

THE BRIMMING CUP

BY
DOROTHY CANFIELD



NEW YORK
HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY
1921

**COPYRIGHT, 1919, 1920, BY
THE McCALL COMPANY**

**COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY
HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, INC.**

First printing, February
Second and third printings, March
Fourth printing, May
Fifth printing, July
Sixth and seventh printings, August
Eighth printing, September
Ninth printing, September

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. BY
The Quinn & Boden Company
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
RAHWAY NEW JERSEY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PRELUDE	3
II. INTERLUDE	23

PART ONE

III. OLD MR. WELLES AND YOUNG MR. MARSH	29
IV. TABLE TALK	48
V. A LITTLE GIRL AND HER MOTHER	64
VI. THINGS TAKE THEIR COURSE	80
VII. THE NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS	91
VIII. WHAT GOES ON INSIDE	115
IX. THE GENT AROUND THE LADY	130
X. AT THE MILL	151

PART TWO

XI. IN AUNT HETTY'S GARDEN	179
XII. HEARD FROM THE STUDY	199
XIII. ALONG THE EAGLE ROCK BROOK	215
XIV. BESIDE THE ONION-BED	224
XV. HOME-LIFE	241
XVI. MASSAGE-CREAM; THEME AND VARIATIONS	256
XVII. THE SOUL OF NELLY POWERS	266

PART THREE

XVIII. BEFORE THE DAWN	279
XIX. MR. WELLES LIGHTS THE FUSE	285
XX. A PRIMAÆVAL HERITAGE	294
XXI. THE COUNSEL OF THE STARS	302
XXII. EUGENIA DOES WHAT SHE CAN	309
XXIII. MARISE LOOKS DOWN ON THE STARS	323

THE BRIMMING CUP

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

SUNSET ON ROCCA DI PAPA

An Hour in the Life of Two Modern Young People

April, 1909.

LOUNGING idly in the deserted little waiting-room was the usual shabby, bored, lonely ticket-seller, prodigiously indifferent to the grave beauty of the scene before him and to the throng of ancient memories jostling him where he stood. Without troubling to look at his watch, he informed the two young foreigners that they had a long hour to wait before the cable-railway would send a car down to the Campagna. His lazy nonchalance was faintly colored with the satisfaction, common to his profession, in the discomfiture of travelers.

Their look upon him was of amazed gratitude. Evidently they did not understand Italian, he thought, and repeated his information more slowly, with an unrecognizable word or two of badly pronounced English thrown in. He felt slightly vexed that he could not make them feel the proper annoyance, and added, "It may even be so late that the signori would miss the connection for the last tramway car back to Rome. It is a long walk back to the city across the Campagna."

They continued to gaze at him with delight. "I've got to tip him for that!" said the young man, reaching vigorously into a pocket.

The girl's answering laugh, like the inward look of her eyes, showed only a preoccupied attention. She had the concentrated absent aspect of a person who has just heard vital tidings and can attend to nothing else. She said, "Oh, Neale,

how ridiculous of you! He couldn't possibly have the least idea what he's done to deserve getting paid for."

At the sound of her voice, the tone in which these words were pronounced, the ticket-seller looked at her hard, with a bold, intrusive, diagnosing stare: "Lovers!" he told himself conclusively. He accepted with a vast incuriosity as to reason the coin which the young foreigner put into his hand, and, ringing it suspiciously on his table, divided his appraising attention between its clear answer to his challenge, and the sound of the young man's voice as he answered his sweetheart, "Of course he hasn't any idea what he's done to deserve it. Who ever has? You don't suppose for a moment I've any idea what I've done to deserve mine?"

The ticket-seller smiled secretly into his dark mustache. "I wonder if *my* voice quivered and deepened like that, when I was courting Annunziata?" he asked himself. He glanced up from pocketing the coin, and caught the look which passed between the two. He felt as though someone had laid hands on him and shaken him. "*Dio mio!*" he thought. "They are in the hottest of it."

