

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)

"Oh, that someone would make thee as my brother, that sucked my mother's breast! . . . I would lead thee, I would bring thee into my mother's house. . . I would cause thee to drink of special wine, of the sweet juice of my pomegrante. . . ."

were

If only someone to help him look at his mother, and worry with him, and look after her. A brother!

But not tonight, gay New Year's eve.

The evening of the first performance.

"Mama, there is a resplendent garment to wrap you in, and a shining chariot awaiting to take you to the theatre."

The night of triumph, and he could read it in her face, in which was the glew of health, not the painful white.

"Hope the garment is red ermine, and the chariot a span of four."

She was in one mood with George. She took her happiness, what she considered was his triumph with Solomon. Yet, of course, there was a certain trepidation to account for, a fear, but even that added to the zest of living. She had not been alive for a long while. But now she and George were living and being brilliant. Full of wit and (jaded? No.) humor. They really meant it. Fantastic, but real. The seconds they dwelt in that make-believe world was more real and enduring than—!

"But, mother, ermine is white." And he kissed her. And her heart was full with excitement. And he could feel her heart beat against him. But he was not afraid. It was a full round beat. No flutter. And Dr. Capen was wrong about her heart. He, George, knows his mother, like his father knew him, and saved him from the doom of eternal paralysis. Where the spirit treads, not even angels dare. . . . He'll cause his mother's health to be wrought. And tonight. Look at her shining eyes. Like a beloved. The beloved! She of Solomon's, she of when Solomon sang!

"But mine must be red," she winked with mischief in her eye, as she smoothed his hair, "for greater than royalty am I. God was with me when you

were born, and with you the angels stood when you were in that mortal illness. And your father had said, 'Providence had a hand in sustaining the life of our child. God has saved him for us.' And then he would add, 'for you', as if he had known that he wasn't very long for this world. But tonight...."

"Tonight we live," George said.

She smiled her youthful smile. And she was younger tonight. Very young and pretty, and beautifully dark, like Blanca. And the thought occurred to George that Blanca was the incarnation of his mother. She more and more looked like his mother. Or his mother looked like Blanca. Especially tonight.

Blanca, Blanca! Did he love Blanca?

At eight, ~~about~~ ^{sum} a half hour before the play was to go on, the ^{sum} ~~Supri~~ theatre was filled. George, sitting with his mother in the front row of the first balcony, could not detect an empty seat, other than those in the lodge on the right which he knew was reserved for the Forrests. Speculation was rife whether the spot would remain empty. Mrs. Forrest had made reservation weeks ahead, but so far no one knew as to the whereabouts of the family, or whether they had returned from New York. Nothing came out of that house as late as four that afternoon. And the house was, to all appearances, quite unoccupied even at that late hour. George had decided to be just another spectator, and enjoy the performance from the balcony. He could watch the show better from that vantage point, and also observe impressions of the people below him. A brilliant holiday crowd. He had watched the ladies with their escorts in evening formal take their seats and make their jovial remarks, expectant quips, as is usual before an unusual happening, a gala occasion. The spirit of the New Year's celebrant was rampant and over the house, ~~and the the jubilation of the holiday~~ ~~festivities was hovering over everybody.~~ The lights were at their best in their orbits, scintillating like stars overhead, and the gold trim-

mings of the box seats had special lustre, a delightful softness which seemed to absorb the glare of the lights and to subdue them.

