



# Borgia

BY ZONA GALE

Author of "Miss Lulu Bett," etc.

SHOULD they go to The Dells and picnic, or should they go to Madison? And three words from Marfa Manchester, spoken on impulse, with detachment, without real choice, result in the expedition to The Dells, result too in the drowning of Ben. A telephone question from Max Garvin—might he bring the calendulas to-morrow night?—and a reply from Marfa: why not bring them to-night instead?—and there is Max Garvin with a severed spine from a motor accident, occurring while he answers her summons, given on impulse, with detachment, without real choice. And these occurrences follow the death of Paul Barker, who had contracted an infectious malady and died of a toxin administered for its cure, after making a visit with Marfa, on an invitation given by the way. Marfa recalls others whom she has touched with disaster—of late there has been a young negress whose life Marfa has not dared to condition, fearing that evil would be the consequence. Her father and Marcus Bartholomew leave for China, and she is torn because she might have prevented their going, through their love of her; and she fears the ill of her inaction not less than her action. She calls herself accursed, dispenser of disaster, and leaves for the pleasant country home of her cousin, Malvina Beach.

THERE spread a wash of clear blue over sky, of green over earth, of August morning sun over green and blue.

The lawn of Cousin Malvina Beach's home sloped to its little lake. Marfa, dutifully making talk, said that this was heaven, and after Mrs. Beach's inconclusive depreciation, Marfa added that at any rate it was quite heavenly not to be told of the neighbors, the servants, and the operations, or whatever kept the place from being perfect. Mrs. Beach countered that it was admirable of her not to wish to be told, and Marfa explained, "No one wants to be told. But most people want to tell," and thought that only by her replies could one be sure that Cousin Malvina heard anything that one said. Her look was withdrawn and calm, her look was ordered.

Marfa had arrived the evening before, in a summer tempest that beat at the trees and walls, as if some free flight resented any thwarting. From turmoil of water and wind, Marfa escaped into the calm of the house, and was met by the calm of Mrs. Beach! This woman, Cousin Malvina Beach, who had been living abroad since Marfa was a little girl, seemed to be intensely aware of herself, of every person, every object, everything said, so that nothing any longer required her attention. She herself was like her lungs that breathed, like her feet that walked, without any one's regard. For every possible moment she seemed practised. Marfa thought: "She isn't human. What is human? Is it turmoil, confusion, desperation?"

They had dined alone together in a room whose one wall was set with wide

glass doors, open to the lake. This was northern country and, the storm having passed, at eight o'clock the light was still drenching the sky. A blue sail bent to the white water. The food was unwonted and delicious. "Her cook is more human than she," Marfa thought, and her thought ran on: "But her cook must be ordered and unconfused to make food like this. . . ."

Mrs. Beach then said:

"I thought that Lawrence and Maude would be here before you. They're detained until to-morrow."

Some voice within Marfa cried out: "It's nobody whom I need see?—I beg your pardon . . ." and again and swiftly: "Oh, it's nobody whom I need see!"

"You know him," Mrs. Beach assured her, undisturbed. "Lawrence Brand. He told me that he used to be in love with you, at college."

"I remember. He took me to my first freshman party. But I can't see him—I can't see any one."

"Charming things," Cousin Malvina went on. "At least he is. I picked them up at Biarritz. Lawrence is perfect. The sister has been an invalid for years. I'm afraid he, poor dear, has a quite fearful time with her."

Marfa leaned forward, looking tense and terrible, looking almost old. "I cannot see any one," she said; "I wrote in my letter that I cannot see any one. . . ."

"Your mother wrote something of the boy's drowning," her cousin said, "and that you blame yourself—of course that is natural. Of course it is. But that had nothing to do with these two friends, or with me." She touched at a point between her eyebrows, as if she were sealing it over.

Marfa relaxed, felt ridiculous, thought: "I cannot tell her that I bring disaster to every one I touch—that prob-

ably she herself will not be free of it . . ." and thought: "I'll go. I can go in two days."

