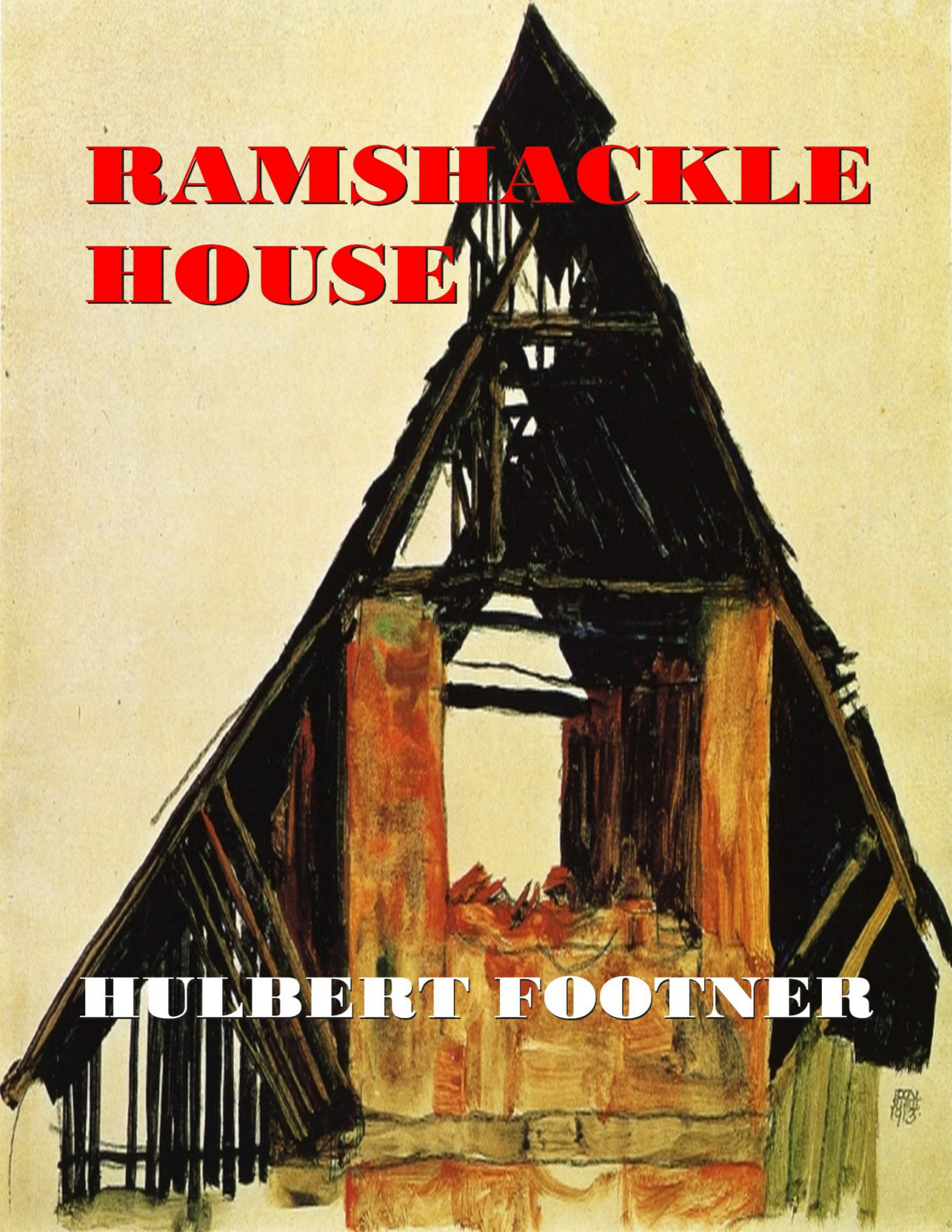


RAMSHACKLE HOUSE

HULBERT FOOTNER



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BY

HULBERT FOOTNER

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RAMSHACKLE HOUSE

CHAPTER I

THE CANOEIST

Broome's Point proper is a crescent-shaped spit of sand separating the mouth of the Pocomico River from the waters of Chesapeake Bay. The end of the spit is decorated with one of those odd structures that our lighthouse service is so partial to, an octagonal house mounted on spreading, spindly piles, the whole looking uncommonly like a spider. The Broome estate comprises all the high ground back of the spit for upwards of four miles up the bay shore and a mile along the river. The mansion stands proudly on a bold bluff overlooking the river mouth. It is one of those square packing-boxes with a "cupalow" so popular with the builders of the sixties. It has never been painted since the first time and its once white face is streaked with rust from the gutters like the marks left by tears on dirty cheeks. One of the snugest anchorages on the coast is under the bank upon which it stands. The river mouth itself forms a great basin three miles across in which all the navies of the world might ride. One shore of it is as wild and deserted as the other. A mile or so up the river lies Absalom's Island with its oystering village, connected with the hinterland by a causeway.