The young foreigners went across the tracks and established themselves on the rocks, partly out of sight, just at the brink of the great drop to the Campagna. The setting sun was full in their faces. But they did not see it, seeing only each other.

Below them spread the divinely colored plain, crossed by the ancient yellow river, rolling its age-old memories out to the sea, a blue reminder of the restfulness of eternity, at the rim of the weary old land. Like a little cluster of tiny, tarnished pearls, Rome gleamed palely, remote and legendary.

The two young people looked at each other earnestly, with a passionate, single-hearted attention to their own meaning, thrusting away impatiently the clinging brambles of speech which laid hold on their every effort to move closer to each

other. They did not look down, or away from each other's eyes as they strove to free themselves, to step forward, to clasp the other's outstretched hands. They reached down blindly, tearing at those thorny, clutching entanglements, pulling and tugging at those tenuous, tough words which would not let them say what they meant: sure, hopefully sure that in a moment . . . now . . . with the next breath, they would break free as no others had ever done before them, and crying out the truth and glory that was in them, fall into each other's arms.

The girl was physically breathless with this effort, her lips parted, her eyebrows drawn together. "Neale, Neale dear, if I could only tell you how I want it to be, how utterly utterly *true* I want us to be. Nothing's of any account except that."

She moved with a shrugging, despairing gesture. "No, no, not the way that sounds. I don't mean, you know I don't mean any old-fashioned impossible vows never to change, or be any different! I know too much for that. I've seen too awfully much unhappiness, with people trying to do that. You know what I told you about my father and mother. Oh, Neale, it's horribly dangerous, loving anybody. I never wanted to. I never thought I should. But now I'm in it, I see that it's not at all unhappiness I'm afraid of, your getting tired of me or I of you . . . everybody's so weak and horrid in this world, who knows what may be before us? That's not what would be unendurable, sickening. That would make us unhappy. But what would poison us to death . . . what I'm afraid of, between two people who try to be what we want to be to each other . . . how can I say it?" She looked at him in an anguish of endeavor, ". . . not to be true to what is deepest and most living in us . . . that would be the betrayal I'm afraid of. That's what I mean. No matter what it costs us personally, or what it brings, we must be true to that. We *must!*"

He took her hand in his silently, and held it close. She drew a long troubled breath and said, "You *do* think we can always have between us that loyalty to what is deep and living? It does not seem too much to ask, when we are willing to give up everything else for it, even happiness?"

He gave her a long, profound look. "I'm trying to give that loyalty to you this minute, Marise darling," he said slowly, "when I tell you now that I think it a very great deal to ask of life, a very great deal for any human beings to try for. I should say it was much harder to get than happiness."

She was in despair. "Do you think that?" She searched his face anxiously as though she found there more than in his speech. "Yes, yes, I see what you mean." She drew a long breath. "I can even see how fine it is of you to say that to me now. It's like a promise of how you will try. But oh, Neale, I won't *want* life on any other terms!"

She stopped, looking down at her hand in his. He tightened his clasp. His gaze on her darkened and deepened. "It's like sending me to get the apples of Hesperides," he said, looking older than she, curiously and suddenly older. "I want to say yes! It would be easy to say yes. Darling, darling Marise, you can't want it more than I! But the very intelligence that makes you want it, that makes me want it, shows me how mortally hard it would be! Think! To be loyal to what is deepest and most living in yourself . . . that's an undertaking for a life-time's effort, with all the ups and downs and growths of life. And then to try to know what is deepest and most living in another . . . and to try . . . Marise! I will try. I will try with all my might. Can anybody do more than try with all his might?"

Their gaze into each other's eyes went far beyond the faltering words they spoke. She asked him in a low voice, "Couldn't you do more for me than for yourself? One never knows, but . . . what else is love for, but to give greater strength than we have?"

There was a moment's silence, in which their very spirits met flame-like in the void, challenging, hoping, fearing. The man's face set. His burning look of power enveloped her like the reflection of the sun. "I swear you shall have it!" he said desperately, his voice shaking.

She looked up at him with a passionate gratitude. "I'll never forget that as long as I live!" she cried out to him.