At last, at the very last, with the first signal of the blinking lights, the Forrests filed in. Mr. Forrest, in the vanguard, was followed in turn by Clara and Cynthia, Foster bringing up the rear. It was almost like a march to battle, at least as far as the older Forrest was concerned. His walk was heraldic, and if feet could talk would be Stentorian. His head was tilted upward as much as his stoop would allow, and his eyes were glaring at no one in particular, but with the old stubborn pride, though the relaxed cast of his facial muscles showed defeat rather clearly. It was after a long fight, and against his better judgment, that he had allowed his family (even joining himself) to attend the show. And who are the main purveyors of this "shindig" but that trio: Black, Dreen, and that young upstart, George Sheraton! It was this Sheraton fellow who was the root of it all and the main spring that fed the well of his troubles, in his family circle as well as in the community at large. It all started that summer when he laid himself on the pages of the Eventide. Had never heard of him before, except of course as a friend of his grandson's, and the bearer of the respected name, "Sheraton". A fable, and unbelievable! But that youngster did turn the tables on him. Him, a Forrest, and hitherto a main pillar in the community! Now, where had the community gone? It's as if this George Sheraton held them in the cup of his hand. He had crossed swords with him, and he had lost. Miserably. Couldn't stand alone --- with his wife aloof and belligerent, as if aligned against him. Should he call off the dogs and sue for peace? What, and take that Black to his bosom, smirk and all! No, it could never go beyond a tacit, silent surrender. Hereafter he'll hide his grievance. He cannot even threaten the paper, or insist upon the resignation of that unspeakable Editor. He knows but too well that there would be ten buyers to every share in the Eventide he would relinquish. No, he'll keep his stocks, and

wait for the day. What day? he asked himself; and a feeble, strained smile flickered briefly on his pinched face. The day of his death? He knew well by now that he'd never have his revenge before that Fateful Day. That Day of days, when it comes to pass, which is the end of all days. The Eventide is in a stronger position than ever, despite the Democratic victory in the national election, and Mr. Barton's place is securely tied to that position. As they sat down in the Box, in the semi-circle of a crescent, George could observe Mr. Forrest uttering monosyllabic words, tight-lipped and withdrawn into himself. Clara was her gay silver self, Foster was innocuous; but Cynthia!

What's with Cynthia!

She turned her lovely head right and left, sitting between Foster and Mrs. Forrest, participating in small talk; there was a poignancy to her movements, yet a lethargic hold on her emotions. As if a vital spring in her had gone and collapsed. It wasn't the bouyant sprightly Cynthia he knew. Then as he trained his binoculars on her he thought he caught an elusive smile on her face. Another one of my fantasies, he chided himself. Seeing things where they are not. The same Cynthia, maybe a happier one for her visit to New York, and her fondness of Foster. Was the wish father to his distorted vision, the thought that made him see what he thought he saw? It couldn't be that he was a bit jealous, now that he was without the 'services' of Blanca? Now that he was alone! No, he didn't think he was that callous. Despicable? But wait! The smile was broken as suddenly as it had come, and the face was a blank. It gave his heart an extra tug. It came to him that the smile had a restraint, an obscurity as of a sunray under a cloud. As if it had come under protest and constraint. A feeble attempt at a forced smile. And Foster? There seemed to be a blunting of the sharp edges of his male ego. Not the old effervescent Foster. The lineaments in his face were leveled down as if gone over by a tremendous pressure-force. His old self would come to the rescue,

asserting ~~itself~~ on occasion, in a retort to some remark that seemed to infuriate him. But immediately he would subside into a complacency which George couldn't make out whether it was one of desperation or self-immolation... Or sheer stupidity and unawareness.

Now the blinking of the lights, as group by group they were fading out, gave presence to the lights on the stage and the proscenium.

There came the hush of expectancy as the curtain was lifting. The interlude, the great interval, the suspense, the limbo - which is neither dark nor light, life or death; the embryo in the womb, the caterpillar in the cocoon before its transmutation. The breathless tilting of the delicate balance. The becalmed ship before the quiver at the bottom of the trough of the surging wave. The stillness of motion of the swooping gull in mid-air, with neither wing or feather in ruffle. One hardly breathes, one breathes hard.

Then the curtain was up, and there was a long whispered "Ah-h-ah-h!" The exhalation of a long pent-up breath! Eyes were staring in front as if they had seen a ghost. And maybe they had. What they saw was like an apparition, and as unbelievable. And then - after what seemed an eternity - voices came, and that was a charity, for it gave breath back to them.