On Decoration Day there was a battle-ship lying in the river. As Pen Broome flew in and out of the big house upon her interminable chores she had a distant view of the holiday crowds on the green common of the Island. Black and white splotches represented the game of ball that was going on between the island boys and the sailors and black dots stood for the automobiles of week-end trippers from the great world. Later Pen knew there

had been a church supper under the big linden trees alongside the parsonage, and at night a dance up the county. Ordinarily Pen was not given to resenting her lot; she was too busy. She had no personal interest in sailors nor in the island boys, and very little in the county people, her own sort. But to-day the spectacle of holiday-making brought an unbearable gnawing to her breast. She was twenty-four.

Pen was no tame and pathetic figure. She was the sort of youngster that is made savage by pain. Consequently next morning there was thunder in the air at Broome's Point. Pen's storms were rare and rather terrible. They cleared the air wonderfully. Perhaps it would have been better for that slack household if they had broken oftener. Black Aunt Maria Garner seeing her mistress' face, rolled the whites of her eyes apprehensively, and propelled her unwieldy bulk about the kitchen with a surprising celerity. She said cooingly:

"Honey, Ah'm gwine beat yo' up nice li'l cheese soufflé fo' yo' lunch!"

"Go along with you, Aunt Maria!" cried Pen with an exasperated laugh. "I'm not going to be taken in with your cheese soufflés! If you want to please me get your work done! Look at this kitchen!"

"Deed honey, Ah done come at sun-up this mawnin'. Deed I doggone swear did I!"

"What good is your coming at sun-up or sun-down if you only rock your fat body on a chair and smoke that filthy pipe!"

"Miss Penny, honey, I got the mos' awfulles' misehy...."

"That's enough of your misery. When I came in that door you started to move as spry as a kitten after its tail!"

At this moment the head of Theodo', Aunt Maria's sixth or thereabouts, appeared outside the kitchen window. Aunt Maria unseen by Pen silently and frantically waved him back, but his momentum was too great. He came on in with his foolish, engaging grin.

Pen whirled around.

"What are you doing in the house at this hour?" she demanded.

Theodo's face turned ashy, but he still grinned. "Ah ... Ah jes' come fo' watah," he stammered.

"And left your horses standing in the field!" stormed Pen. "You don't want water. It's only because you can't keep your trifling mind on your work for more than half an hour at a time. To-morrow is the first of June and you haven't got your ploughing done! And everybody else's corn is six inches high! Go back to your horses and let me hear no more of water!"

Theodo' slunk out.

But the storm did not really break until Pen, going to make her butter, found the broken paddle of her churn still unmended. She marched back through the kitchen, through the big pantry into the dining-room bearing the broken paddle like Nemesis. Aunt Maria's vast body heaved in silent chuckles.

"Boss gwine catch it now fo' sho'," she murmured, and waddling silently through the pantry, put her ear to the crack of the dining-room door.

She was not disappointed. Within the dining-room lightning played about the startled head of the elder Pendleton Broome. And indeed young Pen was sorely tried. Her father was an amiable incompetent who frittered away his time on a dozen unprofitable hobbies while his estate fell into ruin about him. Not his fault entirely of course, for it was a hopeless job to keep up twenty-five hundred acres without any money. And not an acre of it salable. To get the smallest things done about the place required an expenditure of energy from Pen sufficient to have won campaigns. For weeks her father had been promising to mend her churn. Even with a whole churn she made butter under the greatest difficulties, because by the time he had got round to repairing the ice house it was too late to put up ice. She reminded him of that now ... and of other things.

Pendleton Broome essayed to pull the rags of his dignity about him ... without much success. He was one of these half-hearted little corpulent men, partly bald, an odd and pathetic figure in his old clothes with an air of breeding still upon him. Often when she was abusing him the tears would suddenly spring into Pen's eyes.

"But my dear, I can't keep my mind on butter!" he protested.

"If I didn't keep my mind on butter we'd all starve!" stormed Pen.

"I intended to mend the churn," he explained, "but in Friday's *Sun*-paper,

as you know, another correspondent undertook to refute the arguments in my letter on the Mendelian theory. And in answering him I clean forgot about the churn!"

"The Mendelian theory!" cried Pen. "Will that feed us?" Her voice went off into wild inextinguishable laughter. The little man stared at her with an affronted air. Pen suddenly turned and flew out through the hall and across the porch. Her storms generally ended in this way, in tears. Nobody ever saw her cry though.

Running like a sand-piper she skimmed across the weedy lawn, threaded the bordering shrubbery and ducked through a gap in the palings. She ran along the edge of a little field behind the empty and ruinous tenant cottage, and into the woods by a faint path worn by her own feet and no other's. Two hundred yards within the woods she came out in a little clearing upon a bench of land overlooking a pond densely hemmed round by the woods, like a deep green bowl with brown water in the bottom. Here she cast herself down.