Now, waiting on the terrace for the car to come back from the station, she was wretched, sat silent. She thought: "I'm like a plague-sufferer—I'm like a leper—only I look innocent." They had told her not to be morbid, her mother and Luna. But who was called morbid who knew in himself the marks of the plague . . . She moved away from Cousin Malvina. She thought: "Perhaps I'm dead—only my body walks on, moves, poisons everybody, brings death. . . . Perhaps I never have been alive—they might have forgotten to give me the spark, as one forgot to put the eggs in a cake . . . then it's a dead cake. . . ."

"We'll have bouillon and biscuits out here as soon as they come," Cousin Malvina was obviously saying.

A woman, wrists, veins, breath; hollow cheeks, slender body, all so calm. All that she had locked up in her appeared to be nothing. She paid no attention to all that, appeared to have forgotten that she carried in the long white box of her the power to love, hate, sin, regret, to make others suffer. These powers she no longer attended. Or perhaps these had gone. Perhaps her fifty years were enough to leave her, too, like a cake with no eggs—but yet Cousin Malvina didn't kill or maim anybody. She lived decently, sewed prettily, served bouillon and biscuits on the terrace.

Marfa abruptly turned from her, looked down over the lake where white clouds had been stirred into blue and white water. Beyond the shores rose, yellow with stubble, green with alfalfa, fluttering with corn. All were honest, simple; serene about being isolated. All

were guiltless. Nothing over there had cost any living thing its life, its sight, its power to walk, its freedom. . . . The sky innocent, the lake innocent, the field beneficent. "Man is the malady of earth," she thought, and paused. Whose was the voice which of late occasionally spoke up in her like that, saying things of which she never had thought? She watched a robin pulling at an absurdly flexible worm. "He and I," she thought, "we prey. But it's his nature." She stared down at it. "Maybe it's mine. Maybe I'm not even human—not even a malady. . . ."

"It's so warm this morning, I almost wish I'd planned to serve iced drinks," Cousin Malvina said.

Her beautiful car rolled smoothly to the door, and she hurried round to meet the three who alighted. Her exclamation of surprise was evidently to celebrate the arrival of Anthony Beach, her husband, whose return she had not expected. He came quickly along the terrace, met her with an ardent air of taking account of her, body and spirit. Of him Cousin Malvina took account by her surprise, by her arched brows, by her question, but a question quickly passed over in favor of the two who walked with him. But Anthony Beach, with his bright-eyed and touching confidence, believed himself to be still a part of this ceremony.

"Maude, darling," said Mrs. Beach, "*Lawrence*, dear," and such things. She kissed them both, brought out her murmurs as if they had been waiting, dressed and ready in some background, and turned to Marfa, who now, detaching her gaze from the corn, the alfalfa, and the stubble, gave the three her scrutiny, as light and fixed as a bird's, and as swiftly wavering away.

The sister Marfa hardly saw, Maude

Brand—not only on account of her sex but because this young woman had instantly seated herself in a deck-chair and closed her eyes. This woman was young and ill, looked old because of her pallor, because of her frown. She was plain, and there was in her dressing a despair which showed that she was aware of her plainness.

"In a moment," went Lawrence Brand's voice, with a curious effect of three words flying and alighting from him. He attended his sister with an air of routine, more frightful than any boredom.

"Marfa Manchester!" he said only.

She had no impression of anything save of light and of quiet. It was true that he spoke, looked, moved like another. But there came from him an air of unconquerable quietude; and it was as if human restlessness being gone, a soft flow of light filled the vacuum and rose and outrayed from him. And this Marfa caught briefly, like a signal. In another moment she was aware only of his physical presence, his fineness, his inattention, his gruffness. There were chairs, luggage, confusion, bouillon, and biscuits. After her greeting, Marfa said nothing.

But there they were, and she saw them, clearly, as she was not meant to see them. Anthony Beach, sending to his wife pleased glances to which his wife was unopposed. Lawrence Brand, mechanically serving his sister, who was herself luxuriously aware, who was uneasy until she could get back some central position from which the arrival, the hostess, the confusion had shaken her. No bouillon? Then a drink of water? A fan? A sunshade? To lie down? To be quiet? Oh, no, no, she cried. No, none of this seemed for Maude Brand the expression that she

wanted. Not until Lawrence said crisply, "Are you in pain?" did she rise to irritability, cry that nothing, nothing was the matter, and then at last appear content.

