found it comparable to the round a captive squirrel makes in a cage. No one with a sense of humor ever feels himself or herself at all times aggressive, forward-going, and satisfactory. Youth especially is given to morbid discouragements.

There was a girl whose pretty name was Alixe Sherrill, whose age was twenty-four, whose good looks and charm were undoubted, and whose speech and temperament were of the pleasant country south of Mason and Dixon's line—God's country. This child of fortune on a day ungratefully had a grouch; good fortune is no hindrance to ungratefulness. She sat on the rough log step of the gallery of a camp deep in Canadian woods; a sunshiny lake, like an untouched drink poured in a bowl of jade, stretched away from her; she stared sorrowfully at the

laughter of the lake running to hide constantly in vague shores two miles off. A man with a grizzled head and serene face read a trashy novel, sitting in a chair on the gallery; probably scholars and students read such exclusively on vacations.

"Father!" complained Alixe Sherrill.

The man put down his book, and one saw in the movement why his face wore that look of serenity. Long ago he had ordained that self should be deleted from him, and that nothing should ever irritate him. "Yes, my girl."

"Excuse me for interrupting you, father, but it's important."

"Is it, dear? What is it?"

"I feel like a squirrel in a cage, father."

"You do?" He did not even look bewildered. For twenty years, since the child's mother died, he had been used to thinking her thoughts with her. He knew that little thoughts were often quite big. "Like a squirrel," he repeated. "Around and around ad nauseam, it seems. You're not bored with camp, Alixe?"

"No. No. Never. It's heaven. I adore the woods; you know it. It's bigger than that, father. It's so hard to say, but I'm all futile, meaningless. I'm not getting anywhere, and I'm getting old. Twenty-four, father." She lifted her head out of her hands and the moody eyes turned inquiringly. Did he think twenty-four was rather old, also?

"Twenty-four," he considered. "And finding your life like a squirrel in a cage. You probably need to take in washing," he reflected, "but that can't be arranged. The alternative might be marrying. Your mother was nineteen."

The girl made a gesture of impatience. "So unmodern," she objected. "Is there nothing for a woman in this age but washing or wedlock? What about painting portraits? Who was it that Rupert Mortimer said was the hope of the year, if the

year had a hope? That was me, Doctor Sherrill. And you suggest that I take in washing! Shame!"

"Why, then, a squirrel in a cage?"

He was packing his pipe carefully, but threw a brief glance at the boyish figure on the step below him, hands in the pockets of the gray checked sporting trousers. That glance told his experienced eye quite a bit. The look on the face dearest to him was shifting like bits of colored light in a kaleidoscope, like the play of shine and shadow on the Mountain over yonder; this little thought of his girl's was the fluttering tag end of something larger, hidden back in a sensitive, unsatisfied brain. Unsatisfied—that was the trouble; in spite of his infinite devotion, of his living for her, this child who was, after all, a quite separate being from him, wanted something. And he was inadequate to find it for her. A smile slightly grim stirred his lips.

"Do you know what you want, Alixe?"

"Darn it, I don't," she threw back, and laughed. She drew a hand from a manly pocket and pushed back a wave of most feminine hair. "But do you know what I'm suspecting, John Sherrill, M.D.?"

Sherrill shook his head.

"I'm suspecting that I want a tremendous love-affair with an unhappy ending."

"Unhappy?"

"Oh, silly! I can't leave you. I can't. You'd go to rack and ruin. So would I. I can't let go our combination, father, to try an uncertainty. It isn't marrying I want. But—but. I do want to fall in love." She grinned, biting her lower lip and eying him. "I never yet cared a whoop about one of my steadies. You know that. And it's not fair. I'm missing a trick. I'd like to be mad about somebody, somebody to satisfy me to the end of my soul, that's all."

"Oh, that's all."