The clearing contained, a strange sight in those rude surroundings, a little Doric temple dating from the eighteenth century. It was just a circle of plain columns holding up a little flattish dome, the marble all silvery with lichen, and wistfully beautiful against the greenery. Within the columns open to the winds was a raised grave of the period built of brick and topped with a marble slab carved with the Broome arms and with an inscription setting forth the virtues of a Pendleton Broome who died in 1720 at the age of twenty-three.

This spot no doubt because of its disquieting beauty had long ago acquired a bad name in the neighborhood. It had been avoided by so many generations as to have become almost completely forgotten. Those of the natives who knew of it would not have ventured near under any circumstances. Pen herself had stumbled on the place by accident years before and had made it her own. With her own childish hands she had cleared out the undergrowth, and from time to time had planted ferns, "ivory", violets and the moccasin flower until in the spring it was like a flower-bedecked chancel with her young kinsman lying in state in the center of it.

Pen looked upon the long dead youth as the brother she had never had in the flesh. Once she had looked up to him as her big brother, but lately he had

become most lovably her junior, for he remained imperishably twenty-three. Not especially imaginative she nevertheless pictured him vividly in a plum-colored velvet suit with a flare to the skirt of his coat, Mechlin lace at his wrists and throat, sword at side and tricorne hat, his chestnut curls tied with a black moire ribbon. The Broomes were a bright-haired, blue-eyed race; Pen had brought black hair into the family from her mother's side. She pictured the earlier Pen mixing with the wits of his day with a bit of a swagger. According to family tradition he had died in London, and his body was shipped home to his inconsolable parents preserved in a cask of brandy. The stones of his little temple must have been brought from England too, in the tobacco ships. How dearly that Pen must have been loved, this Pen thought, and loved him the better for it.

She cast herself down beside his grave and unpacked her heart. The real source of her pain had nothing to do with broken butter paddles of course.

"Turkeys and chickens and ducks! Ducks and turkeys and chickens! Making butter three times a week and canning all summer! Is that all there is to live for as long as I live? ... Ah my dear, my dear, if I had you really! Someone young to be with! ... But I'm shriveling up alone!"

But the place quieted her as it always did. She became silent. Bye and bye she turned her head sideways on her arm and looked down at the brown pond almost dusty in the sunshine and thought of nothing at all. Her face smoothed out. Pen's cheeks were not smooth like a doll's but had faint hollows of emotion that strangely stirred a man's breast. Nor was she of brittle build like a city maiden. Lying prone on the earth like that, in her full soft curves she symbolized the morning of earth.

This place was on the other side of the point. Across the pond from where Pen lay, only a few hundred yards away, was the bay with its steamships passing up and down, but all hidden from her by the intervening greenery. A winding creeklet flowed in with the flood and out with the ebb. At low tide it lost itself in the sand of the beach outside. Nobody but Pen ever came near the spot. Year after year a white heron nested under a tangle of vines that hung in the water, and in the spring the great shad came flopping clumsily through three inches of water to spawn inside. Pen saw the white heron with a cautious preliminary look around, enter the thicket that concealed her nest,

and watched lazily for her to reappear. With every breath the girl was unconsciously drawing comfort from the earth upon which she lay.

Finally she sat up with a sigh and patted her hair into place. Her "sensible" look returned; a wry smile appeared about her lips. "You fool!" she said to herself. "Wasting the best hours of the day! When you get back even if the paddle is mended it will be too hot to churn! And by night the cream will be too sour!"

She arose with a shake of her skirts and walked sedately and somewhat self-consciously back to the house, though there was none to see her. As soon as she came out from the woods the blue expanse of the river mouth was spread before her with the gray battle-ship lying out in mid-stream and off to the right Absalom's Island with its row of white cottages. She ducked through the fence and picked her way around the tangled shrubs. When she came out from under the mimosa tree she was greatly astonished to see a strange man sitting on the porch beside her father. Another step and she saw that he was young; one more step showed him to be uncommonly good-looking. Pen stopped dead in her tracks. Sternly repressing the impulse to run, she stiffened her back and putting on a haughty expression, marched on to meet the enemy.

The hardest thing she had to do was to mount the porch. For the steps had rotted away and Pen's father had put down a little box and a big box to climb up on "until he got around to fixing the steps." The boxes had been there for two years now. Somebody had gone through the top of the little box and an old piece of board had been laid across it.

The young man was a tall fellow; bright-haired, ruddy and smiling, with beautiful white teeth. He was wearing white flannel trousers of fine quality rather soiled and a snowy shirt cut off at the elbows and open to reveal a smooth brown throat. Pen was taken by surprise. Something about him, the strong bare neck like a column, the laughing eyes that had yet a sort of hunger in them too, turned her suddenly giddy. She was furious at her own weakness—and at him for being the cause of it. If in that moment he had said: "Come!" and had walked off with a curt jerk of the head, she would have had to follow. It was the secret consciousness of this that appalled her.

