

# **Vandover and the Brute**

by

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## Chapter One

It was always a matter of wonder to Vandover that he was able to recall so little of his past life. With the exception of the most recent events he could remember nothing connectedly. What he at first imagined to be the story of his life, on closer inspection turned out to be but a few disconnected incidents that his memory had preserved with the greatest capriciousness, absolutely independent of their importance. One of these incidents might be a great sorrow, a tragedy, a death in his family; and another, recalled with the same vividness, the same accuracy of detail, might be a matter of the least moment.

A certain one of these wilful fillips of memory would always bring before him a particular scene during the migration of his family from Boston to their new home in San Francisco, at a time when Vandover was about eight years old.

It was in the depot of one of the larger towns in western New York. The day had been hot and after the long ride on the crowded day coach the cool shadow under the curved roof of the immense iron vaulted depot seemed very pleasant. The porter, the brakeman and Vandover's father very carefully lifted his mother from the car. She was lying back on pillows in a long steamer chair. The three men let the chair slowly down, the brakeman went away, but the porter remained, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead with the back of his left hand, which in turn he wiped against the pink palm of his right. The other train, the train to which they were to change, had not yet arrived. It was rather still; at the far end of the depot a locomotive, sitting back on its motionless drivers like some huge sphinx crouching along the rails, was steaming quietly, drawing long breaths. The repair gang in greasy caps and spotted blue overalls were inspecting the train, pottering about the trucks, opening and closing the journal-boxes, striking clear notes on the wheels with long-handled hammers.

Vandover stood close to his father, his thin legs wide apart, holding in both his hands the satchel he had been permitted to carry. He looked about him continually, rolling his big eyes vaguely, watching now the repair-gang, now a huge white cat dozing on an empty baggage truck.

Several passengers were walking up and down the platform, staring curiously at the invalid lying back in the steamer chair.

The journey was too much for her. She was very weak and very pale, her eyelids were heavy, the skin of her forehead looked blue and tightly drawn, and tiny beads of perspiration gathered around the corners of her mouth. Vandover's father put his hand and arm along the back of the chair and his sick wife rested against him, leaning her head on his waistcoat over the pocket where he kept his cigars and pocket-comb. They were all silent.

By and by she drew a long sigh, her face became the face of an imbecile, stupid, without expression, her eyes half-closed, her mouth half-open. Her head rolled forward as though she were nodding in her sleep, while a long drip of saliva trailed from her lower lip. Vandover's father bent over her quickly, crying out sharply, "Hallie!—what is it?" All at once the train for which they were waiting charged into the depot, filling the place with a hideous clangor and with the smell of steam and of hot oil.

This scene of her death was the only thing that Vandover could remember of his mother.

As he looked back over his life he could recall nothing after this for nearly five years. Even after that lapse of time the only scene he could picture with any degree of clearness was one of the greatest triviality in which he saw himself, a rank thirteen-year-old boy, sitting on a bit of carpet in the back yard of the San Francisco house playing with his guinea-pigs.

In order to get at his life during his teens, Vandover would have been obliged to collect these scattered memory pictures as best he could, rearrange them in some more orderly sequence, piece out what he could imperfectly recall and fill in the many gaps by mere guesswork and conjecture.

It was the summer of 1880 that they had come to San Francisco. Once settled there, Vandover's father began to build small residence houses and cheap flats which he rented at various prices, the cheapest at ten dollars, the more expensive at thirty-five and forty. He had closed out his business in the East, coming out to California on account of his wife's ill health. He had made his money in Boston and had intended to retire.

But he soon found that he could not do this. At this time he was an old man, nearly sixty. He had given his entire life to his business to the exclusion of everything else, and now when his fortune had been made and when he could afford to enjoy it, discovered that he had lost the capacity for enjoying anything but the business itself. Nothing else could interest him. He was not what would be called in America a rich man, but he had made money enough to travel, to allow himself any reasonable relaxation, to cultivate a taste for art, music, literature or the drama, to indulge in any harmless fad, such as collecting etchings, china or bric-à-brac, or even to permit himself the luxury of horses. In the place of all these he found himself, at nearly sixty years of age, forced again into the sordid round of business as the only escape from the mortal *ennui* and weariness of the spirit that preyed upon him during every leisure hour of the day.