Good, kind Anthony Beach, sipping his bouillon, now felt that something was due to Marfa, of whom, it appeared, he had heard recent news. Her father had gone to China! How could she let him go? Her little cousin Ben had been drowned? Now how in the world could that have happened? Vina had said something of a delay in her visit because of a friend in the hospital, whom he trusted was now quite all right once more? The kind fellow talked, perpetually touching at his clipped mustache, which was nowhere near the bouillon at any time. His wife hung over Maude Brand.

A few minutes and all was over, they had gone to their rooms, and Marfa, with her untasted cup, was left staring at stubble, corn, and alfalfa. She thought:

"Was he, then, in love with me at school? Perhaps he could have saved me—saved Ben and Mr. Garvin and Mona. Saved Marcus Bartholomew and father. . . ." She reminded herself with impatience that Marcus Bartholomew and her father at least were quite all right.

"I must not even speak to him when it can be avoided," she thought, "or I shall do him some harm, too."

Bartholomew's amused eyes came before her: "You feel that way instead of feeling other emotions," he had told her.

She ran up to her room to get into her riding things, and wept as she changed. She wondered if there were people already in the world inevitably approaching for a meeting with her, whom she

would injure. Perhaps people unborn. Arrested, she stood imagining that long procession, coming from distance, and she, meaning to be so right toward them all and yet dealing out death and disorder because her body was not an instrument that her willing spirit could use; not tuned, not—what was it that Max Garvin had said?—not polarized. Her body acted without her, uttered the wrong word independently of her intention. As a primitive woman dealt disaster by design, so she, desiring the good, did the evil through the physical ineptitude of her machine. But those others—all pacing toward her . . . She watched that imagined procession advance, with Lawrence at its head. . . .

When she came down in her tan togs, Lawrence Brand was alone on the terrace.

"I say," he cried when he saw her, "is there another mount, Miss Manchester? Do you mind if I go too?"

It was twelve miles to the village. The road lay shaded and murmurous. The intense awareness and response of the bays manifested in the broken rhythm of their great glossy bodies.

Marfa thought: "I mustn't talk to him. If I don't talk to him, I can't harm him." So when he said, "It's great to be back on a country road in America," she did not reply. When he praised the country, the day, the mounts, she murmured assent, volunteered nothing. He talked on for a bit about the changes that he found, all for the better; about the horse that he had last ridden, at Passy; about the village, where he must make a purchase. Marfa continued her silence. About the college friends for whom he inquired, she manifestly knew nothing. He glanced over at her, she kept her profile turned to his scru-

tiny. He gave his attention to his horse and said no more.

But now a procession of charming events began to occur. They met a little gig, its old gray driven by a tiny boy, whose face was bright, taut, alert, like the face of a wood animal. Without her will, Marfa had glanced at her companion and they had smiled. From the deep of the wood through which they rode, a thrush called, one miraculous rebirth of his spring ecstasy. Together they reined in their horses, and sat silent, hoping for an iteration of the call. A tanager burned before them on a bough, and together they saw it. A wandering German band came by, signalled to them, and began to play, so softly that the horses, when they were halted, merely kept time to the music. "Glücklichkeit die beide," said the fat leader solemnly over his tip, as if he were pronouncing them man and wife.

In the village they made purchases, and stopped at a stall for cold drinks. And through all this Marfa spoke only when the necessity was pressing; and though he had fallen as silent as she, yet they turned their horses' heads homeward in a certain fellowship, as if the spell of silence had more power than the ways of speech.

From the summit of the six-mile hill the road ran like a river between green shores. On the way down the slope Marfa looked over the face of the fields. The meadows lay bathed in the eagerness with which they had come pressing from below, green stretches of countless seeds in resurrection, poised on pale roots now rummaging beneath them. She had an abrupt sense of the million tiny shoots, spurting upward, crowded, aspiring, individual. And these in turn lay molding and lifting to the unborn year their cups of seed,

and all the cool green bodies were already hosts to larvæ and eggs, to life sleeping or already awake and chanting. For no more than a breath, burning and gone again, she felt the life of the fields not as green space but as green multitude, felt its life in her, all seed and no root. With a flash of the sense of the first sea-thing moving from its rock, she saw at the bottom of the hill the empty road leading, gave her horse his head, and when he broke into a gallop, urged him on.