Fortunately for her he was civilized. He merely smiled as a gentleman

may in frank admiration—but not too frank. He was clearly what Pen called a gentleman. The thought was balm to her soul. For if he had not been she knew it would have been just the same with her. The first gentleman she had seen in so many months! It was comforting to be assured that they still walked the earth.

As in a dream she heard her father saying: "Mr. Donald Counsell ... my daughter. Her name is Pendleton Broome the same as my own. It is a family custom."

She heard the young man apologizing for his appearance. "I never expected to..."

Pen caught him up sharply. "Find white people here? You wouldn't. From the look of the place."

Both men were disconcerted by her brusqueness. Pen was horribly ashamed of herself. "I will not blush! ... I will not blush!" she said to herself, glaring out across the river. After the first glance she never looked at the young man again, but was nevertheless tinglingly conscious of his aspect; the fine lines of his body, his fair tanned skin, and always of those merry, speaking, wistful eyes. "What has happened to me? ... What has happened to me?" a little voice within her seemed to be wailing.

The young man tried to smooth things over. "What a heavenly spot! As I have already told your father, I'm loafing down the Bay in a canoe."

"What do you do when the wind blows?" asked the elder Pendleton.

"Oh, go ashore and sit and smoke by my fire."

"Don't you get lonely?"

A shadow crossed the young man's open countenance. "No, I'm fed up with people," he said shortly. "... That is, city people," he added with a glance through his lashes at Pen.

A sudden flame of jealousy burned Pen's breast. "There have been many women in his life!" And immediately: "Oh, what a fool I am!" she promptly added.

Pendleton glanced admonishingly at his daughter. Where was the courtesy to strangers for which the Broomes were famous? The glance was

wasted upon Pen. An awkward silence resulted.

Finally the young man said politely: "I came to see if I could get some butter and eggs."

"Certainly," said Pen stiffly. "Eggs are twenty cents a dozen, butter forty cents the pound."

She bit her tongue as soon as it was out, but could not have helped herself. Some power stronger than her will forced her to put her worst foot foremost. Pendleton père was frankly shocked, but the young man was not put out at all. He grinned at her delightfully and murmured too low for her father to hear:

"Cheap at half the price!"

It did not help Pen any. "He's laughing at me!" she said to herself in a rage. "Thinks he can have me at his own price! ... He'll see!"

Pendleton coughed behind his hand as a direct reminder to Pen of the time-honored hospitality of their house. Pen didn't get it. The effort to master her inexplicable emotions made her look almost stupid. In the end Pendleton himself was obliged to say:

"You will have dinner with us?"

Counsell's face lighted up. "You are very kind, but..." He looked at Pen again.

"We'll be very pleased to have you," Pen said as primly as a school-marm, and despising herself for it. Why couldn't she be natural?

"Well, thanks, I will," Counsell said heartily. "After three days in camp a square meal will be a god-send! I may say I'm no great shakes of a cook."

Pen's breast warmed at the thought of feeding the youth. "Dinner" had the effect of recalling her scattered faculties. Her mind flew to the question: What is there? ... The ham-bone? ... Impossible! ... Stuffed eggs ... lettuce ... radishes ... strawberries. There is that bottle of my three year old grape wine... Not enough for a hungry man. He's so vigorous! ... If I could put it off until half-past one I might get the boys to catch me some soft crabs ... No, the tide is too high! ... I have it! The cheese soufflé!"

Excusing herself she went into the house to get her preparations under

way. In the hall she came to a dead stop with her arms hanging limply, and looked into the future with a sort of horror. Her thought was: "I'm a goner! ... I have lost myself ... lost ...!" She pulled herself together with a jerk and flew into the kitchen, where for the next half hour things hummed. Aunt Maria Garner loved to cook for company.

Later, Pen having changed her dress, was setting the table. Through the open window she could hear her father retailing the Broome family history in the slightly throaty voice of self-importance. Pen knew his tale by heart.

"... Settled here since 1710 ... 2500 acres ... the estate runs four miles up the Bay shore.... The first house built here was a fine Colonial mansion with a pillared portico. Burned by the British on their expedition against Washington in the 1812 affair. A comfortable farmhouse with great chimneys arose out of its ruins. The present structure was erected in 1869. This was the style then, a great square block with a cupola. Considered magnificent in its day. Very fine rooms. You'll see them presently. It contains the oldest bathroom in Southern Maryland. Unfortunately out of order at present.