"Yes, father. And then have him sail away at break of day, and leave me broken-hearted, with a hole in the universe the size of the sun. And I'd be entranced with my sorrow and happy with you ever after. Yet, likely, I'll end by marrying Basil Lynn, and be flourishing and pampered. He is a dear, father,

Basil is. But yet—oh, I so want my lost love that I've never had. Isn't it queer of me, father?"

The pipe was smoked by now, and Doctor Sherrill took it from his mouth and knocked it upside down on the railing of the gallery. He did not smile. "There is such a thing as a divided or dissociated personality," he considered. "It's not a desirable thing. But I fancy it's more common in mild degrees than is supposed. I fancy that many an exemplary wife and mother of a family keeps hidden away, unforgotten and alive, some romance of the sort you're howling for, some hopeless lost love which seems to her dying day, maybe, the loveliest thing in life. Maybe the central thing in life. And yet she may love her lawful husband properly and devotedly all the time. Odd business, personality; it's not always the neat, compact bundle of qualities it's cracked up to be. Mighty mixed and loose-ended and split up at times. But you're just a spoiled brat," he finished. "You've had nothing but happiness and love all your days, and you don't know what sorrow means. I'll have to pray double-quick that you don't learn, for your blasphemy. I'm convinced now that a week's washing would be the prescription."

"Oh, tut." The girl got up and stood, tall and smiling. "What I need, temporarily, like a month at a sanitarium, is a great and hopeless love. And I can't, for the life of me, love anything I've ever seen."

"You'll get yours," her father answered, nodding darkly. "Meanwhile, paddle me across to the mouth of the Rivière des Perdrix. The shadow of the Mountain is on it, and the trout ought to be jumping. We've time for a half-hour's fishing before dinner."

"Bug-juice, fish-net, paddles, rod; that's all," spoke the girl, kneeling by the canoe at the dock five minutes later. "Maybe my hopeless love is on the way; meantime we'll fish. Step into the bus, doctor."

It was no more than an hour later, and the doctor and the girl sat at dinner—or supper—in the dining-room which had no walls but greenery, which was merely

a table and a roof, with seats about it, on a point of land. Lake water lapped at pebbles on shores beneath them, and between them and the shores rose joyfully a cluster of mystical black spruce-trees and the silver and clear green of young birches. Across the lake, in glimpses through the spruces and birches, the Mountain was blue in afternoon haze. And a guide said:

"A canoe."

They looked out at the lake and saw it, leading its shining wake to the landing, and three men got out and came winding up the thread of a trail.

"Fire-rangers," explained Camille, the guide. "*Gardes-à-feu*."

"We want to beg some sugar." It was the first man in the short procession, and he stood under the trees like a young prince just out of a lost battle. His face and hands were black; his clothes hung in rags. The back of his cotton shirt fell from the left shoulder clean to his waist; a handkerchief was tied around a hopeless hiatus at one knee and the trousers were otherwise shredded. For the rest, he was beautiful to look at, for he was six feet and two or three or four inches, and topped with a thickness of brown waves which grew low on his forehead and glittered. His eyes laughed from under long and black curly lashes which seemed half to bury them. He carried himself like a lord or a soldier.

"We want to beg some sugar."

"Beg sugar! Sit down and eat supper," ordered the doctor.

"We aren't fit," protested the first man, and the others came up and stood about laughing at each other, protesting too.

"We've our own provisions, you know, only we're out of sugar," they explained. "We've been down in the burned country, around Lac Carcajou, and our clothes are covered with charcoal, so that it's no use washing—it rubs off instantly again. We did wash our hands just now."

"I think we're a little torn, too," added the leader, glancing over his wrecked shoulder, and with that a general shout went up.

"It doesn't make the faintest difference. Please do as my father says and sit down and have supper," the girl begged them.

"I can't say I don't want to, because I do," stated the leader, and sat down.