The tears stood in his eyes as in hers.

For the fraction of an instant, they had felt each other there, as never before they had felt any other human being: they had both at once caught a moment of flood-tide, and both together had been carried up side by side; the long, inevitable isolation of human lives from birth onward had been broken by the first real contact with another human soul. They felt the awed impulse to cover their eyes as before too great a glory.

The tide ebbed back, and untroubled they made no effort to stop its ebbing. They had touched their goal, it was really there. Now they knew it within their reach. Appeased, assuaged, fatigued, they felt the need for quiet, they knew the sweetness of sobriety. They even looked away from each other, aware of their own bodies which for that instant had been left behind. They entered again into the flesh that clad their spirits, taking possession of their hands and feet and members, and taken possession of by them again. The fullness of their momentary satisfaction had been so complete that they felt no regret, only a simple, tender pleasure as of being again at home. They smiled happily at each other and sat silent, hand in hand.

Now they saw the beauty before them, the vast plain, the mountains, the sea: harmonious, serene, ripe with maturity, evocative of all the centuries of conscious life which had unrolled themselves there.

"It's too beautiful to be real, isn't it?" murmured the girl,

"and now, the peaceful way I feel this minute, I don't mind it's being so old that it makes you feel a midge in the sunshine with only an hour or two of life before you. What if you are, when it's life as we feel it now, such a flood of it, every instant brimming with it? Neale," she turned to him with a sudden idea, "do you remember how Victor Hugo's 'Waterloo' begins?"

"I should say not!" he returned promptly. "You forget I got all the French I know in an American university."

"Well, I went to college in America, myself!"

"I bet it wasn't there you learned anything about Victor Hugo's poetry," he surmised skeptically. "Well, how does it begin, anyhow, and what's it got to do with us?"

The girl was as unamused as he at his certainty that it had something to do with them, or she would not have mentioned it. She explained, "It's not a famous line at all, nothing I ever heard anybody else admire. We had to learn the poem by heart, when I was a little girl and went to school in Bayonne. It starts out,

'Waterloo, Waterloo, morne plaine

Comme une onde qui bout dans une urne trop pleine,'

And that second line always stuck in my head for the picture it made. I could see it, so vividly, an urn boiling over with the great gush of water springing up in it. It gave me a feeling, inside, a real physical feeling, I mean. I wanted, oh so awfully, sometime to be so filled with some emotion, something great and fine, that I would be an urn too full, gushing up in a great flooding rush. I could see the smooth, thick curl of the water surging up and out!"

She stopped to look at him and exclaim, "Why, you're listening! You're interested. Neale, I believe you are the only person in the world who can really pay attention to what somebody else says. Everybody else just goes on thinking his own thoughts."

He smiled at this fancy, and said, "Go on."

"Well, I don't know whether that feeling was already in me, waiting for something to express it, or whether that phrase in the poem started it. But it was, for ever so long, the most important thing in the world to me. I was about fourteen years old then, and of course, being a good deal with Catholics, I thought probably it was religious ecstasy that was going to be the great flood that would brim my cup full. I used to go up the hill in Bayonne to the Cathedral every day and stay there for hours, trying to work up an ecstasy. I managed nearly to faint away once or twice, which was *something* of course. But I couldn't feel that great tide I'd dreamed of. And then, little by little . . . oh, lots of things came between the idea and my thinking about it. Mother was . . . I've told you how Mother was at that time. And what an unhappy time it was at home. I was pretty busy at the house because she was away so much. And Father and I hung together because there wasn't anybody else to hang to: and all sorts of ugly things happened, and I didn't have the time or the heart to think about being 'an urn too full.'"