"This house was built by my father on his return from Peru. He was a man of resource. When everybody hereabouts was ruined by the war he emigrated to South America. Got in with the right people in Peru and made a great fortune in a year or two. Invested it in Peruvian bonds. He returned and laid out the old family place on a princely scale, princely. Laid out twenty miles of roads through the woods for his guests to take horse exercise. At one time he had five hundred employees on the place white and black. How well I remember as a child when the family departed for Newport where my father had another place, they would all be lined up to say good-by in a double row extending far beyond the gate. We would walk between and my father would shake hands with each one and say a few kind words. There was scarcely a dry eye among them!"

Pen, listening to this innocent tale, felt her cheeks burn.

Pendleton concluded with a sigh: "Unfortunately there was a revolution in Peru. The dastardly cutthroats who seized the reins of government repudiated the obligations of their country."

"In other words the bonds were N.G.," murmured Counsell.

"Exactly. My father's fortune was swept away overnight. Since then it has been a struggle. Too much land and too little money. But I look for better times ... better times."

Counsell asked a question.

"The railway," Pendleton answered with an air. "The Broome's Point railway. It will terminate in that gully down to the right there. It was first projected forty years ago, the right of way all graded and the trestles built ready for the rails. Unfortunately there was chicanery somewhere; construction was held up. Since then the enterprise has been revived from time to time, but something has always happened. But it will, it must come some day. I am bringing influence to bear. I have made liberal offers of land to the promoters. That is the finest harbor on the coast that lies before you. Baltimore is jealous. Powerful interests were brought to bear against the project the last time it was started. Trumped-up charges laid against the promoter."

"What happened to him?" asked Counsell.

"Well, he's in jail at present," said Pendleton ruefully. "But he will come out with flying colors. He enjoys my entire confidence. He explained everything to me. The railway must come before long. My place is all laid out in town lots."

Pen gritted her teeth. She could picture the worldly-wise young man laughing at her foolish little father from behind his grave face.

She called them into lunch. She was painfully conscious of the discrepancies of her house, but as a matter of fact Counsell was astonished when he entered. Pen had full control within the house and the squalor was left out of doors. The furniture, what there was left of it, dated from the same ugly period as the house, but there were certain touches; the lofty rooms were cool, inviting, full of charm. Poor as the Broomes were one could never mistake it for other than a lady's house. Particularly the dining-room with its velvety smooth walnut table, the hand-made mats, the dull old silver, the flowers, the delicious looking food.

"Oh! but I'm hungry!" Counsell said involuntarily, showing all his white teeth.

Glancing at Pen he found her eyes obstinately hidden, but she betrayed a dimple.

Not until she heard Counsell pick up his knife and fork did she venture to look at him. She had been waiting for the moment when his attention would be distracted by food. The smooth turn of his ruddy cheek and his long, curved lashes hurt her with delight. There was something affectingly boyish about him for all his strength and his assured air. Pen yearned to mother that shining head against her breast. She never looked at him but the once, yet she was aware of every mouthful he took, and every mouthful gave her satisfaction.

Pendleton Broome opened his eyes rather at the spread. The glance of reproof that he sent across to Pen suggested that while hospitality was the first law of the Broomes, still there should be reason in all things. From that moment with true male consistency he began to cool towards their young guest.

Nevertheless, charmed to have a sophisticated listener, he aired all his quaint and impractical theories. He dabbled in chemistry amongst other things, and had a great store of pseudo-scientific patter. Counsell listened politely and made the suitable rejoinders, but never lost an opportunity of trying to draw Pen into the talk. Pen, resisting his efforts, was nevertheless secretly delighted with his adroitness. It made her realize how she had been hungering for the graces of intercourse.

Once Counsell asked her directly: "Do you know New York?"

"I went to school there." She named a famous finishing school.

Counsell could not but look his surprise.

"I had a legacy," said Pen demurely. Her father frowned.

"Then you know people in New York?" Counsell said eagerly.

She shook her head. "I have not kept up with the girls."

"She deliberately dropped them!" her father put in with an aggrieved air. "It is the infernal Broome pride. She was most popular in school."

Pen laughed lightly. "Northerners are different," she said. "They don't make a merit of their departed glories."

It was her way of letting Counsell know, without being disloyal to her father, that she did not share in her elder's delusions. The young man looked at her in a new way. It was the first inkling of her real nature that she had given him. Pen felt his look through and through her.

Pendleton took advantage of the pause to secure the floor again, and held it for some time. But he had to eat too, and as soon as he stopped talking to chew, Counsell turned to Pen.

"Isn't it rather lonely here?"

"Mercy, no!" laughed Pen. "Far too much to do!"

"I suppose there are lots of agreeable people in the neighborhood?"

"Up the county, oh yes," said Pen.

"And you have all sorts of jolly parties?"

"They do," said Pen briefly.

"Not you?"

Pen explained. "The road from here up the Neck that connects us with the world has become impassable for motors, even if we had one. Even a buggy can scarcely get through now. By road it's twelve miles to the nearest white man's house. Excepting the squatters. Our only way of communication is by motor-boat with the Island. Our friends do not live on the Island. And we've no way of getting up the county."

