

## CHAPTER TWO

### Two Years: June 1873 – 1875

He never completely lost consciousness while in the river, nor did he completely gain consciousness, but thrashed through the furious twilight zone between dream and reality, of abstract fantasies, fleeting and formless, shifting and leaping in frantic motion of color and light and receding into darkness, instantaneously rising again, bursting in flame and ice, yet uncomprehended as pain; for pain had risen above him and beyond him until it had become a solid image, encasing his body, discarded from a mind that had lost all conception of solidity, that had become no more than a feather caught in the eye of a tornado, swirling among the rubble of yesterday's dreams, crying "Abigail" to a distant shadow of a remembered something just out of reach beyond the tomb of pain and insensibility.

The patternless mass merged, moving in upon itself, and found form. He was lying on his back and he could hear the angry rush of the river, unseen, near him. Above, a dull moon shone through the sieve-screen of leaves. He lay still and numb, clinging to his new-found consciousness like a drowning man who rises to the surface and clutches a twig, knowing the twig will break and trying to compress all of life, past and future, into that second before he slides again into darkness. He remembered the house where he had lived, a large white mansion that rose predominant against grass and shade trees on a hill that looked out over Boston to the sea and to the west without a sea, vast and boundless, where a country, a way of life, the likes of which the earth had never seen before, was having its growing pains beyond the horizon.

The young Chett Colfax dreamed. But the young are cowards and he was content with his vision, afraid to express it even to his family, accepting the precept that ideals are for fools. So he lived in the white house with portraits of cold, staring ancestors with satin dresses and vests and satin faces, accepted his heritage without question and went to college. He boxed in college, boxed well, though not from strength nor even interest, for he disliked boxing as much as his parents, this being the furthest extent which he then had the nerve to openly rebel, not so much against those parents as the Pharisaical society they had come to represent, so boxed well only from his natural speed and agility.

He spent hours in quiet meditation and walked the lonely night piers where a man could dream in the shadows and the sound and expanse of the sea, yet content to dream for there was no goal. And one day there was. He remembered now not the incidents, the walks and fights with her father and the just sitting and talking, but the girl herself, soft and fragile and quietly tragic, enigmatic, for she would not talk of her life, which, he leaned on his own, had been as barren and cold as the waterfront drunken poverty where it had been lived or simply endured since birth, where she was forced to diffidently accept the sub-level, not immoral, but amoral code which not only did not avenge the two times she was raped, but brutally beat her for them - these administered by her two brothers, both of whom were worked over by Colfax with a shovel when they tried to stop him from taking her to his home where he had gotten her a job as maid.

They culminated their love in the woods behind the house, flesh and flesh and far beyond that, both needing and giving and receiving without reservation, dreaming together now of the West and a house in a valley far from the docks and far from the white mansion, and dreamed, too, of children; were married in a small church with no member of either family present. But remembered now only the image of her sad, unpretty face and the touch and smell of her body.

The twig broke and he fell away and kept falling for over a timeless month through voices and vague, indefinable sensation. He awoke once and an old woman and older man were standing above him. "Jest

lie quiet,” the man said, and the woman said, “He'll be an right,” and he fell again into darkness.

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