Early and late he went about the city, personally superintending the building of his little houses and cheap flats, sitting on saw-horses and piles of lumber, watching the carpenters at work. In the evening he came home to a late supper, completely fagged, bringing with him the smell of mortar and of pine shavings.

On the first of each month when his agents turned over the rents to him he was in great spirits. He would bring home the little canvas sack of coin with him before banking it, and call his son's attention to the amount, never failing to stick a twenty-dollar gold-piece

in each eye, monocle fashion, exclaiming, "Good for the masses," a meaningless jest that had been one of the family's household words for years.

His plan of building was peculiar. His credit was good, and having chosen his lot he would find out from the banks how much they would loan him upon it in case he should become the owner. If this amount suited him, he would buy the lot, making one large payment outright and giving his note for the balance. The lot once his, the banks loaned him the desired amount. With this money and with money of his own he would make the final payment on the lot and would begin the building itself, paying his labour on the nail, but getting his material, lumber, brick and fittings on time. When the building was half-way up he would negotiate a second loan from the banks in order to complete it and in order to meet the notes he had given to his contractors for material.

He believed this to be a shrewd business operation, since the rents as they returned to him were equal to the interest on a far larger sum than that which he had originally invested. He said little about the double mortgage on each piece of property "improved" after this fashion and which often represented a full two-thirds of its entire value. The interest on each loan was far more than covered by the rents; he chose his neighbourhoods with great discrimination; real estate was flourishing in the rapidly growing city, and the new houses, although built so cheaply that they were mere shells of lath and plaster, were nevertheless made gay and brave with varnish and cheap mill-work. They rented well at first, scarcely a one was ever vacant. People spoke of the Old Gentleman as one of the most successful realty owners in the city. So pleased did he become with the success of his new venture that in course of time all his money was reinvested after this fashion.

At the time of his father's greatest prosperity Vandover himself began to draw toward his fifteenth year, entering upon that period of change when the first raw elements of character began to assert themselves and when, if ever, there was a crying need for the influence of his mother. Any feminine influence would have been well for him at this time: that of an older sister, even that of a hired governess. The housekeeper looked after him a little, mended his clothes, saw that he took his bath Saturday nights, and that he did not dig tunnels under the garden walks. But her influence was entirely negative and prohibitory and the two were constantly at war. Vandover grew in a haphazard way and after school hours ran about the streets almost at will.

At fifteen he put on long trousers, and the fall of the same year entered the High School. He had grown too fast and at this time was tall and very lean; his limbs were straight, angular, out of all proportion, with huge articulations at the elbows and knees. His neck was long and thin and his head large, his face was sallow and covered with pimples, his ears were big, red and stuck out stiff from either side of his head. His hair he wore "pompadour."

Within a month after his entry of the High School he had a nickname. The boys called him "Skinny-seldom-fed," to his infinite humiliation.

Little by little the crude virility of the young man began to develop in him. It was a distressing, uncanny period. Had Vandover been a girl he would at this time have been subject to all sorts of abnormal vagaries, such as eating his slate pencil, nibbling bits of chalk, wishing he were dead, and drifting into states of unreasoned melancholy. As it was, his voice began to change, a little golden down appeared on his cheeks and upon the nape of his neck, while his first summer vacation was altogether spoiled by a long spell of mumps.

His appetite was enormous. He ate heavy meat three times a day, but took little or no exercise. The pimples on his face became worse and worse. He grew peevish and nervous. He hated girls, and when in their society was a very bull-calf for bashfulness and awkward self-consciousness. At times the strangest and most morbid fancies took possession of him, chief of which was that every one was looking at him while he was walking in the street.

Vandover was a good little boy. Every night he said his prayers, going down upon his huge knees at the side of his bed. To the Lord's Prayer he added various petitions of his own. He prayed that he might be a good boy and live a long time and go to Heaven when he died and see his mother; that the next Saturday might be sunny all day long, and that the end of the world might not come while he was alive.

It was during Vandover's first year at the High School that his eyes were opened and that he acquired the knowledge of good and evil. Till very late he kept his innocence, the crude raw innocence of the boy, like that of a young animal, at once charming and absurd. But by and by he became very curious, stirred with a blind unreasoned instinct. In the Bible which he read Sunday afternoons, because his father gave him a quarter for doing so, he came across a great many things that filled him with vague and strange ideas; and one Sunday at church, when the minister was intoning the Litany, he remarked for the first time the words, "all women in the perils of child-birth."