"Have you no white neighbors at all?" he asked aghast.

"Old Mr. Weems Locket who keeps the lighthouse."

"No white woman near?"

Pen shrugged. "No special hardship in that. I like men just as well as women."

"Nobody but the light-keeper?"

"Oh yes, in bad weather the bug-eyes and the pungy-boats lie under our bank and the skippers come ashore to call on father and use the telephone."

"In winter it must be hard."

"Oh things are never really as bad as they seem to one who doesn't know

them."

Just the same his sympathetic voice drew something out of her. For the first time she gave him her eyes freely. Wonderful dark, glowing eyes that won something of him that he never got back again. Her laughing, somber glance said as plainly as if the words had been spoken: "The winter here is Hell!" His eyes laughed back in hers, surrendering, and for an instant they were one.

This brief interchange was terribly sweet to Pen; so sweet that it scared her. For some time afterwards she was quite stiff with him, and his eyes reproached her.

When they left the table and went out on the porch Counsell made a deliberate move to separate her from her prosy father. With all his politeness the young man had a resolute air.

"I think this is simply the finest site for a house that I have ever seen," he said to Pen. "Let's walk out and look over the edge of the bank."

Pen's heart leaped—then sank again, remembering the morning's work still undone, and the afternoon's work all to do. Pendleton looked injured, but as no one paid the slightest attention to him he made believe to recollect something important that he had to do, and went into the house. Pen pleaded with her sterner self: "Just for a few minutes!" Meanwhile she was being firmly urged towards the boxes. Before she was aware of having given in, she found herself well on the way.

They strolled across the neglected lawn, matted with horse-mint, too spicy a vegetable to the taste of the stock that wandered over the place. The drive once paved with shell, made a wide circular sweep in front of the house, but the shell had disappeared under the horse-mint too. Part of the old bed enclosed within the drive Pen had dug up and put in a few dahlias. These she had essayed to protect from the horses and cows and sheep by a miscellaneous barricade of boxes and boards. She blushed for it now. She couldn't explain to him that she had an instinct for flowers that had to find some outlet.

The earthen bank was sixty feet high. In the days of the place's glory an ingenious gardener had planted honeysuckle at the base to keep it from

washing and now the tangled vines swept all the way up to their feet in a bottle green wave flecked with the foam of its pale blossoms. The scent of it was dangerously enervating to youth.

"The whole world down here is full of honeysuckle," murmured Don. "In the evening you can smell it far out in the Bay."

An ineffably lovely panorama was spread before them, which the light haze customary to that soft land, endowed with a curiously moving quality. For awhile in silence their eyes ranged back and forth from Absalom's Island on the one side out over the intenser blue of the Bay. At their feet rode a battered old schooner with a deckload of cord wood. Down at the left the octagonal lighthouse on its spindly legs was just within range of their vision.

"My camp is down there," said Don. "On the other side of the old wharf. The curve in the beach hides it."

They sat down with their feet hanging over the edge. Pen's conscience was protesting more faintly now. She had recovered from her surprise attack and had her forces pretty well in hand. She found she was all right if she avoided looking at him. There was something leaping out of his eyes that simply confounded her. They talked about anything and nothing. He wanted to make her talk, whereas she desired to hear him. So they fenced. The little undertones of bitterness, of self-mockery, in Pen's laughter struck powerfully on the man's imagination. It appeared that this girl most decidedly had a flavor of her own.

He was reluctant to talk about himself and Pen could not ask questions. Consequently her hungry ears were obliged to pounce on the implications of his talk for information. He was of the great world it appeared. He knew everybody. He was not a mere philistine. He knew books, pictures, music; all that Pen thirsted for; and the people who made such things were among his friends. "Though I'm only a common stockbroker," he put in with a laugh. This pleased Pen. She thought: "I wouldn't want an artist for a lover"—and blushed for the thought. He was exactly what she wished him to be. It seemed to her magical that such a one should have been brought into her life if only for an hour or two. Only for an hour or two! She kept telling herself that firmly. "He'll be gone to-morrow and I wishing he had never come!" That was the explanation of the bitterness.

She did ask him one question. "How on earth did you come to stray down here?"

He said: "I read somewhere, years ago, what a lovely and little known country there was on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay ... I keep a canoe and a little tent handy in a club-house in New York. Whenever the world is too much with me I just paddle off for a few days."

Pen's few minutes lengthened out into an hour and she had simply not the strength to send him away. In the end her father was seen approaching, his discolored straw hat placed just so, a jute bag over his arm.

"I'm going over to the Island to get the mail," he said to Counsell in an offhand tone. "Like to come along? It's considered very picturesque."