The Mountain, across, sent back echoes of laughter in gay, deep young voices, as the three hungry boys put away food with the good appetite of out-of-doors, of exercise, of youth. They talked about little, hidden lakes and blind portages and old Indian trails; they talked about what bay the blazes could be found in, and at what pools in the rivers fish were taken; they talked about their work for the government, watching and fighting the ever-recurring fires of the great forest. One learned that one of them was an engineer, sent in to estimate the extent of the big Carcajou fire; that two were students in McGill University, taking this way of spending the summer in the woods; and then it came out that they were all ex-soldiers. Ex-soldiers, of the heroic Canadian army! The girl stared speechless, stirred. What sights those smiling eyes had seen!

"My brother, my only brother, was fighting with the Canadians," she hurried to say proudly.

"Is that so?" They said it civilly, but so many girls' brothers were over there.

They were reticent; they volunteered little but they answered easily enough when some one asked a question.

"Were you wounded?"

"Wounded? Oh, yes. Everybody was wounded. Perfectly fit now. Cough a bit still. Gassed. I got it at Ypres the first time it was used, and we hadn't any masks."

"You were gassed at Ypres!" Alixe whispered the words.

"Yes. Could I have more butter, please? Don, we didn't get trout like this in our camp, did we? You know, that beggar fell into the river with all the fish—twenty-five of them—for lunch yesterday. So we hadn't any lunch." Homeric laughter greeted the memory.

One fitted them out in the guest-cabin after dinner, and everybody, being sleepy, went early to bed. Yet Alixe lay awake a long time, wide-eyed in the dark, looking, looking at a sudden, splendid vision which had stood with shining hair and tattered garments, smiling from the forest. "It's a trifle silly," reasoned Alixe, "to keep thinking about a stranger. It's merely because he's so remarkably hand-



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

"We want to beg some sugar."—Page 140.

some and I'm an artist. Beauty hits me. It would be the same if he were a girl," she assured herself. And proceeded to recapitulate a Scotch accent. Prince Tatters! whispered Alixe in the dark on top of her good and adequate reasoning, and stayed awake, as many another girl has done, because the taste of living was too good to lose in sleeping.

Next morning the three guests came to breakfast shining and soapy with cleanliness. "I hold my fists away from my clothes so as to keep clean for a bit," announced Don.

The sun and shadow rippled and intersplashed about the white table under the trees; the lake ran up the pebbles in musical eager bucketfuls, as if longing to join the feast; the breeze rustled the mystical spruces, and the gay birches and the ragged, big young chaps with their dramatic past framing them, to the eyes of Alixe, with dim haloes, quite unconscious for their part of any past or any haloes, applied themselves to food. Then, through the morning woods, along the winding brown trail, the five strolled over to the big camp and sat about the gallery, and Alixe and her "Prince Tatters," as if strong magnets had pulled them instantly into place, found themselves together, and shortly did not know if the rest were there or not.

"Do you mind talking about France?"

"Not a bit, if I don't bore you," smiled Prince Tatters. His face was clean this morning; an artist, like Alixe, could not but rejoice in it. Lines! A square jaw, a grim Scotch mouth, sensitive lips! and the amazing color of that brown thatch!

"You see," explained the artist, "I'm awfully interested, because my only brother was fighting with the Canadians before we went in. Wouldn't it be queer if you'd known him. David Sherrill."

The prince shook his head. He certainly wished he had known this girl's brother. "I might," he said doubtfully. "Such a mob of men one met. I can't begin to remember, except the ones I saw a lot of."

"There's one man who met him," Alixe spoke, "whom I'm hoping some time to find. If I do, and if he wants anything I have, or everything, he can have it."

"Risky promise," warned the prince.

"I mean it," Alixe repeated recklessly. "He saved David's life."

"Oh!" the prince agreed. "Of course one would feel a bit under obligations."

The prince was Scotch and Alixe was Southern; likely they meant the same thing, but they phrased it differently. Yet there was no chill in the restraint of the words; Scotch reticence is of that quality; one senses it as a coating of ice over a volcano of fire.