In an instant Lawrence was beside her. They galloped abreast to the long undulations of rock and of sward in the dazzle of noon.

When they reined in, on the low bridge spanning a sleepy stream, Marfa's eyes were bright. She cried: "Wasn't it glorious!" And now Lawrence Brand, looking intently at her, asked abruptly:

"Will you tell me why you've refused all the morning to talk to me?"

She said: "There's a bridle-path along this stream for a mile. I think we've time to follow it, before lunch."

Her heart beating painfully, she thought: "I should never have done that—I should never have turned into the bridle-path. But I'm sure to do something like that again. I've got to tell him the truth about me."

The path edged the stream through a copse of locusts and willows, laced with wild grape. He followed her, in her light immobility, as she met the motion of her horse. When at the end of the path she halted, turned, and looked at him at last, he spoke before she did: "When another woman keeps as still as you do, she's a vacuum. But you—you're something positive all the time." She heard herself say, "You're something positive whether you talk or



not," and he cried: "But why shouldn't we talk? It's not necessary, but it's mighty nice. Or it used to be, with you."

He heard: "You don't understand about me, and I've got to tell you."

At this he looked disturbed, as if he had no idea indeed what he might be going to hear.

"Please, please!" he said rather wildly, "nothing matters, you know. . . ."

Once she would have enjoyed the sensation that she was making. Now she was in deep distress.

"I bring disaster to every one who comes near me," she said. "I don't want to harm you—I want to warn you away."

At this he stared frankly and then laughed, drawing down his brows.

"Die Lorelei?" he suggested dryly.

She flushed. "Oh, not that," she cried; "nothing like that. And yet death too—or destruction—blindness—misery." She poured it all out to him: Paul Barker, Ben, Lina, Mona, the yacht's cook, Garvin. A small blue vein stood out in her forehead, as if it were the forehead of a woman old or ill.

He listened, rather as if he were thinking of her than of her words. "What a lot of rotten go's," he said only. "No wonder they've made you morbid."

"It's not morbid," she cried violently, "it's the truth!"

"But we all make one another suffer."

"Not like that!"

"Well, in worse ways."

"Have you ever made anybody suffer?" The bright points of light in her eyes pierced him.

"No end of people."

But when she begged him to tell her

how he had done that, he was able to recall only trifling instances of having occasioned discomfort to this one or that. "You see!" she cried triumphantly.

"Look here," he said, "if you think I'm going to keep away from you for fear of that kind of thing, you're jolly well wrong."

Instead of replying, she said abruptly: "You've suffered yourself. Perhaps you're one of those whom somebody else makes suffer."

"No, no," he said roughly, "that's absurd." And his horse, either from a thrust of his or from a sense of crisis, wheeled; and she pressed forward to follow. They went on once more in silence. She thought: "I've hurt him by saying that—as if he knew it was true."

When they reached the road, his face was untroubled. "You'll let me take the risk," he begged her, "now that I know the worst?"

"You don't believe me," she said; "I can't make you believe me."

"At any rate, you've warned me."

"That doesn't lessen my responsibility. Every moment I've expected your horse to bolt and throw you over his head."

"Just because I was with you! I say, you poor child!"

At this she frowned, urged on her horse. He followed in silence. At the door he stood beside her as she dismounted. She looked up in his face, saw its adult mask set over the anxious lost look of youth. The imponderable breathed from him, something strong and fierce enough to make itself felt, yet pulsing as delicately as light. And this other influence was so magical that she could hardly bother with his strength.

"So now you know," she said bluntly, "why I'm rude to you."

He laughed charmingly, said "Thanks," and made no comment.

Marfa came down to lunch with a sense of release, as if, after a night of anxiety, she had waked to hear homely accustomed sounds. The others were already at table. As they entered, Maude Brand turned on her brother a look without rancor, without reproach even—merely a fixed unwinking regard following him across the room, continuing after he had taken his place opposite her. Finally he met her eyes, and it was impossible not to divine that from the moment of his entrance he had been aware of her look. His "How are you feeling?" carried no conviction of the casual, but rather a resumption of a burden which had been for a little while laid down.