She stopped, smiling happily, as though those had not been tragic words which he had just spoken, thinking not of them but of something else, which now came out, "And then, oh Neale, that day, on the piazza in front of St. Peter's, when we stood together, and felt the spray of the fountains blown on us, and you looked at me and spoke out. . . . Oh, Neale, Neale, what a moment to have lived through! Well, when we went on into the church, and I knelt there for a while, so struck down with joy that I couldn't stand on my feet, all those wild bursts of excitement, and incredulity and happiness, that kept surging up and drenching me . . . I had a queer feeling, that awfull-- threadbare feeling of having been there before, or felt that before; that it was familiar, although it was so new. Then it came to me, 'Why, I have it, what I used to pray for. Now at last I am the urn too full!' And

it was true, I could feel, just as I dreamed, the upsurging of the feeling, brimming over, boiling up, brimming over. . . . And another phrase came into my mind, an English one. I said to myself, 'The fullness of life.' Now I know what it is."

She turned to him, and caught at his hand. "Oh, Neale, now I *do* know what it is, how utterly hideous it would be to have to live without it, to feel only the mean little trickle that seems mostly all that people have."

"Well, I'll never have to get along without it, as long as I have you," he said confidently.

"And I refuse to live a *minute*, if it goes back on me!" she cried.

"I imagine that old folks would think we are talking very young," suggested the man casually.

"Don't speak of them!" She cast them away into non-existence with a gesture.

They sank into a reverie, smiling to themselves.

"How the fountains shone in the sun, that day," she murmured; "the spray they cast on us was all tiny opals and diamonds."

"You're sure you aren't going to be sorry to go back to America to live, to leave all that?" asked the man. "I get anxious about that sometimes. It seems an awful jump to go away from such beautiful historic things, back to a narrow little mountain town."

"I'd like to know what right you have to call it narrow, when you've never even seen it," she returned.

"Well, anybody could make a pretty fair guess that a small Vermont town isn't going to be so very *wide*," he advanced reasonably.

"It may not be wide, but it's deep," she replied.

He laughed at her certainty. "You were about eleven years old when you saw it last, weren't you?"

"No, you've got it wrong. It was when we came to France to live that I was eleven, and of course I stopped going to

Ashley regularly for vacations then. But I went back for several summers in the old house with Cousin Hetty, when I was in America for college, after Mother died."

"Oh well, I don't care what it's like," he said, "except that it's the place where I'm going to live with you. Any place on earth would seem wide enough and deep enough, if I had you there."

"Isn't it funny," she mused, "that I should know so much more about it than you? To think how I played all around your uncle's mill and house, lots of times when I was a little girl, and never dreamed . . ."

"No funnier than all the rest of it," he demurred. "Once you grant our existing and happening to meet out of all the millions of people in the world, you can't think up anything funnier. Just the little two-for-a-cent queerness of our happening to meet in Rome instead of in Brooklyn, and your happening to know the town where my uncle lived and owned the mill he left me . . . that can't hold a candle for queerness, for wonderfulness, compared to my having ever laid eyes on you. Suppose I'd never come to Rome at all? When I got the news of Uncle Burton's death and the bequest, I was almost planning to sail from Genoa and not come to southern Italy at all."

She shook her head confidently. "You can't scare me with any such hideous possibilities. It's not possible that we shouldn't ever have met, both of us being in the world. Didn't you ever study chemistry? Didn't they teach you there are certain elements that just *will* come together, no matter how you mix them up with other things?"

He made no answer, gazing out across the plain far below them, mellowing richly in the ever-softening light of the sunset.

She looked doubtfully at his profile, rather lean, with the beginning already drawn of the deep American line from the corner of the nose to the mouth, that is partly humorous and

partly grim. "Don't you believe that, Neale, that we would have come together somehow, anyhow?" she asked, "even if you had gone straight back from Genoa to Ashley? Maybe it might have been up there after you'd begun to run the mill. Maybe I'd have gone back to America and gone up to visit Cousin Hetty again."

He was still silent.

She said urgently, as if in alarm, "Neale, you don't believe that we could have passed all our lives and never have seen each other?"