"Under obligations—no! Ready to give him—well—myself if he wanted me—yes." She laughed. Silly way to talk! What impelled her to talk in that extravagant style?

Clear gray eyes considered her gravely from away back under the lashes. "Now that might make some fellow lay claim to another man's record," he stated. "What did the chap do?"

She was only too eager to tell the story, one of a thousand like stories of heroism and self-sacrifice, of magnificent courage served by a quick brain and an iron will and an athlete's body. One of the thousand thousand stories which will be told by our children's children, and by their great-grandchildren while civilization endures, and while a race lives to honor those who saved it. One of the thousand thousand—and more thousands than are ever told will be buried forever in silence.

Alixe told this story of the man who had rescued her brother by the forlornest of forlorn hopes, with her soul throbbing in face and voice. Her mouth twisted and her eyes filled and her voice stopped dead once or twice as she told it, and the man who listened was stirred by her emotion more than by the story. One had heard of so many hairbreadth rescues; one had, of course, been in them; it had seemed rather commonplace over there to run out into hell and pull in a comrade; all one's friends did it; rescuing life was the game. So that the young man hardly listened to what the girl told, so absorbed was he in the way she was telling it.

"You see," she ended, "how I'd want to give everything I have and am, if I could, to the man who did that for David, my brother David."

"Oh, well," protested Prince Tatters. "Come now! The chap did the clean thing, of course, but—oh, well! Not yourself—not as bad as all that, don't you know?"

And they both laughed out easy young laughter. "The chap may be a boulder, don't you see," protested the prince.

"Boulder! That's blasphemous! He couldn't be anything but"—she choked on her eagerness—"anything but a prince," she flung at him.

"Very good, then, a prince we'll have him, and let it go at that," agreed the boy cheerfully, and somehow, then, she was asking questions about himself.

And he was answering. Never had he told any one so much about himself, about that three years and eight months of horror and adventure and suffering and happiness before he was invalidated home, too knocked to pieces to fight any more.

"You see, I picked up eleven wounds in my last battle, on the Somme." He glanced at the other group, and spoke a bit lower. The boys would scorn him for talking about himself. Yet he wanted to, for the first time ever; and she wanted to hear; he knew that, surely, and the knowledge was a manner of warmth and joy to him. "I was an enlisted man, and in the trenches a lot," he went on. "I've always been glad I didn't go as an officer."

"Eleven wounds—one battle!" Alixe repeated it. And then, anxiously: "Are you sure you're all right now?"

"Perfectly," the prince assured her. "One arm's a bit smaller than the other, and weaker, but that's nothing. And this bothers a trifle when I carry a pack." He flung over the bronze head and in the back of his powerful neck was a seam, a furrow of three inches. "Do you mind putting your hand here?" He pushed back the wave of hair on his forehead, and the girl put up her fingers and felt under the skin something hard and loose. "Shrapnel," grinned the boy. "I haven't bothered to have it out."

"Do you know," the girl told him, "I saw you sail. I saw the line of thirty-eight great ships steam down from Quebec, that September day in 1914. We were going back from this camp. And I'll never forget coming through Valcartier two days before and the crowd at the little station, and the soldiers getting on the train. Yes, and their friends leaving them, their mothers and their sweet-hearts. And the big dining-room that night at the Château Frontenac, full of the saddest dinner-parties I ever saw.

Do you know," she went on eagerly, "I thought I was crazy. There was a great fellow in Highland uniform—a Canadian Highlander, I suppose—who got on at Valcartier, and he must have been six feet four—huge. And when we went into the Frontenac there he was; and two minutes later I met him around a corner in a corridor; and one minute later again in another corridor. I kept seeing him every second. I suddenly realized that there was a regiment of him and that they were all six feet four. Giants."

The boy threw back his head and shouted laughter. "Well, not all quite six four," he said. "I'm only six two, and I went over with that lot."