Counsell looked at Pen in indecision. He most assuredly did not want to go, but perhaps the best way to make headway with the girl was to be agreeable to the old man. You couldn't always tell.

"Won't you come too?" he asked.

Pen shook her head. "I've a hundred things to do."

"Couldn't I help?" he asked eagerly.

Pen laughed clearly. "Heavens! what do you know about turkey chicks? Or making butter and cleaning house?"

He still hesitated.

Pen arose briskly. "Run along," she commanded. "When you come back perhaps you'll stay to supper." She had not intended to ask him. It was surprised out of her. It surprised her father too. "Was that necessary?" his elevated eyebrows asked. He did not like this young man as well as he had in the beginning.

Counsell blushed red with pleasure. "That is kind," he said.

"Then mind you're back in time," said Pen, leaving them. "You never can tell about the engine in our boat."

She flew about her work. The butter got itself made, and the eggs collected. Sundry small chicks were treated for the gaps, and the far wandering turkeys rounded up. Preparations were set on foot for a real

Southern Maryland supper; soft crabs, fried chicken, hot biscuits, strawberry shortcake. If Pen had had her way she would have stuffed her young man like a Strasbourg goose.

All afternoon she was filled with an excitement that was neither wholly pleasurable nor painful. Her heart would keep rising in her throat, and stern discipline was required to put it down. Finally she red up the house. She lingered in the guest-room her hand caressing the white spread, while she debated whether she might ask him to spend the night. She foresaw her father's look of disapproval but that did not influence her much. But she decided against it with a firm shake of the head. "Only prolong the agony," she said to herself, with her little smile of self-mockery.

In the midst of her activities she often found time to run out on the porch where she could observe the progress of the *Pee Bee*, that slab-sided little marine monster that ploughed through the water so fiercely at the rate of five miles an hour. It would take them fifty minutes to go and come if they did not loiter, but her father would be sure to want to show Counsell the Island, and incidentally show off Counsell to the Islanders; he would get into talk with men at the store. Sure enough it was four o'clock before they started home. Half way over the *Pee Bee* suddenly stopped. Pen could see her father crouching over the engine in the way she knew so well. Counsell was perched up on the bow looking towards Broome Point. So much the better for him if he knew nothing about engines. Time passed and they did not budge. "How bored he must be!" Pen thought anxiously. "It will sicken him of us!"

At last the *Pee Bee* began to move ahead by fits and starts, Pendleton darting to and fro between wheel and engine. How familiar Pen was with the little comedy that was taking place on board! Pendleton would never let anybody else steer! When the *Pee Bee* finally passed under the bank Pen could still follow her progress by the noise she made. She arranged matters so that supper should come on the table at the moment the disgruntled men crossed the porch.

She had put on the black net evening dress that had been made over three times. A red peony in her corsage freshened it up a good deal, but in the end Pen threw it away. "Too coquettish!" she said, jeering at her reflection in the mirror. She had no idea how lovely she looked with her perfect neck and

arms, her fine capable hands a little roughened by work, her eyes big with feeling yet determinedly reticent, and those soft, red, bitter lips.

Her heart sank fathoms deep when Pendleton came in alone.

"Where's Mr. Counsell?" she asked very offhand.

"Stopped in his tent to tidy up a bit," said Pendleton ... "Was it necessary..." he began reprovingly.

"You'd better do the same," said Pen coolly.

Pendleton dropped the bag of mail in the hall and went upstairs registering disapproval in every step. Pen rushed the supper out into the oven again. Her heart was singing.

Though it was still bright out-of-doors the dining-table was lighted by a red-shaded swinging lamp. To be sure the shade was only of paper, but it made none the less a cheerful glow. When Counsell came into the room his good manners failed him; he stopped short and stared at Pen in silence. Pen could not look at him. She said to herself: "He's amused at my silliness; dressing up in these old rags!"

At the table they gave Pendleton full sway and it improved his humor. Counsell had discovered that it pleased Pen best to have him encourage her father. Counsell's conversation with her was limited to compliments on the wonderful eats. Pen received it with her little twisted smile. That was the way she was. She knew he meant it, but it hurt—how it hurt! Because it signified nothing. Nothing would come of it. A long course of self-discipline had taught Pen never to build on the prospect of happiness, that thereby she might be saved a crushing disappointment when happiness failed to materialize.

At the conclusion of the meal Counsell got his reward when it appeared that Pendleton, owing to the time he had wasted on the river, still had his chores to do about the place. He departed for the barn. Aunt Maria Garner waddled back and forth, clearing the table and rolling her eyes at the guest. She was not a well-trained servant.

"Shall we go outside?" suggested Counsell.

"Mosquitoes!" said Pen smiling.

She led the way into the great dim drawing-rooms on the other side of the

hall. The only illumination was given by a piano lamp with a yellow paper shade standing beside an old ebony upright.

"You play?" asked Counsell.

"Not for you," said Pen promptly. "You know too much."