He turned on her his deep-set eyes, full of tenderness and humor and uncertainty, and shook his head. "Yes, dear, I do believe that," he said regretfully. "I don't see how I can help believing it. Why, I hadn't the faintest idea of going back to settle in Ashley before I met you. I had taken Uncle Burton's mill and his bequest of four thousand dollars as a sort of joke. What could I do with them, without anything else? And what on earth did I want to do with them? Nothing! As far as I had any plans at all, it was to go home, see Father and Mother for a while, get through the legal complications of inheritance, sell the mill and house . . . I wouldn't have thought of such a thing as bothering even to go to Ashley to look at them . . . and then take the money and go off somewhere, somewhere different, and far away: to China maybe. I was pretty restless in my mind, pretty sure that nothing in our civilization was worth the candle, you know, before you arrived on the scene to put everything in focus. And if I had done all that, while you were still here in Rome, running up and down your scales, honestly . . . I know I sound awfully literal . . . but I don't see how we ever could have met, do you, dear?"

He offered her this, with a look half of apology, half of simple courage.

She considered it and him seriously, studying his face and eyes, listening retrospectively to the accent of his words, and

immensely astonished him by suddenly flashing a kiss on his cheek. "You're miraculous!" she said. "You don't know how it feels; as though I'd been floundering in a marsh, deeper and deeper, and then all at once, when I thought I'd come to know there wasn't anything in the world *but* marsh, to come out on beautiful, fine, clean earth, where I feel the very strength of ages under my feet. You don't *know* how good it seems to have a silly, romantic remark like what I said, answered the way you did, telling the truth; how *good* it feels to be pulled down to what's what, and to know you can do it and really love me too."

He had been so startled and moved by her kiss that he had heard her words but vaguely. "I don't seem to catch hold of all that. What's it all about?"

"It's all about the fact that I really begin to believe that you will be loyal and tell me the truth," she told him.

He saw cause for gravity in this, remembering the great moment so shortly back of them, and said with a surprised and hurt accent, "Didn't you believe me, when I said I would?"

She took up his hand in hers and said rapidly, "Dear Neale, I did believe it, for just a moment, and I can't believe anything good of anybody for longer than that, not *really* in my heart of hearts. And it's my turn to tell you some truth when I tell you about that unbelief, what I've hardly even ever told myself, right out in words."

He was listening now, fixing on her a look of profound, intelligent attention, as she went on, stumbling, reaching out for words, discarding those she found, only her steady gaze giving coherence to her statement. "You know, living the way I have . . . I've told you . . . I've seen a great deal more than most girls have. And then, half brought up in France with people who are clever and have their eyes wide open, people who really count, I've seen how they don't believe in humans, or goodness, or anything that's not base. They

know life is mostly bad and cruel and dull and low, and above all that it's bound to fool you if you trust to it, or get off your guard a single minute. They don't *teach* you that, you know; but you see it's what they believe and what they spend all their energies trying to dodge a little, all they think they can. Then everything you read, except the silly little Bibliothèque-Rose sort of thing, makes you know that it's true . . . Anatole France, and Maupassant, and Schnitzler. Of course back in America you find lots of nice people who don't believe that. But they're so sweet you know they'd swallow anything that made things look pleasant. So you don't dare take their word for anything. They won't even look at what's bad in everybody's life, they just pretend it's not there, not in *their* husbands, or wives or children, and so you know they're fooled." She lowered her voice, which faltered a little, but she still continued to look straight into his eyes, "And as for love, why, I've just hated the sound of the name and . . . I'm horribly afraid of it, even now."

He asked her gravely, "Don't you love me? Don't you think that I love you? "

She looked at him piteously, wincing, bracing herself with an effort to be brave. "I must try to be as honest as I want you to be. Yes, I love you, Neale, with all my heart a thousand times more than I ever dreamed I could love anybody. But how do I know that I'm not somehow fooling myself: but that maybe all that huge unconscious inheritance from all my miserable ancestors hasn't *got* me, somehow, and you too? How do I know that I'm not being fooled by Nature and fooling you with fine words? "

She hesitated, probing deep into her heart, and brought out now, like a great and unexpected treasure, "But, Neale, listen! I *don't* think that about you! I don't believe you're being fooled. Why, I believe in you more than in myself! " She was amazed at this and radiant.

Then she asked him, "Neale, how do *you* manage about all