"You did!" It seemed a tremendous coincidence to Alixe. "Maybe I saw you at the Frontenac that day; maybe you were at one of those tragic dinner-parties that night."

"I was."

"But I didn't see you." She shook her head with decision. "I wouldn't have forgotten you."

A swift glow crept from somewhere into the boy's tanned face. Did she mean it? Wouldn't she forget him? Of course he never could forget her, never. But if his everlasting soul hung in the balance he could not say so to her straightly and simply, as she was saying it to him. That iron bar to emotional speech, Scotchness, prevented him, and because of it he was miserable. He sat dumb, staring at her, wishing.

Then suddenly she asked: "Will you let me sew up the shoulder of that shirt?"

Let her? He looked up at her. And in one minute he was sitting, petrified, blissful, while her head bent over him and her fingers touched him and flashed away and came back—yes, again and again and again.

"I don't know how to thank you," he stammered. But indeed he did not need to know how, with the smile he had. But of that he had no knowledge.

"Thank me? *Thank me?* I'm so grateful, so glad I am to do the least thing after all you've done for us. To sew up a man who was gassed at Ypres and wounded on the Somme—I'll brag of it all my life."

And once more the boy had no word at all to say, though he hunted one franti-

cally. But he could smile. And then that confounded Don—who wasn't talking to her—had suggested going, and they were getting into the canoe at the landing. He waited, making a pretense of arranging their meagre pacquetons, so that the others might say good-by first, so that he might touch her hand last. What a fool a man was to let his heart get like lead and the world grow empty because of leaving a girl he'd never seen till last night, and would never see again!

"Have you gone to sleep?" demanded Don from the bow, and he stood up and shook hands with Doctor Sherrill, and spoke words of thanks, and turned. Her fingers slipped to his with a queer thrill, as if they forever and inevitably belonged there. He could not speak, not even to say "Good-by." But she looked up with eyes that were dim with something she did not trouble to hide.

"Good-by, Prince Tatters," whispered Alixe.

He was paddling furiously with his cracked old paddle down the lake, away—away. About half a mile along suddenly, as if the skies had opened, he had a revelation. That youngster he had stopped for and thrown over his shoulder the day a hundred of them were surrounded by the Germans—that was at Cantigny, that was in the spring of 1917—that was her brother. He knew, the moment he thought of it, without a shadow of doubt. Moreover, hadn't she said that the boy cried out about his photograph case that he'd dropped, and that his rescuer had laid him down carefully and gone back for the case. He did that; he remembered now. Of course any man would have done it; photographs were as valuable as life over there.

But it was a coincidence, and, with other coincidences, was proof. He was the man to whom that girl had said she would give anything—herself—if the man wanted her. A mighty stroke of the cracked paddle slewed the departing canoe around in its tracks and another very nearly headed it back to the camp. There was outcry from the canoe.

"What the hell, man? What are you doing?" Don gazed around from the bow in astonishment.

"Did you forget something?" asked McNairn from amidships.

"Yes, I did. That is," the prince explained, with Scotch exactness, "that is, there's something I've got to say to Miss Sherrill."

Which was greeted with roars of laughter. "Swim back. We're going to make the train," Don suggested, and McNairn commented:

"Hard hit, poor lad, oh, very hard hit!"

And to the prince, turning slowly lobster color, a realization flashed that life was not a fairy story; that he could not possibly imagine rushing back to this only girl of the world, and setting forth to her: "I saved your brother. I am ready to accept your gratitude and yourself." It was out of perspective, that idea. Moreover, she had simply been exaggerating in her graceful way. People do; he could not. Of course, of course she didn't dream of being taken literally. What could he say if he should go back? Slowly, wearily the cracked paddle dipped and pushed water till the bow stood forward again.

"I wonder what made him turn the boat around," spoke Alixe, watching from the camp gallery.