He puzzled over this for a long time, smelling out a mystery beneath the words, feeling the presence of something hidden, with the instinct of a young brute. He could get no satisfaction from his father and by and by began to be ashamed to ask him; why, he did not know. Although he could not help hearing the abominable talk of the High School boys, he at first refused to believe that part of it which he could understand. For all that he was ashamed of his innocence and ignorance and affected to appreciate their stories nevertheless.

At length one day he heard the terse and brutal truth. In an instant he believed it, some lower, animal intuition in him reiterating and confirming the fact. But even then he hated to think that people were so low, so vile. One day, however, he was looking through the volumes of the old Encyclopædia Britannica in his father's library, hoping that he might find a dollar bill which the Old Gentleman told him had been at one time misplaced

between the leaves of some one of the great tomes. All at once he came upon the long article "Obstetrics," profusely illustrated with old-fashioned plates and steel engravings. He read it from beginning to end.

It was the end of all his childish ideals, the destruction of all his first illusions. The whole of his rude little standard of morality was lowered immediately. Even his mother, whom he had always believed to be some kind of an angel, fell at once in his estimation. She could never be the same to him after this, never so sweet, so good and so pure as he had hitherto imagined her.

It was very cruel, the whole thing was a grief to him, a blow, a great shock; he hated to think of it. Then little by little the first taint crept in, the innate vice stirred in him, the brute began to make itself felt, and a multitude of perverse and vicious ideas commenced to buzz about him like a swarm of nasty flies.

A certain word, the blunt Anglo-Saxon name for a lost woman, that he heard on one occasion among the boys at school, opened to him a vista of incredible wickedness, but now after the first moment of revolt the thing began to seem less horrible. There was even a certain attraction about it. Vandover soon became filled with an overwhelming curiosity, the eager evil curiosity of the schoolboy, the perverse craving for the knowledge of vice. He listened with all his ears to everything that was said and went about through the great city with eyes open only to its foulness. He even looked up in the dictionary the meanings of the new words, finding in the cold, scientific definitions some strange sort of satisfaction.

There was no feminine influence about Vandover at this critical time to help him see the world in the right light and to gauge things correctly, and he might have been totally corrupted while in his earliest teens had it not been for another side of his character that began to develop about the same time.

This was his artistic side. He seemed to be a born artist. At first he only showed bent for all general art. He drew well, he made curious little modellings in clayey mud; he had a capital ear for music and managed in some unknown way of his own to pick out certain tunes on the piano. At one time he gave evidence of a genuine talent for the stage. For days he would pretend to be some dreadful sort of character, he did not know whom, talking to himself, stamping and shaking his fists; then he would dress himself in an old smoking-cap, a red table-cloth and one of his father's discarded Templar swords, and pose before the long mirrors ranting and scowling. At another time he would devote his attention to literature, making up endless stories with which he terrified himself, telling them to himself in a low voice for hours after he had got into bed. Sometimes he would write out these stories and read them to his father after supper, standing up between the folding doors of the library, acting out the whole narrative with furious gestures. Once he even wrote a little poem which seriously disturbed the Old Gentleman, filling him with formless ideas and vague hopes for the future.

In a suitable environment Vandover might easily have become an author, actor or musician, since it was evident that he possessed the fundamental *afflatus* that underlies all branches of art. As it was, the merest chance decided his career.

In the same library where he had found the famous encyclopædia article was "A Home Book of Art," one of those showily bound gift books one sees lying about conspicuously on parlour centre tables. It was an English publication calculated to meet popular and general demand. There were a great many full-page pictures of lonely women, called "Reveries" or "Idylls," ideal "Heads" of gipsy girls, of coquettes, and heads of little girls crowned with cherries and illustrative of such titles as "Spring," "Youth," "Innocence." Besides these were sentimental pictures, as, for instance, one entitled "It Might Have Been," a sad-eyed girl, with long hair, musing over a miniature portrait, and another especially impressive which represented a handsomely dressed woman flung upon a *Louis Quinze* sofa, weeping, her hands clasped over her head. She was alone; it was twilight; on the floor was a heap of opened letters. The picture was called "Memories."

Vandover thought this last a wonderful work of art and made a hideous copy of it with very soft pencils. He was so pleased with it that he copied another one of the pictures and then another. By and by he had copied almost all of them. His father gave him a dollar and Vandover began to add to his usual evening petition the prayer that he might become a great artist. Thus it was that his career was decided upon.