Her look did not change. "What shall I say to that?" she asked. Her enunciation was very clear, almost impertinently clear.

"I hoped you'd say 'Immensely better,'" said Lawrence pleasantly.

"No," she said only—a curious "no," slow, short, of rising inflection; a "no" which made her mouth not round but almost closed.

"You look better already," said Lawrence obliviously, but his oblivion carried no conviction either.

Maude Brand smiled—she had a smile, not sweet or kindly, but crooked and mysterious and lingering. "If only I *had* looked better as many times as you've said that," she observed.

He smiled across at her, a smile evidently having no back thought. But she continued to regard him, without eating, and now without speaking—merely that slow-winking, intent stare.

Marfa looked at her, at the long fragile hands, the tips of the long fragile fingers just touching the table's edge, all but a finger of each hand lifted, like butterflies. About the hands there was something eager, terribly expectant, at queer odds with the expressionless watching face, the face that seemed to expect nothing. The face, pallid and fragile too, shadowed, thinly veined, blue-lipped, was lighted by eyes having the brightness of invalidism; the brightness, Marfa thought, of death. But the thin crooked mouth, mobile, sardonic, dominated the insensate face.

She went on with something that she had been relating:

"The mine had been salted, they said—but he didn't know that. He would never admit it while he lived—said the vein had pinched out—oh, he trusted everybody. Then when he knew that all his friends had lost money through him, he turned that land, for which he had paid thousands an acre, into grazing-land. He bought sheep—the wrong kind at first—and the sheds were insufficient. It turned cold and the sheep crowded into the sheds and smothered to death trying to keep warm. But he wouldn't give up, because of his friends' money—so then he bought more sheep and kept on and on. And he got back all their money for his friends."

"And was it some one you know?" Anthony Beach asked, attending to his mustache.

"It was my father," she said, and looked at them all, with something like maternal pride, as if she had been relating the achievement of a loved son. "My mother was like that too," she added.

"But not, alas, her brother," said Lawrence Brand.

She turned on him a look in which pride and rancor were blended. "I have a wonderful, wonderful family," she said, and burst into laughter.

"My father had power," said Lawrence, "that he didn't pass on. He could charm things to come his way."

"And how could he do that?" inquired Anthony Beach, in his slim staccato, and touched with his napkin at his red lips. He had a wandering eye, as if he had been cut from the general mass and never specialized to any form of attention. He asked "How could he do that?" as he might have asked "Did he fish with a fly?"

Marfa cried: "I think your wife knows. Things fall into order where *she* is. Of themselves, you know."

"Yes," said Beach sadly, "she orders even me. I do as I should, in spite of myself."

Maude Brand, who manifestly never attended to any part of a conversation save to that which she herself intended to say next, went on, as if she had not been interrupted:

"My father *drew* things to himself—the kind of thing he wanted. He had a nose for success. People do. They talk of a journalist having a 'nose for news,' and a man having a collector's instinct—and hunter's luck. Well, don't such people somehow get magnetized to attract the things that come to them? It was that way with him. He was magnetized to success—in the long run."

"In the long run," Lawrence repeated. "But he couldn't seem to make his magnet work until he'd first attracted a lot of rubbish that he didn't want."

"And are you a magnet?" Mrs. Beach asked him.

"Didn't I draw you to our table at Biarritz?"

"It was I who did that," said Maude

Brand. "It was the only time that I ever attracted anything good. You know, I'm really magnetized to attract ill luck."

"Darling, how ridiculous!" Mrs. Beach cried.

Again Miss Brand took that poised attitude, her hands alighting on the table's edge as if they had just flown there.

"I attracted to myself all my maladies," she said, in a loud and excited voice. "My accident—bad luck on journeys—ptomaine in my food—friends who have disappointed me—and the most ghastly boarding-places!"

When they laughed, she cried quite earnestly: "I'm not joking! I've watched this for years."

"And look at the brother she magnetized to herself," said Lawrence.

"That's the most extraordinary conception I ever heard in my life," Anthony Beach said rapidly. "Isn't it the most extraordinary conception you ever heard in your life, Vina?"