That embalmer of might-have-beens, Time, took this half-day of Alixe Sherrill's life and wrapped it in cobwebs and stored it a little deeper every hour in the chest of perhaps things, where memories are kept also. It never sank so far but the girl's hand could reach in and lift it out and look at it. It seemed always very beautiful to her. Inside the silvery gray fold on fold of cobwebs, in the heart of it, flamed and glowed color—rose and green and purple shifting like an opal, which stayed bright always. Yet the thing was an incident only, and only eighteen hours long at that.

Alixe was married two years later, and the young Basil Lynns went to Montreal on their wedding trip. In a room of the Ritz-Carlton, gay with English chintzes, she was moved to tell her husband about this cobweb-opal memory. The tall and very well-dressed young man smiled.

"Don't you mind?" asked Alixe.

"Not a bit, dearest. Of course, every man who saw you was in love with you. I'm prepared for that."

"But the point is—I was in love with



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

The tangent had touched the circle again and gone on into space.—Page 146.

him. He left a fearful ache. And he was the first who ever made a dent in me."

"Oh," reflected Basil Lynn.

"I can't help a feeling that it was he who saved David," she went on.

"Did he say so?"

"Say so! Heavens, no!"

"And you told him about David?"

"Yes."

"Then," Lynn settled it, "he didn't. He'd have said so."

"Oh, well—likely," agreed the girl reluctantly. "But I still have a hunch." The caressing voice went on: "You know I love you, Basil?"

"I know it—thank heaven."

"But if I saw my Prince Tatters again how can I tell but that wonderful understanding would happen—but that awful ache would happen when he went?"

Lynn, sitting back in a luxurious stuffed armchair, a picture of prosperous youth, refused to be worried. "It was all environment and picturesqueness, darling; all romance."

"But romance is strong."

"A casual fire-ranger, in rags, dear; and likely it was the rags that made the romance. Probably in citizens clothes he'd be a boulder."

"Stop it!" ordered Alixe. "'Bounder.' He was a glory." She put out her hands to ward off something. "Don't try to kick over my dream, or I won't talk to you about it."

"I won't," promised Lynn contritely. "But, my dearest, what's the good of working myself up over a dream? It was only a few hours long, and it's gone, and you love me, and you're my wife. What's in the world besides that marvellous fact?"

"Well," set forth Alixe, curling her patent-leathered toes under her on a sofa, "well, things are pleasant, and you're a lamb. But what I want to know is if I may strictly-honorably go on loving a dream to the end of my days and still be quite satisfactory to you as a wife. I can do it—somehow I'm built that way; to love the memory of my hero boy in rags forever till I die—my hopeless love. And still adore you as your everyday wife, splendid you, and enjoy my lucky lot. But is it satisfactory to you? I always wanted a hopeless love, Basil; don't grudge it to me."

And Lynn, who had not set out to own

all the subtleties of the soul he loved, put his arms around her and whispered: "As long as you don't stop loving me, precious, it's perfectly satisfactory."

And then: "Come along—put on the green hat I like and let's go out and see the procession."

A member of the royal family of England had arrived in Montreal the day before, and the whole beautiful city flew gay with bunting and was jubilant with bands and marching troops. The Lynns stood on the corner of a street which leads down from Sherbrooke Street to St. Catherine's, and the troops, turning here, came close to the curbstone. Alixe gazed up the wide avenue at the endless, elastic lines of marching men; khaki, khaki, and yet more khaki. Till a glint of strong color broke, with splashes of white, with Scotch caps jaunty on lofty heads, with fluttering plaids—the Canadian Highlanders were coming; the pipes droned out their mystical, stirring, restrained, maddening music. Alixe's pulse jumped.

"The 'Ladies from Hell,'" she whispered, and caught her husband's sleeve and thought of what deeds had won that name, and of what hell in very fact these steadfast faces had looked into.