He was allowed to have a drawing teacher. This was an elderly German, an immense old fellow, who wore a wig and breathed loudly through his nose. His voice was like a trumpet and he walked with a great striding gait like a colonel of cavalry. Besides drawing he taught ornamental writing and engrossing. With a dozen curved and flowing strokes of an ordinary writing pen he could draw upon a calling card a conventionalized outline-picture of some kind of dove or bird of paradise, all curves and curlicues, flying very gracefully and carrying in its beak a half-open scroll upon which could be inscribed such sentiments as "From a Friend" or "With Fond Regards," or even one's own name.

His system of drawing was of his own invention. Over the picture to be copied he would paste a great sheet of paper, ruling off the same into spaces of about an inch square. He would cut out one of these squares and Vandover would copy the portion of the picture thus disclosed. When he had copied the whole picture in this fashion the teacher would go over it himself, retouching it here and there, labouring to obviate the checker-board effect which the process invariably produced.

At other times Vandover copied into his sketch-book, with hard crayons, those lithographed studies on buff paper which are published by the firm in Berlin. He began with ladders, wheel-barrows and water barrels, working up in course of time to rustic buildings set in a bit of landscape; stone bridges and rural mills, overhung by some sort of linden tree, with ends of broken fences in a corner of the foreground to complete the composition. From these he went on to bunches of grapes, vases of fruit and at length to more "Ideal heads." The climax was reached with a life-sized Head, crowned with honeysuckles and entitled "*Flora*." He was three weeks upon it. It was an achievement, a veritable *chef-d'oeuvre*. Vandover gave it to his father upon Christmas morning, having signed his name to it with a great ornamental flourish. The Old Gentleman was astounded, the housekeeper was called in and exclaimed over it, raising her hands to Heaven. Vandover's father gave him a five-dollar gold-piece, fresh from the mint, had the picture framed in gilt and hung it up in his smoking-room over the clock.

Never for a moment did the Old Gentleman oppose Vandover's wish to become an artist and it was he himself who first spoke about Paris to the young man. Vandover was delighted; the Latin Quarter became his dream. Between the two it was arranged that he should go over as soon as he had finished his course at the High School. The Old Gentleman was to take him across, returning only when he was well established in some suitable studio.

At length Vandover graduated, and within three weeks of that event was on his way to Europe with his father. He never got farther than Boston.

At the last moment the Old Gentleman wavered. Vandover was still very young and would be entirely alone in Paris, ignorant of the language, exposed to every temptation. Besides this, his education would stop where it was. Somehow he could not make it seem right to him to cut the young man adrift in this fashion. On the other hand, the Old Gentleman had a great many old-time friends and business acquaintances in Boston who could be trusted with a nominal supervision of his son for four years. He had no college education himself, but in some vague way he felt convinced that Vandover would be a better artist for a four years' course at Harvard.

Vandover took his father's decision hardly. He had never thought of being a college-man and nothing in that life appealed to him. He urged upon his father the loss of time that the course would entail, but his father met this objection by offering to pay for any artistic tuition that would not interfere with the regular college work.

Little by little the idea of college life became more attractive to Vandover; at the worst, it was only postponing the Paris trip, not abandoning it. Besides this, two of his chums from the High School were expecting to enter Harvard that fall, and he could look forward to a very pleasant four years spent in their company.

Out at Cambridge the term was just closing. The Old Gentleman's friends procured him tickets to several of the more important functions. From the gallery of Memorial Hall Vandover and his father saw some of the great dinners; they went up to New London for the boat-race; they gained admittance to the historic Yard on Class-day, and saw the strange football rush for flowers around the "Tree." They heard the seniors sing "Fair Harvard" for the last time, and later saw them receive their diplomas at Sander's Theatre.

The great ceremonies of the place, the picturesqueness of the elm-shaded Yard, the old red dormitories covered with ivy, the associations and traditions of the buildings, the venerable pump, Longfellow's room, the lecture hall where the minute-men had barracked, all of these things, in the end, appealed strongly to Vandover's imagination. Instead of passing the summer months in an ocean voyage and a continental journey, he at last became content to settle down to work under a tutor, "boning up" for the examinations. His father returned to San Francisco in July.

Vandover matriculated the September of the same year; on the first of October he signed the college rolls and became a Harvard freshman. At that time he was eighteen years old.

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