Mrs. Beach turned her ordered and placid gaze upon her husband and her guests.

"She's a creative genius—Maude," she observed. "She doesn't paint or play, so she invents deliciously."

Into Miss Brand's pallid face had come a flow of color, into her eyes bright points of light.

"Let me ask you," she said, "if these things are invented. We went to Rouen—I had three pension addresses. I chose the one in the middle of my list—in the middle. For no reason. Well, they showed me to a room where a woman had died of a fever. I had an illness of weeks—a convalescence of months. In Clovelly I went to walk. I started down one street, changed, and chose another—tripped on the stones and sprained



my ankle—I was for three weeks laid up in Clovelly. In Rome we were given a drunken driver—hundreds of cars out and we alone had a drunken driver. We collided with a railing—my back was terribly wrenched—more weeks in Rome, convalescing, you see. I have reached out-of-the-way hotels when the last room had been given to the tourists one minute ahead of us—one minute! I have taken boats that had a terrible passage, when the next week's sailing was calm and I might quite as well have waited. I have made friends who have annoyed me frightfully when I might have made friends at the same hotel who were angels. . . ."

"Good heavens," said Anthony Beach, "but who hasn't?"

"I've done all these things, with her," said Lawrence. "Why wasn't it I who attracted these things to her?"

"Because when you go alone you have perfectly beautiful times," his sister said with an air of triumph. "You always do." Again she regarded him with that mixture of approval and distaste.

"Good Lord," cried Anthony Beach, "but there's such a thing as ill luck. . . ."

"Only to those who attract it," said Maude Brand. "And I do. Look here," she said suddenly, "your wife doesn't, does she? Don't things always come out right for Vina?"

With one finger Mr. Beach pressed his minute mustache each way from his red lips.

"She is incorrigible," he said. "I've never known it to rain when she didn't want it to. Oh, literally! Her trains, her appointments, people she wants to see or doesn't want to see—the stars in their courses fight for things to come out right for her. I've often said so."

Lawrence laughed. "Good fun," he

said, "when you two get together. And what about the rest of us, between you?"

Marfa sat motionless, her food untasted. Her eyes were on Miss Brand's face. When she spoke, her own voice sounded faint to her, she wondered if they could hear her, and when she lifted her voice she seemed to be calling to them, with a voice which could not reach them. Her voice—abruptly its tones seemed to her a frail bridge across which alone she could reach them, if at all, from out her terrible isolation. She was aware of Lawrence, watching her with alarm and concern, aware of the others, who were about to slip from this subject and, she thought queerly, never get back to it. She was speaking now and they were all listening:

"But what about all those people," she asked, "who brought you the ill luck? The pension people, the driver, the one who had fever. . . ."

Miss Brand stared. "Bless you," she said, "they had nothing to do with it. It was I—I—I! I attracted it."

"But they sowed all those terrible seeds!" Marfa cried. "Some one was bound to pick them up. . . ."

"To attract them," Miss Brand assented. "And that one was I."

Marfa felt young, impotent, desperate. Their faces swam about her. She addressed herself to Lawrence's face.

"The attraction," she said, "may have been accidental. But the one who created and scattered all the ill luck—the accident, the illness, the trouble—what of that one?"

There was a moment's silence—but no one save Lawrence was really attending. Maude Brand was merely waiting to talk again herself. Anthony Beach was a polished surface over which all contacts trickled with faint chance at

any reaction. The ordered eye of Mrs. Beach was appraising the dessert that had just been brought in. Lawrence alone was watching Marfa, and with a frown, as if he wished that she wouldn't go on.

"Because," said Marfa clearly, "I'm like that. I bring misfortune to every one I meet. I've always done that all my life."

She sat with eyes downcast, waiting for the confusion which it seemed to her that her words must bring, now that they were out. And she heard Mrs. Beach saying:

"You darling child. Imagine! Have lots of whipped cream on that."

"You bring good luck, Miss Marfa, merely by permitting us to look at you," said Anthony Beach. "Vina, are your cigarettes decent?"

Marfa's eyes went to Lawrence. He was looking at her not with amusement but with a gentleness that suddenly shook her, like pain.

Maude Brand began again:

"And then, I remember, there was once in Normandy . . ."