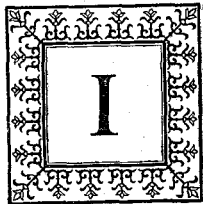
And with that, swiftly, a ragged boy with deep eyes was smiling at her across a table in the woods, and she heard the tones of his voice: "I went over with that lot," he had said. Her breath came fast; how quickly they marched; she could not possibly look at them all. And then suddenly—he was there! At the end of the line, turning now close by her—three feet away. The Scotch cap was a crown on the brown hair, the face and figure were more magnificent even than she remembered. With the sight the warm impetuosity of her soul seized her; the crowd, the marching troops, faded. She tossed out her hands to him, standing alone in all the world—almost her hands touched him, and he turned as if a bullet had struck him in the ranks.

"Prince Tatters—oh, Prince Tatters!" cried Alixe.

His eyes held hers a second with the unfaded memory in them of a little eternal day; he passed. The tangent had touched the circle again and gone on into space.

Dramatis Personæ

BY DONN BYRNE



I must be for the thousandth time now he was sitting down at the neat table looking out on the little lawn, and trying to get his ideas together, trying to get something new, something startling, that would awaken these hard-boiled men who had control of theatres, magazines, publishing houses to the sense that he was alive, worth while, valuable. If he could only think up a new detective, or—or something.

Any other than he would have given up the game long ago, but he knew he had talent—he wouldn't go quite so far as to say genius—but great talent. It was no use their turning him down all the time. He was certain they never read the stuff.

He was certain, too, there was some trick, some knack he hadn't discovered. Just some little trick. These men of national, international fame, he could see from their faces they had no especial brains—any more than he had.

But just some little trick he couldn't get.

He had taken courses in writing, gone to schools of journalism, and here were all his manuscripts with neat rejection slips; here was what he thought the great American novel battered and dog-eared, a study of the temptations of a girl in the great city; and here was his crook drama, that some filthy reader had marked with the rim of a coffee-cup. It was enough to make a man quit.

But he wouldn't quit. He'd be as big as the biggest of them. He, too, would have his picture in the papers, not gaunt and bitter as most of them seemed, but pleasant, dignified, literary. And his picture would look like an author's, with its well-marked features, its masculine little mustache, its intellectual glasses. And he, too, would be interviewed. And he, too, would sign contracts involving great sums of money. And there would be gossip about him, too, in the papers, where in

Florida he was spending the winter vacation, what he was doing in summer.

He wouldn't quit. Hadn't they all said at school and college he was cut out to be a writer? Hadn't he gone to Europe for six months? And, what was more, hadn't he the money his father, the hardware man, had left him? Hadn't he his home? He could stick it out.

His home! His wife! If instead of these few trees, this lawn, the outlook on the quiet Sound, if instead of here he lived somewhere in the welter of affairs, wouldn't he be better? Somewhere things changed, where one did not have to go three-quarters of an hour in a train to the theatre. Downtown in New York. Only trees and grass and water and sky here. Nothing to write about.

And his wife, Berenice, oh, she was a sweet girl, a nice girl, but—hadn't he perhaps made a mistake? She was so good and wholesome! Too much? Wouldn't it have been better to be married to—to an actress, or a sculptress, or—or something. Some one who could feel things; who wouldn't smile, and be nice. Berenice was all right, but—

And his mother. She was a nice, darling person, but—she didn't just understand. She was just a mother, like anybody's mother. If she could feel the great complex things! But she was just loving, and everything he did was right.

Berenice, and his mother . . . the trees, the water . . . essential barrenness of life . . . nothing to write about . . . so unfair.

I

BECAUSE Barry had hinted it annoyed him to have her in the house while he was trying to write, Berenice had decided to go out for an hour or so, to give the poor lad a chance. And for a few minutes it bothered her to be idling, whereas there were so many little things that needed her attention. A house became so awry. It needed a flick of the hand here and there, a touch to flowers. But the white road,