"Anyway, I'd rather have you talk to me," he said. "We haven't started to get acquainted yet."

Pen's inner voice cried: "What's the use? What's the use?"

Her little painful smile tantalized him. He said involuntarily: "You mock at everything I say."

"Not at you," said Pen. "At myself!"

"I don't understand you," he complained.

"And you have known so many girls!" said Pen, drawing down the corners of her lips.

"Yes," he said. "But never one like you. In town they seem to be cut out pretty much to a pattern. Some well cut, some badly. But all the same pattern."

Pen thought: "He's a good-natured sort. He thinks I expect to hear this sort of thing."

There they sat side by side on the big sofa in the seductive half light of the great room—but something was the matter. They made no progress. Perhaps having desired this moment so much, the realization of it frightened them. With too much feeling they were dumb; and they did not know each other well enough to be comfortably silent together. So each made various attempts to start something which only resulted in utter banality. They found themselves talking as primly as a couple in an old-fashioned romance. The sources of laughter were frozen up. And the more self-conscious they became, the stiffer grew their tongues.

It was chiefly Pen's fault. She got the notion in her head that he merely desired to repay her hospitality with a little gallantry, and she blighted his warm overtures as with a frost. It was due to her fatal instinct to guard against a pain which might be more than she could bear.

However the young man was determined; moreover he had a reputation to keep up. More experienced than Pen he had learned how a little naturalness clears the air, and he was resolved to speak his mind no matter how hard she made it for him. In the end he blurted it out awkwardly:

"Why shouldn't I tell you? ... a fellow like me ... knocking about ... making a joke of everything ... you get the notion girls are charming useless creatures you've got to put up with because they're so charming ... And lots of them are useless without even being charming ... Makes a man cynical ... And then to meet one more charming than any and *useful!* ... Oh, I express myself rottenly! ... Well, it gives you a jolt. You've got to rearrange all your ideas..."

This was simply more than Pen could bear. She insisted to herself that it was simply gallantry on his part. Gallantry is part of the Maryland tradition. She laughed in a way that dried him up, and made him turn a dull red.

"Thanks for useful," she said.

The sullen, hurt glance he bent on her seemed to say: "You're charming but you're very prickly!"

That put the finish to their conversation. To the outward view they presented the spectacle of two normal young people slightly bored with each other and exchanging perfunctory remarks, but in reality each was suffering keenly. They couldn't make it go. Pendleton returned to the dining-room where they could hear him rattling the newspaper, and they were even ready to wish that he would come in and separate them in their unhappiness. Finally Counsell got the idea that Pen wished to be rid of him. After all he'd been hanging about the place all day. He rose to go.

Pen's heart said: "This is the end!" But her face only showed a polite and wistful blank. She said quietly:

"You'll be moving on to-morrow, I suppose."

"I suppose so," he said sullenly.

Pen greatly wished to say: "Well don't forget us," or something of the sort, light and friendly, but she could not get the words out.

And of course he took her silence to mean it was all one to her whether he went or stayed.

But he could not go like that. He hung indecisively at the door of the room. Finally he blurted out like a boy:

"I say, what's the matter?"

"Why, nothing!" answered Pen with a startled look.

"This afternoon we were like pals.... What have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing whatever," said Pen.

"Oh," he said sorely, "then it's just that you don't fancy my style much anyhow."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that!" said Pen with a teasing smile. Heaven knows what it cost her.

"I quite understand," he said with a man's absurd injured vanity.

"You understand nothing!" murmured Pen.

He moved to the front door, and failed to hear her. For a moment or two they looked unhappily out at the night. The moon had risen behind the house and was casting long shadows athwart the lawn. Beyond the edge of the bank there was a mystical sea of subdued radiance.

"Well ... good-night ... good-by," he mumbled. "Thank you so much for your kindness ... good-by."

"My kindness!" Pen's heart cried. "Good-by," she said aloud, without a suspicion of a shake or a tremor. "Father is in the dining-room."

"Please say good-night to him for me," he said hurriedly ... "Good-by." He held out his hand.

"Good-by," said Pen, letting her cold fingers lie within his for a moment without any response to his pressure.

He went slowly across the front porch and stepped down. She closed the door. She stood there, her arms hanging. Her thoughts were like a dialogue back and forth within her.

"He didn't want to go. Why did you send him? But what did he want to stay for? Just a summer night's flirtation. That would have finished me. It's better this way ... Maybe he meant it ... No! That sort of happiness is not for me! Might as well get used to it soon as late! ... I'm not going to run upstairs

and cry, either! There are the chickens to fasten up, the yeast to make and the milk to set out!" Her arms went up above her head and fell again. "Oh God! but life is dreary!"

From the dining-room her father called her in a strange, agitated voice that sent the blood flying from her heart:

"Pen! Pen! Come here, quickly!"