As they came out on the terrace, Maude Brand asked of Lawrence, "Where did you go this morning?" with a manner of casualness, but with a direct and listening look. Marfa felt astonishment, but Lawrence answered simply: "For a canter—and a gallop, with Miss Manchester."

"I had thought we might finish the chapter . . ."

"I'll get the book now. Perhaps the others would care to join us. . . ." He moved away.

Miss Brand's voice sounded sharp and piping. "But I have had hardly a word with you to-day!" Her voice was

sharp, like the voice of some untutored mother to her child.

Marfa went to Mrs. Beach and slipped her hand through her arm.

"Cousin Malvina," she cried, "I'm going home to-morrow—I must go home to-morrow!"

Mrs. Beach stood in the sun, which seemed to shine round her as round a heavenly body, reflecting light but by it unmoved. She stood serene, unsurprised, completely prepared, apparently regarding nothing as unpreventable.

"You can't leave," she said in her mellow alto. "You really must go with us to-morrow to see the charming place I want the Brands to buy—quite close to us it is. Just our little party—with a car and a hamper. You can't resist the lake—and there's wintergreen. . . ."

Marfa faced her. In a sharp effort to force understanding on her, she leaped the generation between them:

"Vina! You mustn't pass over it. What I said at the table is true. I'll bring down something terrible on all of you if I stay. I oughtn't to have come . . . I thought I could get away from it. You mustn't let me bring trouble and unhappiness to this house, too. . . ."

Through the haze of her tears, Mrs. Beach's large serene face smiled out at her.

"Marfa, dear," she said, "we'll have you all over this nervousness if you'll only stay on and let us take care of you."

Marfa cried, as into some space wherein nothing registered: "But I'm not in the least nervous—it's true! It's true!"

"After all you've been through," Mrs. Beach said equably, "I don't wonder at anything you imagine. Go down in the garden and look at my holly-

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# What's Wrong with the United States?

BY THOMAS JEFFERSON WERTENBAKER

Edwards Professor of American History, Princeton University

The Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton defends America—and shocks the intelligentsia and culture-chaser by holding that material comfort is more fundamental than art.

RECENTLY I received a bundle of books for review. They all dealt with conditions in the United States, and most of them were extremely pessimistic. One author believes that the horde of immigrants who poured into the country in the years just preceding the World War have brought us to the verge of ruin. Unrestricted immigration, he says, has filled our cities with morons, criminals, and the physically unfit, has lowered wages, imperilled our institutions, and impaired the racial stock. We have now closed the doors, it is true, and we are trying to keep them closed, but it will be centuries before we can assimilate the conglomerate mass of humanity which we have admitted. It is a permanent disaster, perhaps an irretrievable disaster.

With a troubled mind, I turn to the next volume. But it, too, sounds the alarm-bell. This time it is our tendency toward undirected reproduction which appears as the great peril. The best classes, leaders in every walk of life, we are told, are restricting the size of their families, while the unfit—the lowest classes of workers, the ignorant, criminals, defectives—are reproducing with great rapidity. It is the survival of the unfittest. The race ascends the ladder by centuries of laborious striving, only in the end to cut off its own head. Seeing in this volume only the blackest

future for the United States, I lay it aside more troubled than ever.

The next is a volume by a foreign observer—a diplomat who had dwelt long in this country. Perhaps he can see something of good in us. Alas! He is of opinion that we have bartered off our souls to Mammon. "Big profits overshadow liberty in all its forms," he says, "and the exercise of intelligence is encouraged only if it fits in with the common aim. Any one who turns aside to dabble in research or dilettanteism is regarded as almost mentally perverted. . . . In the universities the majority of the students are satisfied if they memorize an array of ready-made facts, and they seek from their professors not culture but the fundamentals of a successful career. . . . The material advance is immeasurable in comparison with the Old World, but from the point of view of individual refinement and art the sacrifice is real indeed. Even the humblest European sees in art an aristocratic symbol of his own personality, and modern America has no national art and does not even feel the need of one."

In disgust I leave my study and wander to the university library. There, by chance, I happen upon a well-known novel, the work of an American. In it the average, middle-class American is pilloried. Self-assertive, crude, ignorant,